Final Year Project

Charting multilingualism in Singapore: From the nineteenth century to the present

By

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Supervised by
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I declare that this assignment is my own original work, unless otherwise referenced, as defined by the NTU policy on plagiarism. I have read the NTU Honour Code and Pledge.

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Four years in LMS has come down to this, and I am truly thankful for the opportunity to have been part of the LMS family.

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Abstract

This study sets out to chart multilingualism in Singapore from the nineteenth century to the present, with specific reference to the analysis of census reports from the early nineteenth century to 2010. This study first considers the sociolinguistic context of Singapore from a historical perspective, and then proceeds to identify and highlight a number of macro-sociolinguistic trends related to the development of multilingualism in Singapore. Such trends include patterns of language shift from vernacular languages to 'official' languages, the decline in the use of vernacular languages in the home domain, as well as increased literacy rates in 'official' languages. It is suggested that the analysis of census data in this report sheds light on the multilingualism history of Singapore, and further indicates possible future research areas related to the history of languages in Singapore society.

Charting Multilingualism in Singapore: From nineteenth century to the present

1. Introduction

Singapore is a multilingual nation, where, since the early nineteenth century, there has been a constant flux in the population, with people coming to settle or work in Singapore from the Malay Archipelago, Asia and elsewhere. Such historical processes resulted in the creation of a community that was both multiracial and multilingual. Singapore, during the colonial era, had a linguistic landscape where a myriad of languages were spoken on a daily basis. The British colonial authorities did not mandate that the local population had to learn their language, English, and, in the nineteenth century, the learning of the language was usually confined to a few selected elites that helped them in matters related to the government (Koh 2014). Throughout the colonial era, different races tended to live in segregated areas in Singapore, each confined to their community that spoke the same language. Even if there was contact between races that spoke different languages, according to Furnivall (1967), they tended to do so at the market place only. For much of the colonial period, the government did not actively pursue an interventionist language policy, and the community was marked by a very high degree of multilingualism.

Today, Singapore is still a multiracial and multilingual nation with a population of some 5.4 million people (Department of Statistics Singapore 2014: 4). However, the Republic of Singapore Independence Act that was drafted in 1965 designated that the official languages of the nation are English, Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil, while the national language is Malay (Singapore Government, 1987). As Singapore has navigated its language policies from colonial beginnings to the post-colonial modernity of the present, language issues have played an important role in the development of society. In this present study, I intend to chart the history of multilingualism in Singapore from the colonial times to modern day Singapore, through the careful examination of census data from the nineteenth century to the present. Although official census data do not reveal the full history of multilingualism in Singapore, this study suggests that (despite certain limitations) the examination of such data can make a contribution to the profiling of multilingualism in Singapore society from a diachronic perspective.

2. Literature review

In order to carry out the review of relevant literature, it was necessary to consult work from a number of different disciplines, including historical studies, as well as sociolinguistic and educational research dealing with the languages of Singapore.

2.1 Historical perspectives

According to Bloom (1986), prior to the founding of colonial Singapore, Singapore was a fishing village that was 'inhabited by a few families of Orang Laut ('Sea People' or Proto-Malays); probably pirates, a settlement of Chinese cultivators of pepper and gambier, and about a hundred Muslim Malay fisherfolk led by the Temenggong of Johore, who had moved there in 1811' (Bloom 1986: 349). In this narrative, the founding of modern Singapore began in January 1819 when Sir Stamford Raffles, an agent of the East India Company signed a preliminary treaty with the Temenggong of Johore, which allowed the British to establish a trading post in Singapore (although it should be emphasised that a number of historians have recently challenged this essentially short-sighted view of history, and pointed out that Singapura had been long established as a key trading base in the Malay Archipelago). According to Turnbull, the initial population of Singapore in 1819 was very sparse:

> Altogether in January 1819 Singapore had perhaps a thousand inhabitants, consisting of some 500 *Orang Kallang*, 200 *Orang Seletar*, 150 *Orang Gelam* in the Singapore river, other *orang laut* in the Keppel Harbour area, twenty to thirty Malays in the Temenggong's entourage and a similar number of Chinese. (Turnbull 1977: 5)

Following the establishment of the colony, Singapore grew as an important port of trade, and people from the Malay Archipelago, China, and elsewhere migrated to Singapore in search for employment and settlement. The British adopted an open-door immigration policy which resulted in the burgeoning of the population (Yeoh 2007). In order to maintain the orderliness of the city, Raffles drew up the Jackson Plan (Figure 1) that allocated areas around the city for each ethnic group. (Turnbull 1977, Buckley 1965) The different ethnic groups were then segregated into 'campongs', including the Chinese 'campong' which was 'to the south west of the Singapore river' (Buckley 1965: 83) and the Bugis 'campong' which occupied 'the whole extent from Campong Glam to the mouth of the Rochor River' (84). This

intentional segregation of racial communities allowed for native languages to thrive, as people from the same background lived together, thus creating an environment for the continued usage of their languages.
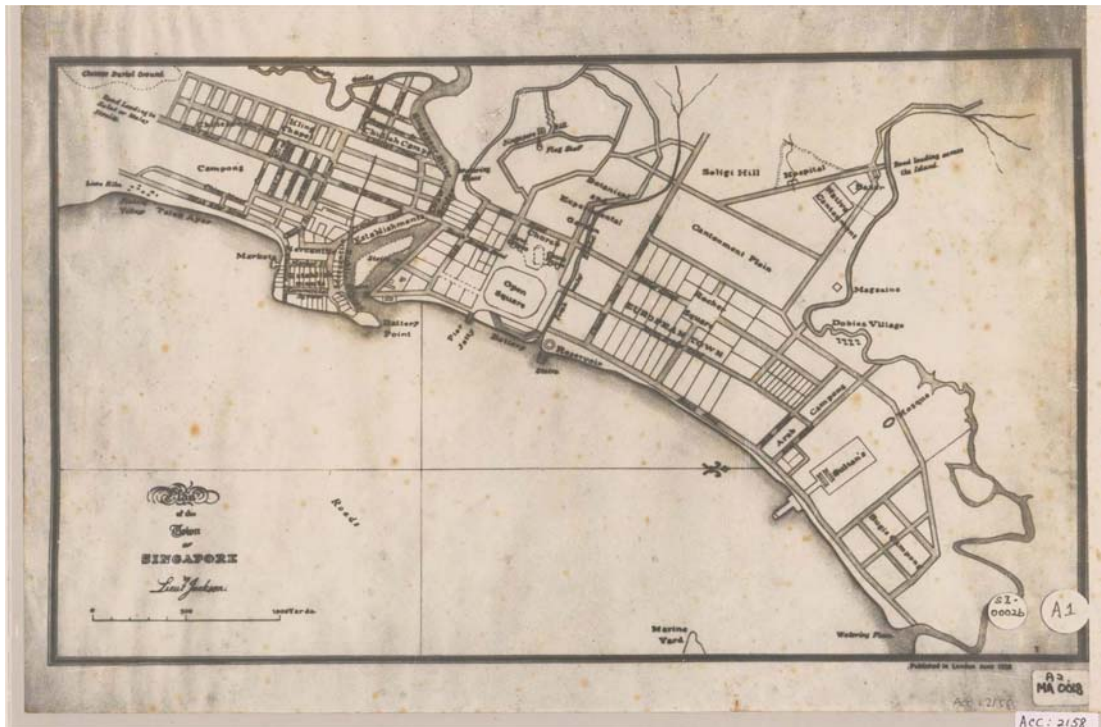
Figure 1: Map showing the Jackson 1828 map of Singapore, which outlines Raffles' vision for Singapore town (National Archives of Singapore, 2014)

Furthermore, the British colonial rulers allowed each ethnic group to enforce its own legal system, which was known as the 'capitan' system, and typically the British only interfered in interethnic conflicts (Bloom 1986: 352). Thus, with the Jackson Plan and the capitan system of governance, Singapore in the early years was '[fragmented] along ethnic, linguistic, religious and occupational lines.' (352). In the next section, we will consider sociolinguistic perspectives on this early era of multilingualism in Singapore.

2.2 Sociolinguistic perspectives on the linguistic history of Singapore

A comprehensive history of the development of multilingualism in Singapore is not available in the literature, however it is evident that education played a major role in the maintenance and promotion of various languages in the society. It is therefore important to consider which languages were taught in schools, as well as the formulation of language policies throughout history. In the sections that follow, I

provide a brief account of some of the major sources in the literature that have dealt with such issues.

2.2.1 Language education

During the colonial era, there were mainly two kinds of school that existed in Singapore; vernacular schools and English schools (Gwee & Wong 1980). The vernacular schools used the students' native language as the principal medium for teaching. Records from history show that in the colonial era, Tamil, Malay and Chinese schools existed. Malay vernacular schools were typically Qu'ran schools where students were taught the Islamic religion, Malay, and how to read the Qu'ran in Arabic. An example of Malay education in Singapore is in the Singapore Free School (Chelliah 1940). In the case of Chinese schools, the Reverend G.H Thomsen recorded in 1829 that 'there was a Cantonese school at Kampong Glam, another at Pekin Street, while there was a Hokkien School also at Pekin Street' (Gwee 1969: 51). With regard to Tamil education, the Singapore Free School as well as some Christian mission schools such as St. Francis Xavier Malabar School (established in 1859) provided Tamil-medium education. The existence of these vernacular schools aided in the preservation of immigrants' native languages and contributed to the multilingual profile of the community. As mentioned earlier, the British colonial authorities did not actively promote English-medium education during the colonial era. Nevertheless, access to the learning of the language was available in mission schools and Branch English Schools, with some of these schools 'not purely English or vernacular schools, but Anglo-Vernacular schools' (Chelliah 1940: 36). More recently, in 1984, English was designated as the official first language within the education system and it remains the medium of instruction in all schools till today. In this system, all subjects in schools are taught in English, with the only exception being mother tongue language classes.

2.2.2 Educational perspectives and language policies

In this section, we will look at educational perspectives and language policies that were instituted in Singapore. During the colonial era, Sir Stamford Raffles founded the first institute of education. Raffles was an advocate of vernacular languages, and in fact, the Singapore Institution (present day Raffles Institution), which he started,

'[had] for its object the cultivation of the languages of China, Siam, and the Malayan Archipelago; and the improvement of the moral and intellectual condition of the inhabitants of those countries' (Raffles 1823: 3). Generally, the educational language policy adopted by the British colonial rulers was one that allowed for the survival and even the promotion of so-called 'vernacular languages'.

   If one compares with the present, one obvious example of a language policy that has been implemented in modern-day Singapore that has affected the survival of various languages is the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' (SMC). Implemented by then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1979, the campaign aims to unify the Chinese population in Singapore by encouraging the use of Mandarin as the common language of the community. Since the early 1980s, other Chinese languages have been officially regarded as 'dialects', and subsequently have had only limited use in the media. Another interventionist language policy that has been implemented in recent decades has been that of promoting 'English-knowing bilingualism'. This policy was implemented as part of the education system to ensure that students would be bilingual in two languages – English and their mother tongue. In Singapore, 'mother tongue' is the 'superordinate language' of one's ethnic group (Gupta 1998: 117). Therefore, a student who has Chinese heritage is guided to learn Mandarin Chinese, while a student from an Indian heritage typically learns Tamil. From the review of some of these languages policies in Singapore, we see that modern-day language policies have been evidently more restrictive than those that applied in the colonial era. Such policies have affected many aspects of contemporary Singapore life, it is been argued, affecting not least notions of identity within the community. For example, Chew (2013) points out that, in Singapore, languages have been used to express one's racial, regional individual and even religious identities since the colonial days. In this context, one might argue that it is particularly relevant to examine the historical record in order to construct a historical account of the development of multilingualism in our society, which also leads on to the consideration of the value of census data in such research.

2.3 Research on language censuses

One study that has investigated multilingualism using census data and results from sociolinguistics surveys is one that was carried out in Hong Kong by Bacon-Shone

and Bolton (1998). Their article states that their research 'sets out to challenge the myth of Hong Kong as a monolingual society by reviewing a wide range of empirical research on multilingualism in the Hong Kong speech community' (Bacon-Shone & Bolton 1998: 43). The data that were analysed in this study were Hong Kong government censuses from 1911 to 1991 and two sociolinguistic surveys that were carried out in 1983 and 1993. Upon close analysis of the data, they were able to debunk the myth that Hong Kong was a monolingual society, and to establish that the society had a long and complex history of multilingualism and linguistic diversity. Their data shows that other Chinese minority dialects such as Hakka and Hoklo were spoken other than Cantonese back in the early 1900s of Hong Kong. However, it was also evident through the comparison of census data that there was a language shift around the early 1960s from minority Chinese dialects to Cantonese. Furthermore, their analysis was also able to show the increased use of English over the years. Their study further demonstrated that the analysis of censuses and sociolinguistics surveys is able to shed light on the historiography of the languages in a country to give us a better understanding of the language shift and maintenance that occurred.

The primary aim of a census is to provide accurate and reliable estimates of a country's population (Baffour & Valente 2012). Census data may then be used by government bodies to better understand the population that they govern and accordingly, tailor suitable policies for the benefit of their people. However, beneath the practical purposes of censuses, other agendas may apply. According to Anderson (2006), in his book *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, three institutions – the census, the map and the museum 'shaped the way in which the colonial state imagine[d] its dominion – the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry' (Anderson 2006: 164). This is especially evident in a plural society like British Malaya. The diversity of its migrants that made up its population, almost unintentionally, led to the construction of a multi-ethnic territory. British's attempts to classify the people they governed were most evident in censuses that were taken under their purview. A study by Manickam (2014) based on the census categorisations of British Malaya shows that the racial boundaries that were created by the British were not static, but in fact constantly changed as they sought to understand the local population. Being classified in a certain racial category was not solely based on biological factors, but instead in a

plural society like British Malaya, on 'cultural characteristics such as language, dress, and cuisine' (Hirschman 1987: 557). In these studies, it is concluded that language issues were deeply intertwined with issues of race throughout the history of British Malaya.

In addition to racial issues, other political factors may apply in the administration of language censuses. Lieberson (1967) proposed a number of question-types that could be used in such research, but, in his analysis of this issue, Arel (2001) argues that the design of censuses was often political, as 'the choice of particular categories derives from political choices', further adding that 'a census language indicator presupposes an agreement as to what the acceptable "language" categories are' (115). He also notes 'language was meant to be the great decoder of nationality' and he goes on to state examples such as in Prussia where the language one spoke is an indicator of one's nationalist allegiance (95). Whether language is a tool to express one's allegiance in the case of Singapore may be contentious, but nevertheless even here and elsewhere the claim to speak a particular language may have repercussions. Thus, according to Arel, the significance of the census as an instrument of the state is that 'it is an ultimate register of the "truth"', adding that, 'it constitutes the privileged medium of the state, which, while targeted at individuals, bestows group *recognition* and (numerical) *proportion'* (Arel 2001: 94, italics in the original).

3. Research issues

As has been shown through the literature review, there is an indication that during the colonial era of Singapore there was a myriad of many languages being spoken by people coming from different hometowns, cultures and backgrounds. However in modern-day Singapore, there are only four official languages – English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. Between the founding of Singapore to present day, how the level of multilingualism and degree of linguistic diversity has changed is one important point of enquiry in this project. To my knowledge, there have been only two publications that have studied multilingualism from a historical perspective in Singapore. Tham (1990), looked at language shift and maintenance in Singapore, but data was limited to two censuses – 1980 and 1990. Another research project that investigated language use in Singapore using census data was that of Tan (2003), but the data was limited to the 1980, 1990 and 2000 censuses. Therefore, there seems to be a dearth of research

that analyses the historiography of languages in Singapore from colonial times to modernity.

Following the review of the literature set out above, the research issues for this project may now be specified as follows:

(1) What are the macro trends of language maintenance and language shift that are highlighted through the analysis of census data?

(2) More specifically, what can the analysis of census data tell us about the multilingual development of Singapore with reference to Chinese dialects, Indian languages, Malay, Mandarin and English?

(3) To what extent can the analysis of census data increase our understanding of the multilingual history of Singapore?

4. Methodology

Following the methodology that was used by Bacon-Shone and Bolton (1998), census documents were the primary data source for this project. The earliest census was recorded in 1824. Though the accuracy and reliability of the censuses that were taken from 1824 to 1870 were questionable due to methodological concerns, the early censuses still give us a general idea of the population of Singapore during this period of time. The table below lists all the available censuses from 1824 to 1870.

Table 1: Censuses of Singapore from 1824 to 1870

Year	Census
1824	First Census of Singapore
1825	Second Census of Singapore
1826	Third Census of Singapore
1827	Fourth Census of Singapore
1828	Fifth Census of Singapore
1829	Sixth Census of Singapore
1830	Seventh Census of Singapore
1831	Eighth Census of Singapore
1832	Ninth Census of Singapore
1833	Tenth Census of Singapore
1834	Eleventh Census of Singapore
1836	Twelfth Census of Singapore
1840	Thirteenth Census of Singapore
1849	Fourteenth Census of Singapore
1860	Fifteenth Census of Singapore

The first official census that was taken in Singapore was in 1871 by the Straits Settlement of Singapore, and thereafter conducted regularly in 10-years interval with some interruption during World War II. The first post-independence census taken in Singapore was in 1970.

Table 2: Official censuses of Singapore from 1871 to 2010

Year	Census
1871	First Census of Straits Settlements of Singapore
1881	Second Census of Straits Settlements of Singapore
1891	Third Census of Straits Settlements of Singapore
1901	Fourth Census of Straits Settlements of Singapore
1911	Fifth Census of Straits Settlements of Singapore
1921	Sixth Census of Straits Settlements of Singapore
1931	Seventh Census of Straits Settlements of Singapore
1947	Census on The Federation of Malaya and Colony of Singapore (8th in the series)
1957	Census of Population, Singapore (9th in the series)
1970	First Census of Population, Singapore after Independence (10th in the series)
1980	Second Census of Population, Singapore after Independence (11th in the series)
1990	Third Census of Population, Singapore after Independence (12th in the series)
2000	Fourth Census of Population, Singapore after Independence (13th in the series)
2010	Fifth Census of Population, Singapore after Independence (14th in the series)

Censuses shown in both Tables 1 and 2 are the data that were used for analysis. The censuses listed in Table 1 are no longer extant and primary sources are not available. However, secondary source that cite figures from the censuses is still available, such as Newbold's (1839) *Political and statistical account of the British settlements in the Straits of Malacca*. The rest of the population censuses are available from the library at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the National Library Board (NLB). Upon retrieval of the censuses, a complete archive of the data was made. The censuses were analysed with particular reference to ethnicity, literacy and language use. The analysis was then translated into visual representations such as bar graphs and tables. Also, comparisons were made between censuses and any identifiable trends were highlighted, followed by possible explanations and commentary.

5. Results and data analysis

This section is divided into two main parts, Section 5.1 dealing with colonial censuses and Section 5.2, which incorporates data from the post-colonial era, but also refers back to the earlier period.

5.1 Colonial censuses (1824-1957)

During the British colonial rule, the censuses that were taken covered the Straits Settlements, which included Penang, Malacca and Singapore. The Straits Settlements were those parts of British Malaya under direct rule of British colonial officials, and together with the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States constituted what was 'British Malaya' from the late nineteenth century until 1957, as illustrated by Figure 2 below.
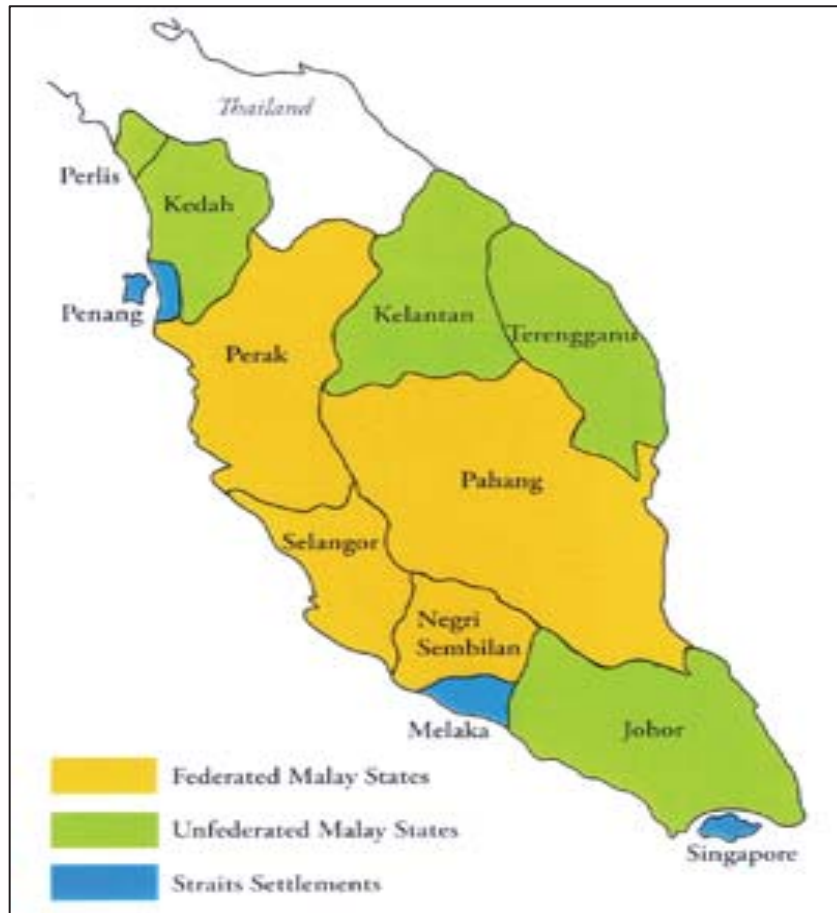
Figure 2: Map showing the territories of British Malaya (Malay Factbook 2014)

The first recorded census of Singapore was recorded in January 1824. It was only in April 1871 when the first systematic census taking of Singapore was administered by the British colonial government.

5.1.1 1824 to 1836 censuses

Early censuses were carried out unofficially by police officers that were not trained in census taking. Though the accuracy of these early censuses might be questionable, the

figures do give us a general idea of the composition of the population then. The numbers recorded in Figure 3 are quoted from Newbold (1839).
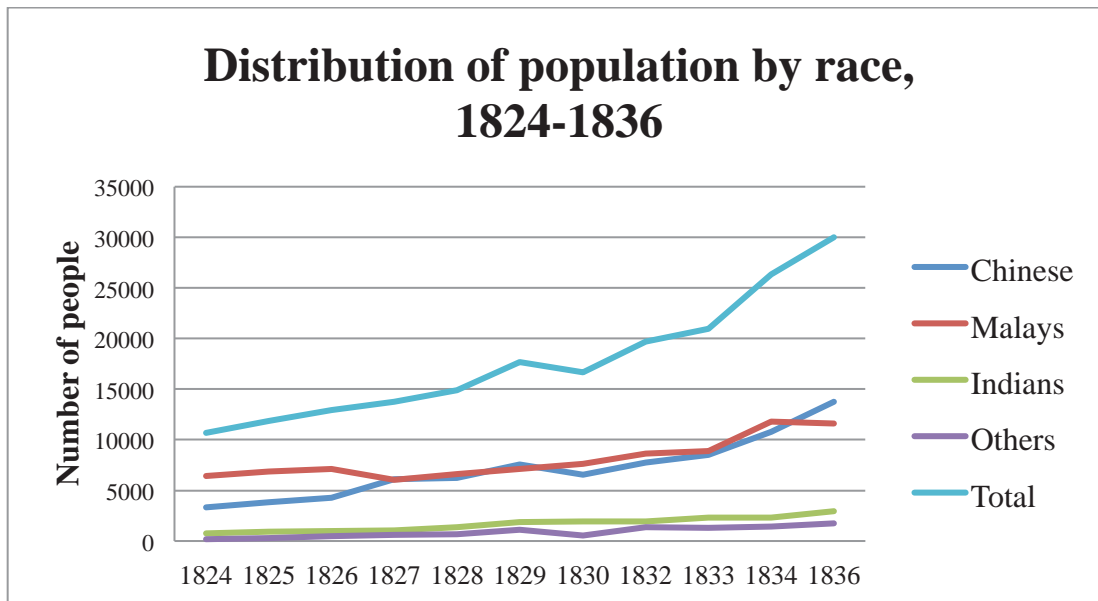
Figure 3: Chart that shows the distribution of population by race in early Singapore from 1824 to 1836 (Newbold 1839)

Figure 3 above shows the composition of the population of Singapore by race, over the period of 1824 to 1836. I have aggregated the population into 4 main groups – Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others. In the figures quoted from Newbold (1839), the Chinese were not further broken down into the various dialect groups. The Malays consists of the 'Malays', 'Bugis', 'Balinese', 'Javanese' and 'other natives from the Malay Archipelago', while the Indians consisted of 'natives of Coromandel and Malabar coasts', 'ditto of Hindoostan and Bengal' and 'Parsees' (originally from Iran). The group 'Others' consisted of 'Europeans', 'Indo-Britons', 'Native Christians', 'Armenians', 'Jews', 'Arabs', 'Caffres' and 'Siamese'. From this data, we can see that the two main groups of people in early day Singapore were the Chinese and Malays, and thus we can infer that the Chinese and Malay languages were widely represented in the population, though in varying degrees. In addition, it is also evident that since the early 1800s, Singapore has been a multi-racial territory with people from different races co-existing in the same area.

5.1.2 The 1871 census

The total population of Singapore in 1871 was 97,111. In this census, the languages spoken in Singapore were not recorded. However, a count was taken of the various

ethnic groups that were living in Singapore. It might be a logical assumption that the various ethnic groups would be speaking their native languages as they were mainly migrants to Singapore and were living among fellow migrants from the same region, town or village, thus allowing for the use of their native languages. Looking at the census, the data includes the numerical breakdown on the number of inhabitants classified according to their ethnicity. These numerical values are converted into percentages for the entire population and represented in a bar graph shown below.

1871 census

56.2%

19.8%

11.0%

8.8%

2.2%

2.0%

Chinese   Malays   Indians   Eurasians   Europeans &   Others
                                              Americans
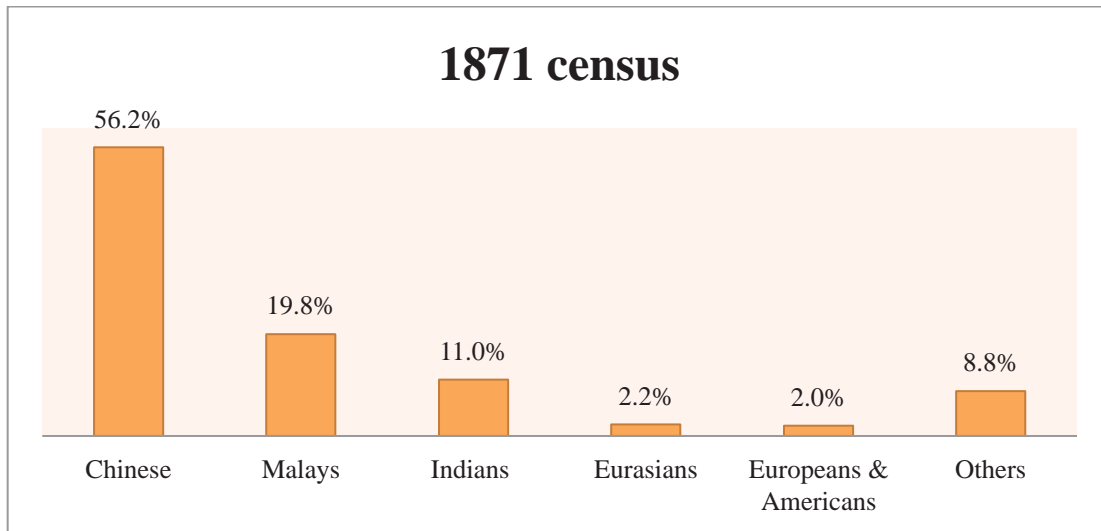
Total population: 97,111

Figure 4: Racial composition of Singapore according to the 1871 census of the Straits Settlements

From the bar graph above, it is apparent that the majority of the population of Singapore in 1871 were the Chinese (56.2%), followed by the Malays (19.8%) then Indians (11.0%). The Indian population was made up of the 'Bengalees'[1], 'Klings'[2] [Tamils] and the Indian military. Other significant ethnic groups residing in Singapore then include 'Eurasians' (2.2%) and 'Europeans and Americans' (2.0%). The ethnic groups that were represented in the category 'Others' (8.8%) included 'Arabs', 'Boyanese'[3], 'Bugis'[4], 'Cochin-Chinese'[5], 'Dyaks'[6], 'Abyssinians'[7] and 'Siamese' among others.

Based on the above data of ethnic groups that were present in Singapore and following the assumption that they spoke their native vernacular languages, we can hypothesise that the languages spoken in Singapore in 1871 included Chinese, South Asian, Malay, Western and even African languages. Another interesting finding from the census is the fact that majority of schoolmaster and schoolmistresses are 'Natives'

instead of 'Europeans' and 'Eurasian'. According to the 1871 census (15), there were 17 Europeans and Eurasians schoolmasters and schoolmistresses while there were 143 'Natives'. This is an interesting point to note as these natives make up the majority of the authority in school. What piques my curiosity is what was/were the language(s) used by the teachers to teach their students and what language(s) did the students use to communicate among themselves. However, this line of enquiry falls out of the scope of this project but might be the focus of a future investigation of early education in Singapore.

5.1.3 The 1881 census

The total population of Singapore in 1881 was 139,208, and again the census included no questions on languages. Here again, however, the ethnic composition of the population may serve to provide an indication of the languages that were spoken at that time.

Total population: 139,208

Figure 5: Racial composition of Singapore according to the 1881 census of the Straits Settlements

From Figure 5 above, we see that the Chinese population maintained its position as the most populous ethnic group (62.3%) in Singapore, followed by the Malays (15.9%) and the Indians (8.7%). What differs from the previous census is that we see an increase in migrants from other parts of the Malay Archipelago, such as the Javanese (4.2%), Boyanese (1.5%) and the Bugis (1.5%), which might indicate a greater variety of Malay languages being spoken on the island. The 1881 census was

the first time that shows the breakdown of the Chinese population into 'the tribes to which they belong' (Census of the Straits Settlements 1881: 6).

Chinese population 1881 census

Category	Percentage
Not stated	0.3%
Kehs	7.1%
Hylams	9.6%
Straits Born	11.0%
Macaos	17.1%
Teochews	26.1%
Hokkiens	28.8%

Total Chinese population: 86,766

Figure 6: Breakdown of the Chinese population according to the 1881 census of the Straits Settlements

From Figure 6 above, we see that the 'Hokkiens' (28.8%) constituted the majority of the Chinese population, followed by the 'Teochews' (26.1%), 'Macaos'[8] (17.1%), 'Straits Born'[9] (11.0%), 'Hylams'[10] [Hainanese] (9.6%) and 'Kehs'[11] [Hakka] (7.1%). From these figures, we can again infer the linguistic diversity that was present within the Chinese population, and arrive at a 'guestimate' of the relative sizes of the speech communities for each Chinese language.

5.1.4 The 1891 census

The total population of Singapore in 1891 was 184,554. As in the previous censuses, language questions were not included.
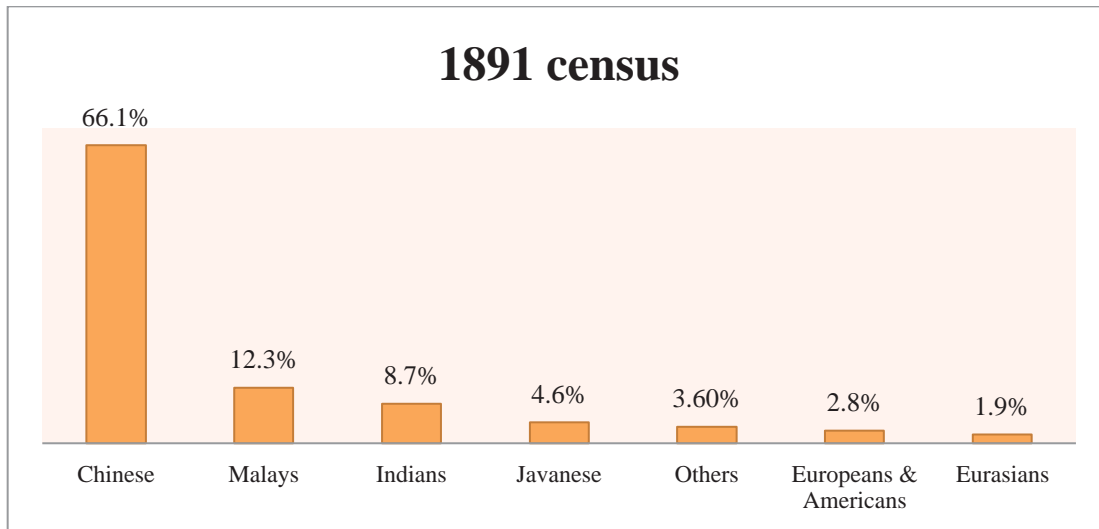
Total population: 184,554

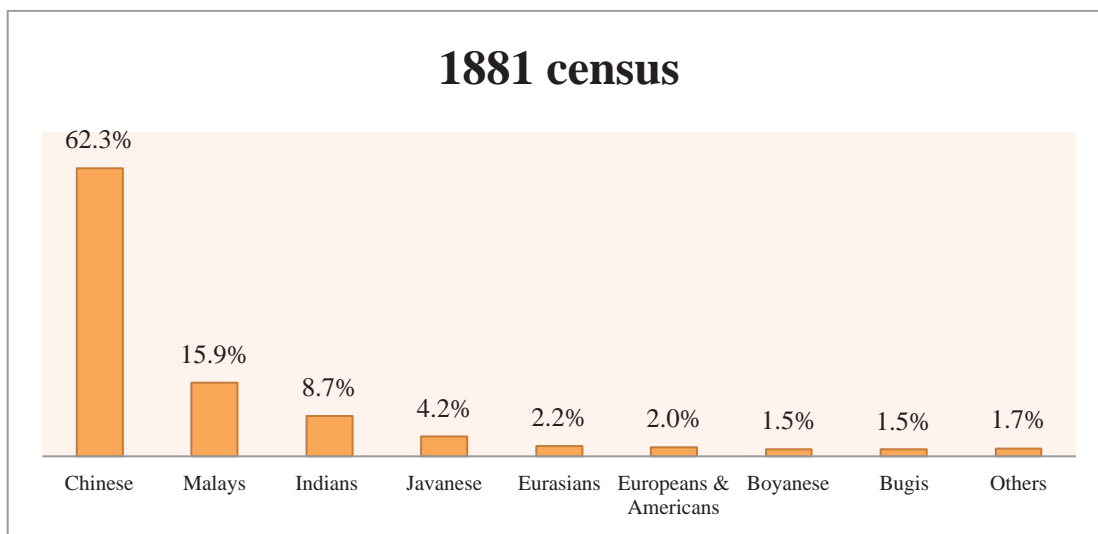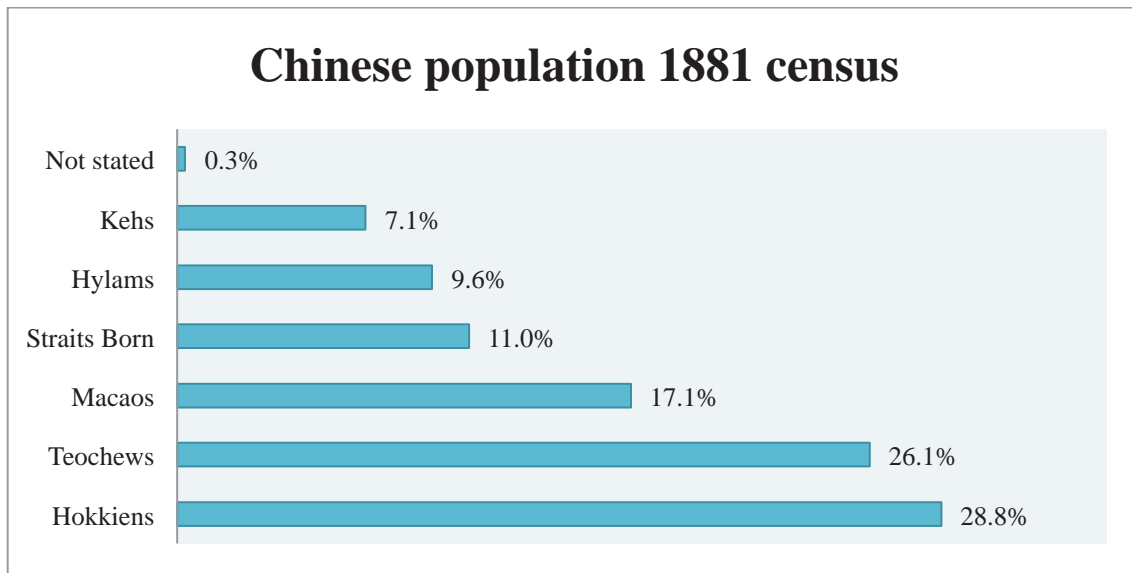Figure 7: Racial composition of Singapore according to the 1891 census of the Straits Settlements

Looking at the racial composition of the population based on Figure 7 above, it is similar to that of previous years with the Chinese population being the most populous (66.1%), followed by the Malays (12.3%) and Indians (8.7%). One interesting point to note in the 1891 census is the way in which the races were grouped in the census. As previously, the different groups of Chinese people were categorised under a single category 'Chinese', and general classificatory labels were also extended to Malays and Indians as well. However (unlike present day censuses), sub-categories for these larger groupings were also provided. Thus, the category of 'Malays and other Natives of the Archipelago' consisted of 'Achinese'[12], 'Boyanese', 'Bugis', 'Dyaks', 'Javanese', 'Jawi-Pekans'[13], 'Malays' and 'Manilamen'[14]. Another category described as 'Tamils and other natives of India' comprised 'Bengalis', 'Burmese', 'Parsees'[15] and 'Tamils'. This amalgamation of the races under single categories no doubt reflected the way in which British officials viewed the Singapore population, as well as notions of race and ethnicity in the late nineteenth century. In similar fashion, the category for 'Chinese population' also provided details concerning Chinese ethnicity and language groupings, as illustrated by Figure 8.

Chinese population 1891 census

Group	Percentage
Khehs	6.1%
Hylams	7.1%
Straits-born	10.5%
Cantonese	19.2%
Teochews	19.5%
Hokkiens	37.6%
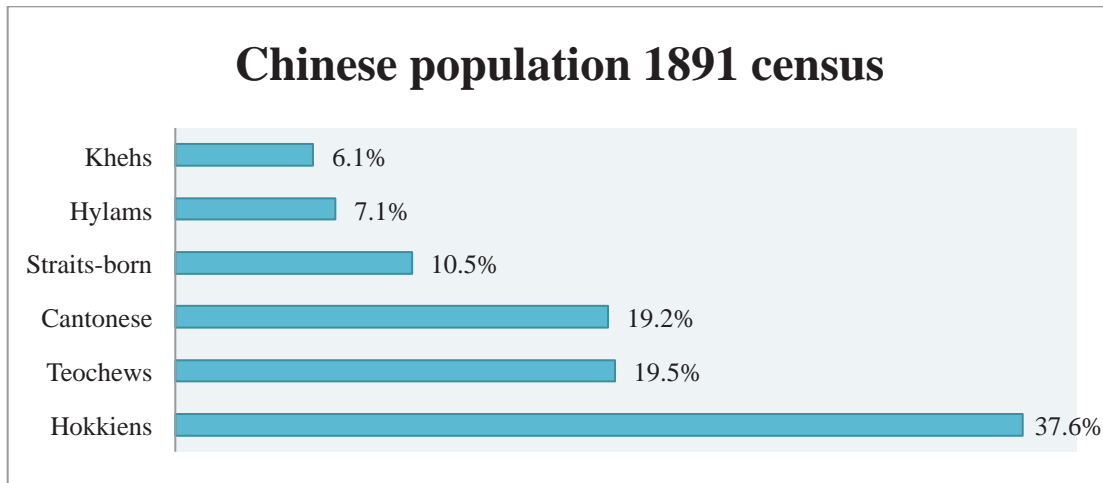
Total Chinese population: 86,766

Figure 8: Breakdown of the Chinese population according to the 1891 census of the Straits Settlements

Figure 8 above shows the breakdown of the Chinese population into their various 'tribes', as they were called in the official census report (Census of the Straits Settlements 1891: 36) The composition of the Chinese community was similar to that in earlier reports, with the Hokkiens being the most populous (37.6%), followed by the Teochews (19.5%) and Cantonese (19.2%). However, one difference in the terminology is that the Cantonese 'tribe', was known was 'Macaos' in the 1881 census, but was reclassified as 'Cantonese' ten years later.

5.1.5 The 1901 census

The total population of Singapore in 1901 was 228,555. The racial composition of Singapore in 1901 was as follows: Chinese (71.8%), Malays (10.1%), Indians (7.8%), Others (6.8%), Eurasians (1.8%) and Europeans & Americans (1.7%).

Chinese population 1901 census

Not stated — 0.2%
Kheh — 5.2%
Hailam — 5.8%
Hok-Chiu — 7.9%
Straits Born — 9.4%
Teo-Chiu — 16.8%
Cantonese — 18.8%
Hokkien — 36.0%
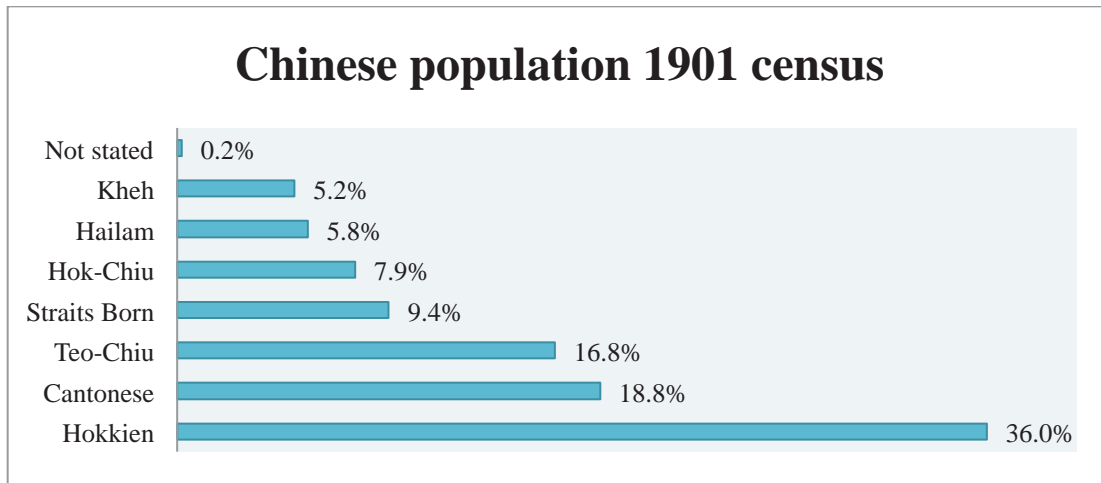
Total Chinese population: 86,766

Figure 9: Breakdown of the Chinese population according to the 1901 census of the Straits Settlements

In 1901, the Hokkien tribe was still the most populous ethnic Chinese group. However, the 'Cantonese' (18.8%) now outnumbered the 'Teo-Chius' (16.8%) as the second most populous Chinese ethnic group. The 'Hok-Chiu'[16] group was not mentioned in previous censuses but was named for the first time in 1901. One very interesting comment included in this census, related to the selection of enumerators for the 'Chinese quarters' of the city, which mentions the bilingual abilities of Straits-born Chinese:

> So. It was found possible through the agency of Mr Ho Yang Peng, Chinese Sub-Postmaster, Singapore, to find a sufficient number of Straits-born Chinese to act as Enumerators throughout the purely Chinese quarter of the town i.e. much of the Town living between the River, New Bridge Road and the sea. Naturally the filling up of schedules for illiterate Chinese was down more efficiently by Straits-born lads of fair education, speaking both Chinese and Malay, then would have been the case if the work had been entrusted to Malays, as has been the case to some extent at previous Censuses. (Report of the census of the Straits Settlements 1901: 24)

From this, we learn that the Straits-born Chinese were bilingual in Chinese and Malay, which may have been due to their mixed heritage, and to the length of settlement of their families in the city (Frost 2003).

5.1.6 The 1911 census

The total population of Singapore in 1911 was 311,985, and this was the first census when specific language questions were asked. At this time, the racial composition of the population was as follows: Chinese (71.4%), Malays (15.0%), Indians (9.0%) and Others (4.6%). However, what is interesting to note here is that the Chinese were not classified according to the various 'tribes' as in the earlier censuses, but, this time, they were classified according to their birthplace, whether they were 'China-born Chinese' or 'Straits-born Chinese'. This indicates that there was now an official differentiation between these two groups in the eyes of colonial officials, which may have reflected a distinction growing in the community at the time.

The 1911 census is noteworthy, as mentioned above, because it was the first time that the languages that were spoken by the population have a specific mention in the data. The number of people speaking each language was tabulated, which provides more precise information on the level of multilingualism of Singapore, and the relative sizes of distinct speech communities in the community at this time. From the tabulation in the census data, we see that there were a total of 57 languages spoken within Singapore and there were 20 languages with at least 500 speakers. With 57 languages being spoken in such a small territorial area, one can only imagine the number of languages one could hear by just walking around colonial Singapore.

Table 3: Table showing the size of the various Chinese speech communities according to the 1911 census of the Straits Settlements

Chinese languages in Singapore (1911)

Language	Number of speakers	Percentage of population
Hok-kien	91,549	29.3%
Cantonese	48,739	15.6%
Teo-chiu	37,507	12.0%
Kheh	12,487	4.0%
Hailam	10,775	3.5%
Hok-chiu	3,653	1.2%
Hok-chhia	3,640	1.2%
Hing-hoa	1,925	0.6%
Mandarin dialects	252	0.1%
Kau-chiu	86	0.03%
Lui-chiu	77	0.02%
Hai-lo-hong	5	0.002%

From Table 3 above, we have an indication of sizes of Chinese language speech communities in Singapore in 1911. As earlier, the most populous Chinese speech community were the Hokkiens, followed by the Cantonese and Teo-chiu (Teochew) communities. What is particularly interesting here is that the speech community of those speaking the Mandarin dialect is one of the smallest, at only 0.1% of the population (some 252 speakers of the variety). From being one of the smallest Chinese speech community, it is interesting to chart the rise of Mandarin speakers over the years, an important trend which is discussed in later sections of this paper. In addition to detailed information concerning speakers of Chinese languages, the 1911 census also yields interesting information relating to speakers of Malay languages, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Table showing the size of the various Malay speech communities according to the 1911 census of the Straits Settlements

Malay languages in Singapore (1911)

Languages	Number of speakers	Percentage of population
Malay	49,425	15.8%
Javanese	7,353	2.4%
Boyanese	3,858	1.2%
Bugis	686	0.2%
Arabic	665	0.2%
Banjarese	24	0.01%
Annamese	11	0.004%
Aboriginal dialects	8	0.003%
Bundu	4	0.001%
Achehnese	3	0.001%

From Table 4 above, we see the different languages that are spoken by the Malay community. The majority spoke Malay (15.8%), followed by Javanese (2.4%). Other minority Malay languages being spoken were Boyanese (1.2%), Bugis (0.2%), Banjarese (0.01%), Bundu (0.001%) and Achenese (0.001%). Interestingly, a small number of speakers of aboriginal dialects were also reported as living in the community at this time (0.003%, a total of 8).

Table 5: Table showing the size of the various Indian speech communities according to the 1911 census of the Straits Settlements

Indian languages in Singapore (1911)

Languages	Number of speakers	Percentage of population
Tamil	19,378	6.2%
Hindustani	2,471	0.8%
Bengali	1,486	0.5%
Malayalam	1,208	0.4%
Punjabi	238	0.1%
Gurumuki	222	0.1%
Urdu	197	0.1%
Singhalese	157	0.1%
Gujarati	142	0.05%
Telugu	136	0.04%
Hindi	70	0.02%
Sindi	57	0.02%
Kabuli	32	0.01%
Canarese	4	0.001%
Gurka	3	0.001%
Parsi	3	0.001%
Pushtu	3	0.001%
Marathi	2	0.001%
Oriya	2	0.001%
Pathani	2	0.001%

From Table 5 above, we have an idea of the many South Asian languages that were spoken in Singapore at that time. The largest speech community is the Tamils (6.2%), followed by the Hindustani (0.8%). However, there are so many more Indian languages that were spoken such as Bengali (0.5%), Punjabi (0.1%) and Singhalese (0.1%) just to name a few. These figures from the 1911 census show us the extent of multilingualism that was present in Singapore at that time. As compared to present day Singapore, the Singapore of the past seems to have a greater degree of multilingualism.

5.1.7 The 1921 census

The total population of Singapore in 1921 was 350,355. The racial composition of the population was as follows: Chinese (74.5%), Malays (13.7%), Indians (7.6%),

Europeans (1.5%), Others (1.3%) and Eurasians (1.3%). This time again, as in 1911, language questions were included, as they were in all subsequent censuses.

Chinese population by tribe 1921 census

Tribe	Percentage
Hokkien	43.1%
Cantonese	24.9%
Tie Chiu	16.8%
Hailam	4.6%
Kheh	4.6%
Hok Chiu	1.8%
Hok Chia	1.2%
Hin Hua	0.5%
Northern provinces	0.4%
Kwongsai	0.01%
Others and not	
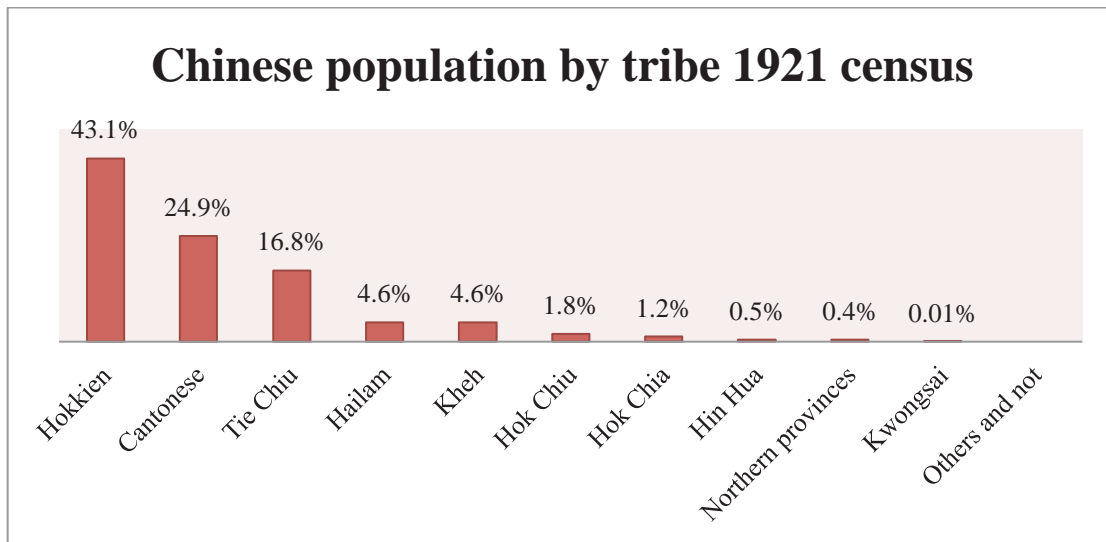
Total Chinese population: 317,491

Figure 10: Composition of the Chinese population by tribe according to the 1921 census of the Straits Settlements

The breakdown of the Chinese population according to 'tribes' was also recorded and shown in Figure 10 above. Similarly, the composition remains largely the same as previous censuses. However, there was also an addition, with the inclusion of the categories 'Northern provinces'[17] and 'Kwongsai'[18]. [See endnotes for an explanation of this and other linguistic labels that were used in colonial censuses].

Malay population by race 1921 census

Total Malay population: 58,520

Figure 11: Composition of the Malay population by race according to the 1921 census
of the Straits Settlements

The 1921 also included, for the first time, a detailed breakdown of the Malay population by race. From Figure 11 above, it is evident that the Malays constituted the majority (60.2%), followed by the 'Javanese' (23.0%) and the 'Boyanese' (11.3%). There are also other minority groups such as the 'Bornean races' (2.9%), 'Bugis' (2.0%) and the 'Banjarese'[19] (0.6%).
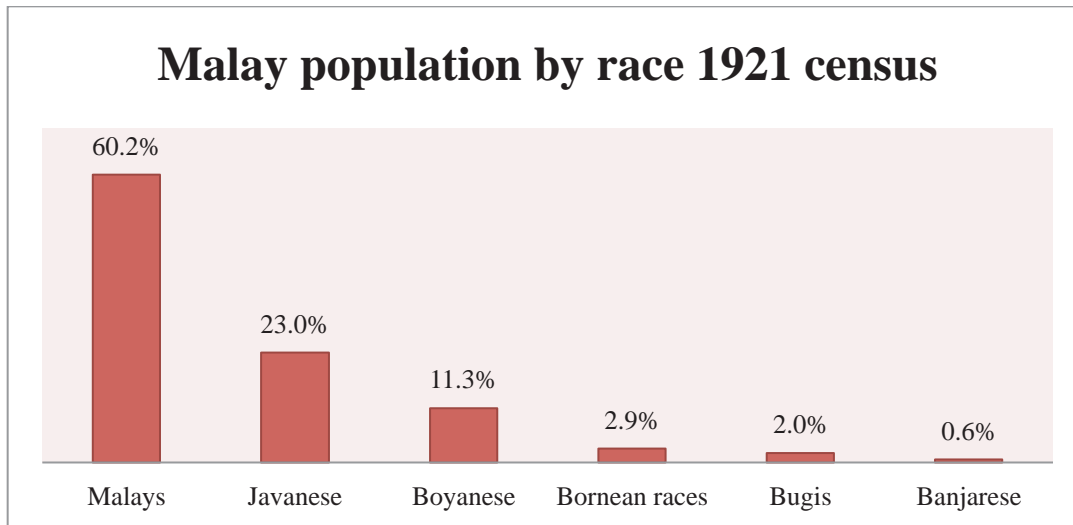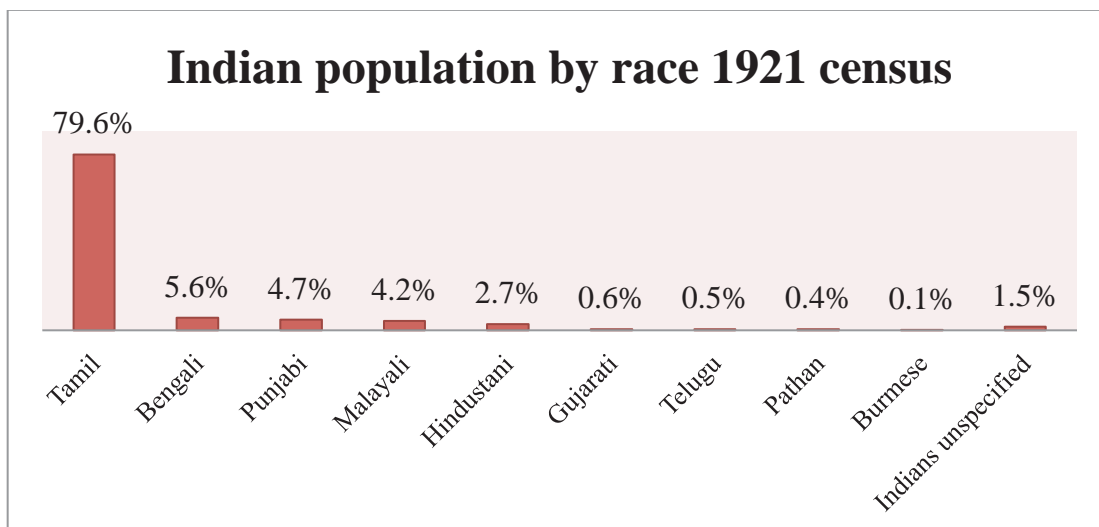
Indian population by race 1921 census

Total Indian population: 32,456

Figure 12: Composition of the Indian population by race according to the 1921 census
of the Straits Settlements

The composition of the Indian population by race was also noted for the first time in 1921. From Figure 12 above, the Tamil constituted the majority (79.6%) and there were also significant proportions of 'Bengali' (5.6%) 'Punjabi' (4.7%), 'Malayali' (4.2%) and 'Hindustani' (2.7%).

The 1921 census was the first time in the Straits Settlements that literacy and ability to speak English were asked, after about one century since Sir Stamford Raffles first landed on the shores of Singapore. One thing to note, was that the superintendent of the 1921 census, J.E. Nathan wrote in his commentary, the 'stupidity and carelessness' of the enumerators might have resulted in an unduly high return of the number of persons that claimed that they were literate. He also noted that the test of literacy was just a simple 'yes' or 'no' from the respondents, and this might lead to some inaccuracy of the results. He even goes on to give suggestions on how this could be better improved for the 1931 census and that is to formulate two kinds of questions, 'Can you read and write?' and 'Can you read and write English?' As of 1921, the test of literacy was determined by the 'ability to read and write a letter' (107). Nevertheless, the data collected in 1921, though with its potential flaws, gives us an idea of the magnitude of those who knew the English language at that time. It was recorded that 5.6% of the population were literate in English and 31.0% were literate in other languages, while 60.9% were illiterate. Other than literacy, the ability to speak English was also noted. 8.3% of the population were able to speak English, while 91.2% were unable to speak English. From these figures from the 1921 census, it is evident that only a small minority of the population (including Europeans, Eurasians and Americans) claimed to be literate in English and able to speak the language (around 8% for both skills).

5.1.8 The 1931 census

The total population of Singapore in 1931 was 567,453. The racial composition of the population was as follows: Chinese (74.3%), Malaysians (12.5%), Indians (9.0%), Others (1.5%), Europeans (1.4%) and Eurasians (1.2%). There are a few points of interest to note in this census. Firstly, the superintendent of the 1931 census, Vlieland, provided a lengthy definition on the term 'race'. In his words,

> The term "Race" is used, for the purposes of a Malayan census, in a peculiar sense, which
> requires explanation. The information, which it is desires to obtain from the results of

enquiries under this heading, is of importance for a variety of purposes, and the word "Race" is used, for lack of a more appropriate term, to cover a complex set of ideas of which race, in the strict or scientific sense, is only one small element. It would be of little use to the administrator or the merchant to attempt a classification of the population by race in the ethnographic sense, to say nothing of the fact that any such tentative classification would be highly controversial. An attempt at classification by "nationality," or, more exactly, by national status or political allegiance, would be almost equally open to controversy, and of little, if any, greater practical value. It is, in fact impossible to define the sense in which the term "Race" is used for census purposes; it is, in reality, a judicious blend, for practical ends, of the ideas of geographic and ethnographic origin, political allegiance, and racial and social affinities and sympathies. (Vlieland 1931: 73)

Also, there has been a revision in the use of the racial term 'Malay' to 'Malaysians'. According to Vlieland, 'the term "Malaysians" is used to include all indigenous peoples of the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, and the term "Malay" to include only those Malaysians (excluding aboriginals) who belong to British Malaya.' (75) Furthermore, there were changes in spelling of the terms for some Chinese ethnic groups. For example, the term 'Tiu Chiu' was replaced by 'Tie Chiu', and the term 'Hok Chhia' is replaced by 'Hok Chia'.

Secondly, Vlieland noted 'there is, in fact, no oral medium of communication between two Chinese of different "tribes," if each speaks only the language of his own "tribe"' (78). He also added that the Communist movement in China that started in 1921 resulted in the standardisation of Mandarin as the medium of instruction in schools in China and this had an impact on the Chinese population in Singapore as well. Mandarin became the medium of education in most Chinese schools in Malaya, 'of which there are about six hundred [schools] representing between fifty and sixty thousand pupils' (78). Thus, we can see the rise of the importance of Mandarin as the language in the Chinese population since the early 1920s onwards.

The test of literacy used in 1931 was determined by these three questions – 'Can you read and write?', 'Can you read and write English?' and 'Can you speak English?' (Vlieland 1931: 91). The census recorded 9.1% of the population being literate in English and 9.4% of the population being able to speak English.

5.1.9 The 1947 census

The total population of Singapore in 1947 was 976,839. The racial composition of the population was as follows: Chinese (74.8%), Malays (11.9%), Indians (7.5%), Europeans (3.1%), Others (1.7%) and Eurasians (0.9%).

   What is interesting to note here is that Del Tufo, the superintendent of the 1947 census, went on to further define the term 'race'. He notes that 'race' is not defined by one's nationality and in the case of mixed marriages, 'race' was "the name of the community which accepts the individual and to which he claims to belong" (Del Tufo 1947: 71). Also, in this census, there was a distinction made between 'Malaysians' and 'Other Malaysians'. Del Tufo noted, 'the distinction between the Malays and the Other Malaysians is not very great' (72), and the 'Other Malaysians' and 'Malaysians' are able to assimilate into a single community. However, Del Tufo suggested that results should be tabulated separately for Malays and Other Malaysians to see if there are more distinctions that would emerge.

   In the 1947 census, literacy in three languages was asked – Malay, English and any other language. The questions asked were, 'Can you read and write Malay?', 'Can you read and write English?' and 'Can you read and write any other language?'. A person was considered as literate if he had the ability 'to read and write a simple letter in the language and the reply was restricted to "yes" or "no"'. (90). Del Tufo, also noted that the first two questions were asked 'in order that the results might provide one of the bases for later estimates of the number of non-Malays who would be affected by the draft constitutional provisions relative to citizenship at that time under consideration; and the second was inserted not only for the same reason but also to enable comparisons to be made with the 1931 figures' (90), and these questions were 'politically biased' (90). The tabulation of English literacy rates excluded the European and Eurasian populations, and even so, a rate of 9.4% was recorded as literate in English.

Percentage of population literate in Malay, by race 1947 census
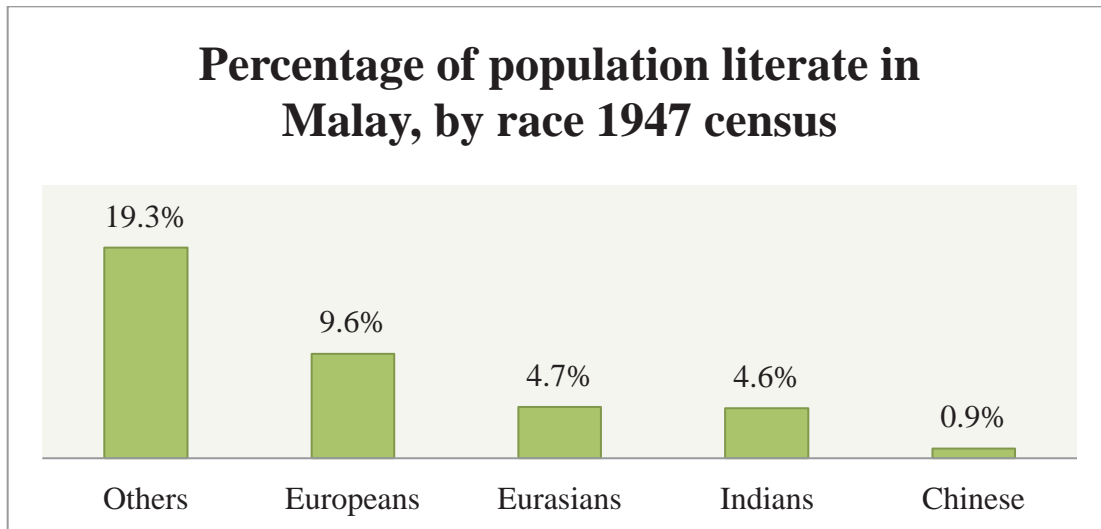
Figure 13: Percentage of total population of Singapore literate in Malay, by race according to the 1947 census of the Straits Settlements

As mentioned, Malay literacy rates were included in the 1947 census. Figure 12 above shows the percentage of population (other than 'Malaysians' and 'Other Malaysians') who were literate in Malay, by race. It is interesting to note that there is a sizeable proportion of people from each racial group that were literate in Malay, with the largest percentage (19.3%) from 'Others', followed by Europeans (9.6%), Eurasians (4.7%), Indians (4.6%) and Chinese (0.9%).

5.1.10 The 1957 census

The total population of Singapore in 1957 was 1,479,313. The racial composition of the population was as follows: Chinese (75.4%), Malaysians (13.6%), Indians & Pakistanis (8.6%) and Others (2.4%).

Chinese population, by community 1957 census
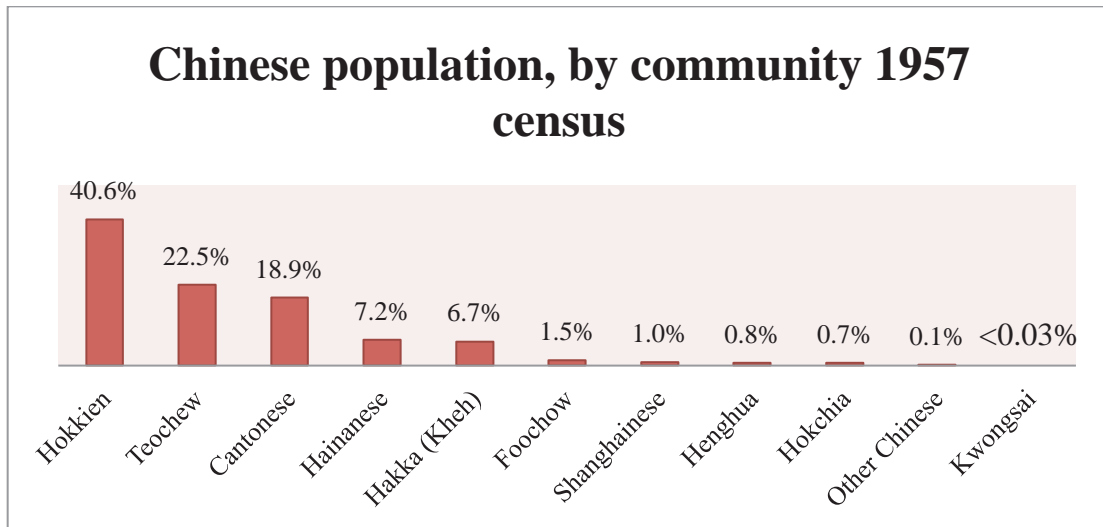
Total Chinese population: 1,090,596

Figure 14: Composition of the Chinese community as according to the 1957 census of the Straits Settlements

Figure 14 above shows the breakdown of the Chinese population into communities. The most populous group remained to be the 'Hokkiens' (40.6%), followed by the 'Teochews' (22.5%) and 'Cantonese' (18.9%). The 'Kheh' community has been renamed 'Hakka' and the 'Hokchiu' to 'Foochow'.

Malaysian population, by community 1957 census
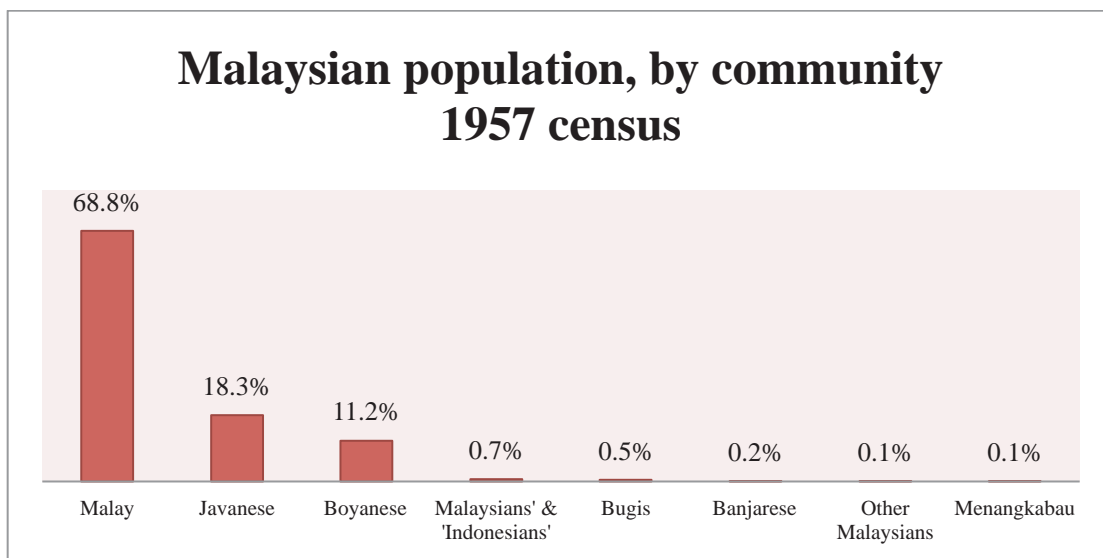
Total Malaysian population: 190,059

Figure 15: Composition of the Malay community according to the 1957 census of the Straits Settlements

Figure 15 above shows the breakdown of the Malay population into communities. The largest community was the 'Malays' (68.8%) followed by the 'Javanese' (18.3%) and 'Boyanese' (11.2%).

Indians and Pakistanis in Singapore, by community 1957 census
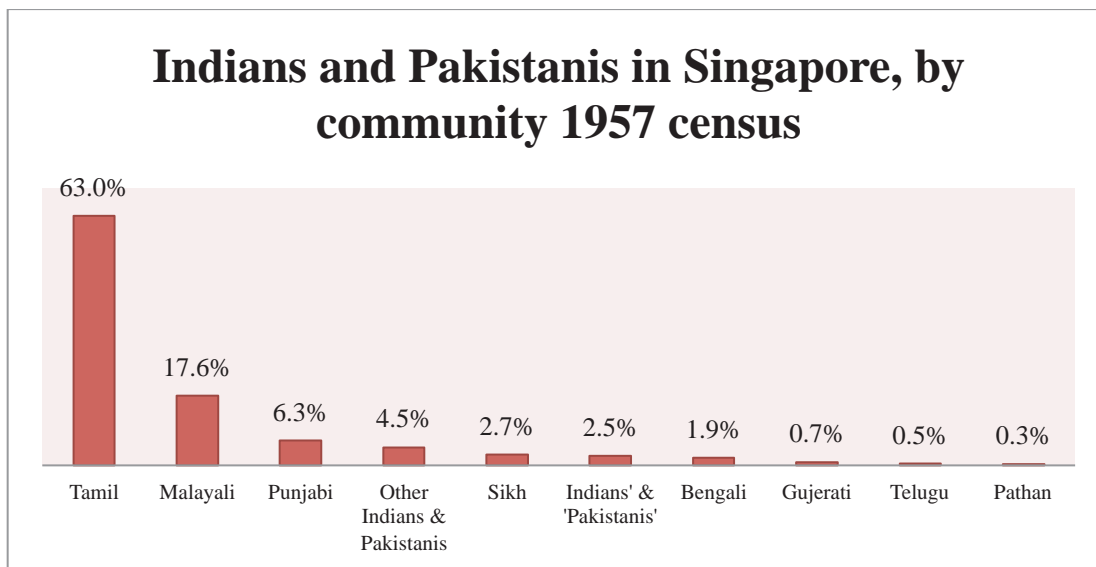
Total Indian and Pakistanis population: 124,084

Figure 16: Composition of the Indian and Pakistanis community according to the 1957 census of the Straits Settlements

Figure 16 above shows the breakdown of the Indians and Pakistanis population into communities. The major community was the 'Tamils' (63.0%), followed by the 'Malayali' (17.6%) and other minority groups such as the 'Punjabi' (6.3%) and 'Other Indians and Pakistanis' (4.5%).

The literacy report in the 1957 census was particularly interesting. Firstly, it was recorded that 'the majority of the people in Singapore can speak more than one language or dialect, although at different levels of proficiency' (Report on the census of population 1957: 76). This is an indication that the Singapore population were generally at least bilingual. Secondly, it was noted, that 'Malay is the medium of communication of the different races and the number of persons who are able to speak Malay in addition to their own language or dialect is fast increasing' (76). It is thus evident (and supported by census data) that the lingua franca between different racial groups at the time was Malay. Furthermore, the assessment of the level of literacy in 1957 was limited to what the census takers deemed as 'principal languages', which included Malay, English, Chinese Tamil and any other language. Literacy was

'defined as the ability to read and write a simple letter' (76). The fact that only four 'principal languages' mattered in the assessment of literacy rates indicates the shifting stance of the Singapore government towards these languages as important languages and finally instituting them as official languages in 1965.

The most interesting information from this census is the data that tabulates the 'mother tongue' of a person by racial group. According to Chua the superintendent of the 1957 census, one's mother tongue is the language or dialect principally spoken in home in early childhood. He added, 'from the point of view of information on cultural and social assimilation and interaction between cultural and social group, mother tongue may be regarded as a necessary supplement to racial group' (Chua 1964: 9). Looking at the figures, a majority of the people professed their mother tongue to be that of their native 'tribe', however, there were also a small percentage of people who claimed their mother tongue was not a language normally associated with their particular ethnic group.

Table 6: Table showing percentage of Chinese population whose mother tongue is English or Mandarin according to the 1957 census of the Straits Settlements

Percentage (and no.) of Chinese, by 'tribe', whose mother tongue is English or Mandarin (1957 census)			
Tribe	**Hokkien**	**Teochew**	**Cantonese**	**Hainanese**
Mandarin	0.02% (82)	0.01% (29)	0.04% (76)	0.1% (45)
English	0.3% (1,147)	0.2% (337)	0.1% (274)	0.1% (37)
Tribe	**Shanghainese**	**Henghua**	**Hokchia**	**Kwongsai**
Mandarin	5.4% (345)	0.1% (5)	0.04% (3)	1.4% (4)
English	0.2% (23)	0% (0)	0.04% (3)	0% (0)
Tribe	**Hakka (Kheh)**	**Foochow**	**Other Chinese**	
Mandarin	0.1% (68)	0.2% (31)	27.1% (338)	
English	0.6% (400)	0.3% (51)	1.2% (15)	

Table 6 above shows the percentage of the Chinese population that stated that their mother tongue was either Mandarin or English, as opposed to the language normally associated with their ethnic group or 'tribe'. Though the percentages are small, this may be significant, as we start to see a small portion of the Chinese community that recognised their mother tongue as Mandarin, possibly due to the fact that they might have attended schools that used Mandarin as the medium of instruction, as mentioned in the 1931 census. It would be of particular interest to find out who the people were

that professed English to be their mother tongue, although this information is not available from the census.

Table 7: Table showing percentage of Malay population whose mother tongue is English or Malay according to the 1957 census of the Straits Settlements

Percentage (of no.) of Malay, by race, whose mother tongue is Malay or English (1957 census)			
Race	**Malay**	**Javanese**	**Boyanese**
Malay	0.0% (0)	59.5% (21,434)	36.0% (7,977)
English	0.1% (93)	0.03% (10)	0.01% (3)
Race	**Menangkabau**	**Malaysians' & 'Indonesians'**	**Other Malaysians**
Malay	69.6% (112)	62.4% (837)	66.4% (196)
English	1.2% (2)	3.3% (44)	4.1% (12)
Race	**Bugis**	**Banjarese**	
Malay	70.2% (750)	73.2% (259)	
English	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	

Table 7 above shows the percentage of Malay population that stated that their mother tongue was either English or Malay. One striking observation about this set of data is that there is large proportion of non-ethnic Malays that professed their mother tongue as Malay. From the table, we can see that a large number of 'Banjarese' (73.2%), 'Bugis' (70.2%), 'Menangkabau' (69.6%), 'Other Malaysians' (66.4%), 'Malaysians & Indonesians' (62.4%), 'Javanese' (59.5%) and 'Boyanese' (36.0%) professed that their mother tongue is Malay.

Table 8: Table showing percentage of Indian population whose mother tongue is English or Tamil

Percentage of Indians (and no.), by race, whose mother tongue is Tamil or English (1957 census)

Race	Tamil	Malayali	Punjabi	Sikh
Tamil	N.A	1.6% (342)	0.3% (23)	0.5% (18)
English	0.9% (691)	2.2% (485)	0.7% (57)	1.4% (47)
Race	**Gujerati**	**Telugu**	**Pathan**	**Bengali**
Tamil	0.0% (0)	21.2% (123)	2.2% (7)	0.7% (17)
English	0.7% (6)	3.8% (22)	1.9% (6)	3.2% (77)
Race	**Indians' & 'Pakistanis'**	**Other Indians & Pakistanis**		
Tamil	2.4% (73)	2.9% (161)		
English	5.5% (168)	6.5% (368)		

Table 8 above shows the percentage of Indian population that stated that their mother tongue was either English or Tamil. It is evident from this that there were now numbers of the non-Tamil population that were reporting Tamil as their mother tongue, and this is most obvious in the 'Telugu' community with 21.2% stating that Tamil is their mother tongue. Thus, the three tables above present very interesting data, as we can start to see a shift from a person's ethnic language to the language of the majority in each racial population.

5.2 Post-colonial censuses (1970-2010)

This section describes and analyses census data from the independence of Singapore in 1965 up to the present. These results are discussed in two sections: the first dealing with the 1970 census, and the second dealing with the four censuses between 1980 and 2010. One thing to note in censuses in the post-colonial era is that there is now a new distinction made between 'citizens' and 'non-citizens' in the data. Furthermore, from 1990 onward, data was collected only from the 'resident population', which would have left out the sizeable proportion of foreigners (1.46 million as of 2011) who live in Singapore (National population and talent division 2013).

5.2.1 The 1970 census

The criterion used to assess literacy in 1970 was made more stringent as compared to that of 1957. The reason for the change in criterion was due to the fact that given 'the universal primary education as well as a high level of secondary education [in Singapore]' (Report on the census of the population 1970: 100), the measure of literacy should 'require not only an ability to read and write but also include an element of comprehension and understanding capability' (100). Thus, the criterion for assessing literacy was modified to 'ability to read with understanding a newspaper in any of the four official languages or any other language' (100).

Table 9: Literacy rates of population (citizens and non-citizens) according to the 1970 census of Singapore

Literacy rates of the population in the 1970 census	
English only	21.0%
Chinese only	29.2%
Malay only	6.2%
Tamil only	1.6%
English & Chinese	6.4%
English & Malay	5.2%
English & Tamil	1.1%
Two or more official languages	1.0%
Non-official languages	0.4%
Illiterate in all languages	27.8%

The 1970 census is the first time where literacy in two or more languages was counted. Table 9 above shows the literacy rates of population, both citizens and non-citizens. From the percentages, we see that the non-literate population make up about one-quarter of the population (27.8%) and proportion of monolinguals is large, with the largest group being the monolingual-Chinese population (29.2%). However, in the 1970 census, it was not recorded what languages the different ethnic groups were literate in. The tabulated figures only show the number of official languages that they claim literacy in. Nevertheless, we start to see the importance being placed on the literacy abilities in the official languages there were instituted in 1965.

5.2.2 The 1980 to 2010 censuses

Since the questions asked in the 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 censuses are very similar, I have conflated the discussion of these censuses under a single category. Firstly, the test of literacy used in these censuses was the one used in 1970, which is the ability to comprehend a newspaper in that language. Secondly, literacy rates in official languages were also tabulated. In these sections below, relevant data from the four censuses in this period are set out in comparative form, in order to provide a concise illustration of relevant trends in multilingualism that span the colonial to post-colonial periods. Key issues here include the racial composition of the population, the rise in English literacy rates, the rise in the literacy rates of 'mother tongues', multi-language literacy in official languages, and the shift in languages used in home domains.

5.2.3 The racial composition of the population

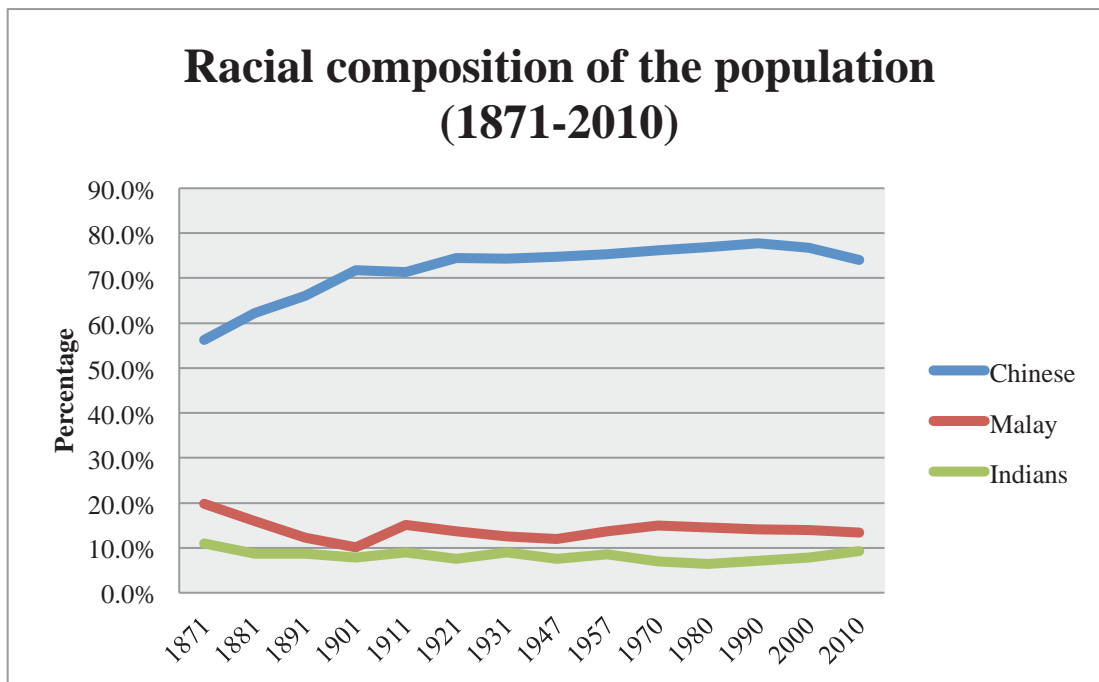Figure 17: Racial composition of the population from 1871 to 2010, based on census data

Figure 17 above shows the distribution of population in percentages between the periods of 1871 to 2010. One striking pattern throughout all the census data is that the proportion of the races in Singapore has been the largely the same. The most populous racial group had always been the Chinese group, followed by the Malays then Indians.

The proportion of each racial group over the years will also give us a rough indication of the size of the various speech communities. In the next section we will chart the rise and decline of languages in Singapore throughout history.

5.2.4 Rise of official languages and literacy rates in Singapore

This section looks at census reports that reveal a rise in the learning of official languages and a rise in literacy rates in Singapore, with reference to such languages as English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil.

Percentage of population literate in English (1921 - 2010)
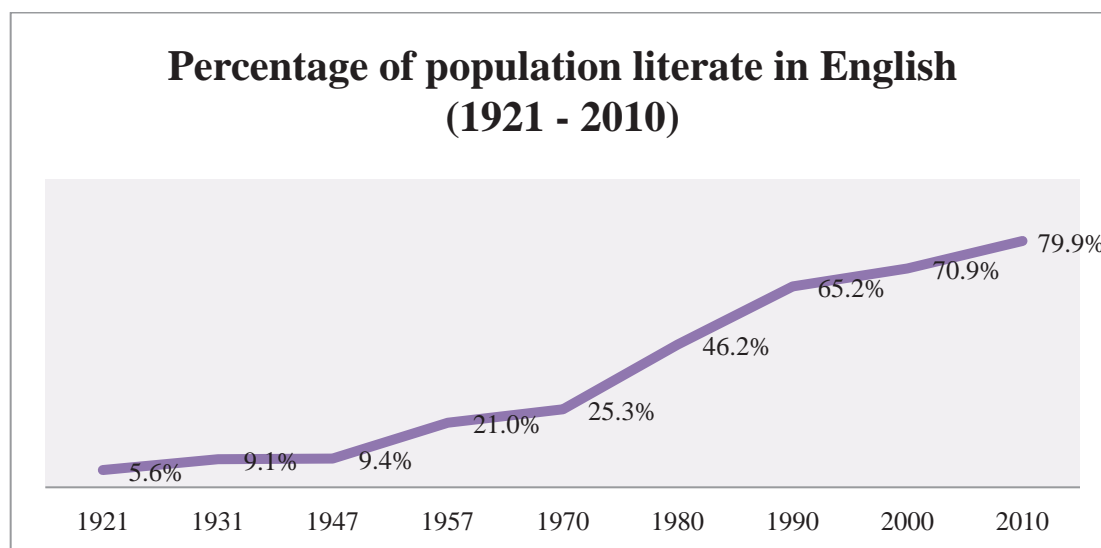
Figure 18: Percentage of population literate in English from 1921 to 2010 according to census data

Looking at the census data, it is evident that literacy rates in English have increased tremendously throughout the years. Figure 18 above shows the Singapore population's literacy rates in English from 1921 to 2010. From barely a fraction of the population literate in English in the early twentieth century, we currently see a literacy rate of about 80% of the population. This could probably be attributed to the English-medium education that was introduced in modern Singapore that boosted English literacy to such a high level. Furthermore, it is proven that the level of English proficiency in Singapore is the highest in Asia (Asianscientist 2011 and Bolton 2008).

5.2.5 Rise in mother tongue literacy rates in each racial group

Literacy rates of each racial group in their designated mother tongue (1957-2010)

——Literate in Chinese ——Literate in Malay ——Literate in Tamil

82.7%   86.7%   90.5%   88.9%
63.8%   70.2%   75.2%   80.0%
59.7%
48.6%   42.5%   42.5%   48.8%   50.0%
35.6%

1957   1980   1990   2000   2010
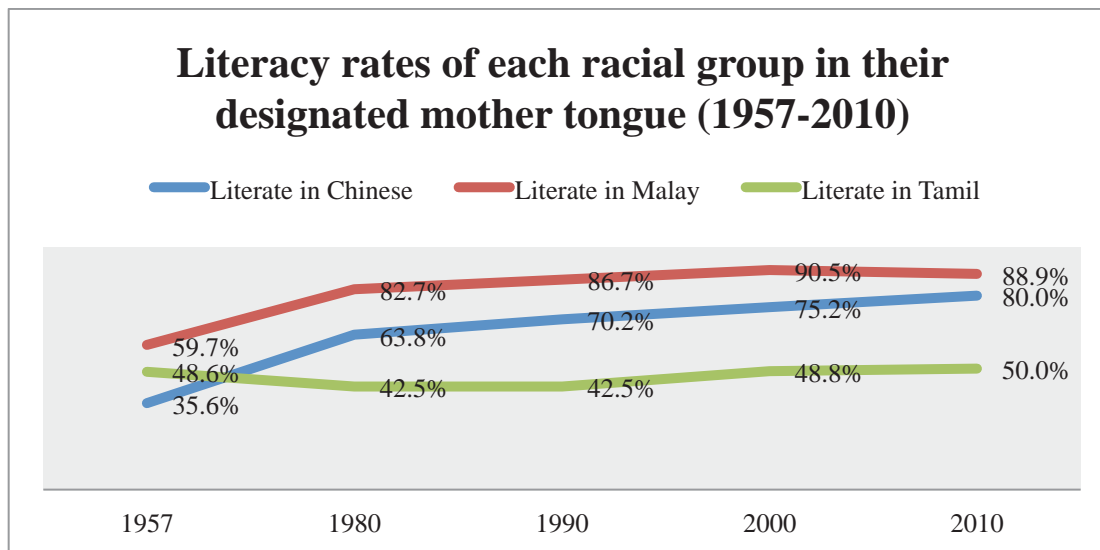
Figure 19: Percentage of each racial group literate in their designated mother tongue
from 1957 to 2010 according to census data

Figure 19 above shows the literacy rates of each ethnic group in their designated 'mother tongue'. The term 'mother tongue' in the Singapore context differs from linguists' definition of a mother tongue. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (1981), 'mother tongue' is defined as the language that is first learnt by the individual and the language that one can identify with. However, in Singapore the official designated 'mother tongues' are Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, 'which are the linguistic varieties which are officially associated with the official races of the state, namely Chinese, Malay and Indian, and learnt as second languages in school' (Lim 2009: 52). As such, 'mother tongue' is predetermined by one's ethnicity and this is officially endorsed by the public education system in Singapore. From Figure 19, it is evident that there is an increasing trend of each ethnic group in their designated 'mother tongue'. The Chinese community noted a substantial increase in people literate in Chinese, from 35.6% in 1957 to 80.0% in 2010. An increase is also observed among the Malay community with literacy rates in Malay increasing from 59.7% in 1957 to 88.9% in 2010. In the Indian community, the literacy rate in Tamil has increased minimally from 1957 to 2010 and this could be due to the Non-Tamil Indian languages (NTILs) policy in place in the education system. This policy was introduced in the early 1990s, where five NTILs (Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu) were introduced to be part of the national examinations and Indians from these ethnic groups had the option

to take an NTIL as their mother tongue, instead of Tamil (Ministry of Education 2007).

The overall increase in literacy rates in designated 'mother tongues' provides evidence for the effectiveness of the language education in modern day Singapore, indicating an obvious shift towards these official 'mother tongues'.

5.2.6 Multi-language literacy in official languages

Bilingualism was an important part of the education system since the 1950s, where vernacular languages such as Mandarin, Tamil and Malay were regarded as second languages and English as a first language. Eventually, the bilingual education policy was revised and what is in place till today is that students have to study their subject curriculum in English and at the same time, reach a 'second-language' proficiency in their designated mother tongue. (Dixon 2005). Given the importance of being bilingual in the Singapore education system, it would be interesting to chart the development of bilingualism in the population over the years.

Literacy in two or more official languages (1980 - 2010)

Legend: Chinese, Malay, Indian

Data points:
- 1980: Chinese 26.4%, Malay 52.0%, Indian 51.8%
- 1990: Chinese 38.0%, Malay 64.3%, Indian 55.9%
- 2000: Chinese 47.4%, Malay 73.1%, Indian 64.1%
- 2010: Chinese 63.3%, Malay 83.8%, Indian 80.5%
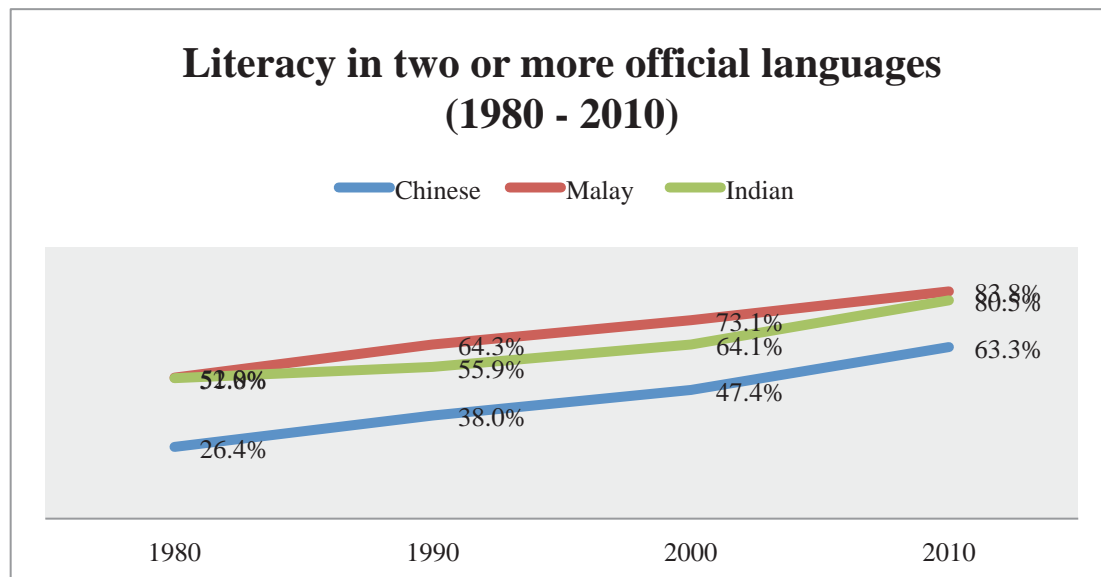
Figure 20: Percentage of each racial group literate in two or more official languages

Figure 20 above charts the literacy rates of each ethnic group, whose members are literate in two or more official languages. It is evident bilingual literacy has an upward trend from 1980 to 2010. The increase was most significant in the Chinese community where bilingual literacy was only 26.4% in 1980 but is at 63.3% as of 2010. Bilingual literacy in the Malay community increased from 52.0% in 1980 to

83.8% in 2010 and in the Indian community the increase was from 51.8% in 1980 to 80.5% in 2010. Thus, the notion of Singapore being a bilingual population is supported by census data where we say a large proportion of each ethnic group being literate in two or more languages.

5.2.7 The shift of languages used in the home domains

In 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 censuses, data that showed the predominant languages spoken at home were collected. The 1980 and 1990 census listed the languages that were spoken most frequently to parents, spouse, siblings and grandparents. The percentages shown in Figure 21 are a composite based on these categories.
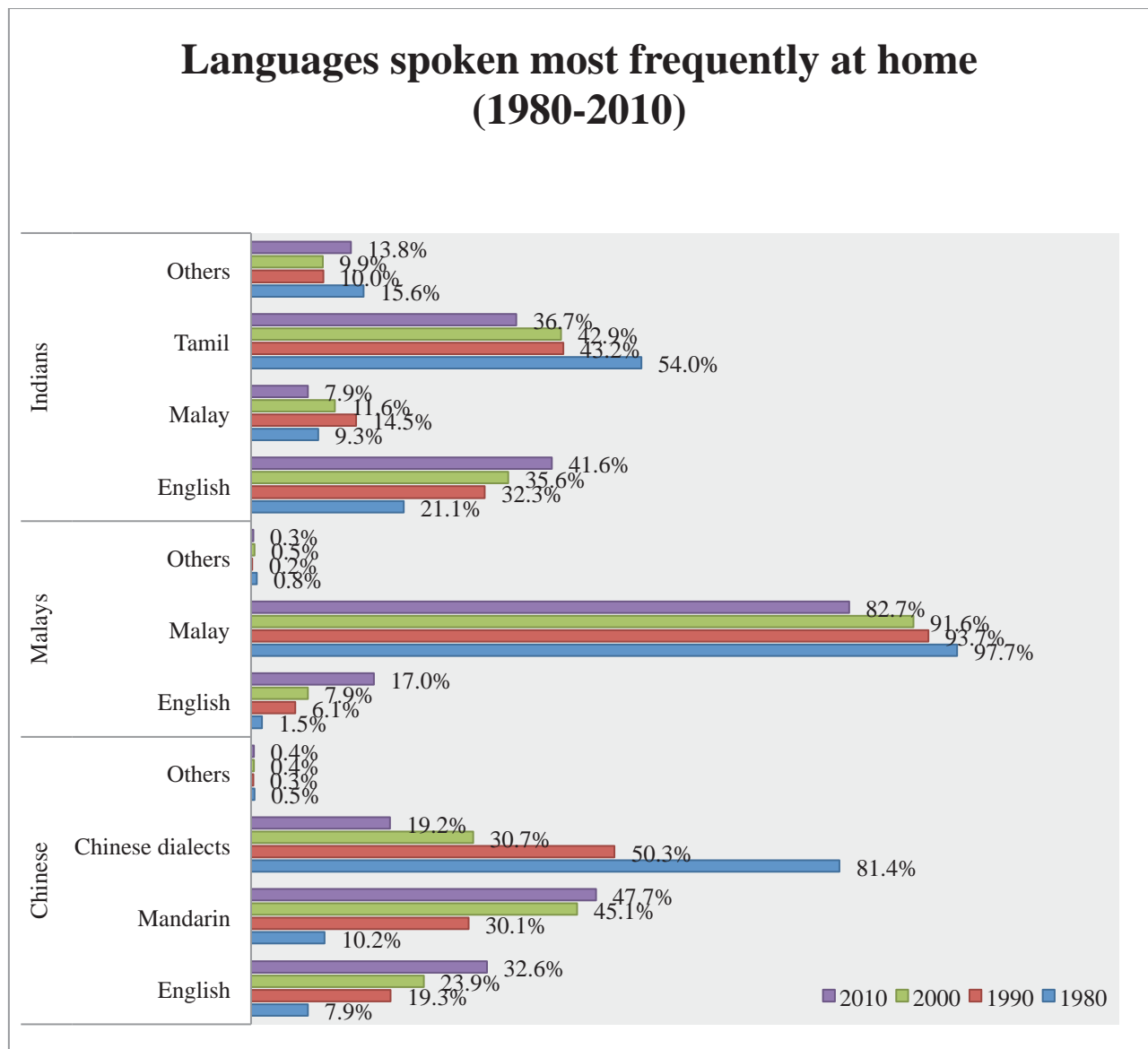

Figure 21: Languages spoken most frequently at home in 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010

The impact that Singapore's language policies has on language use in Singapore seems to be most pertinent when we analyse the languages spoken most frequently at home. As can be seen in Figure 21 above, the usage of English as a home language has increased across three ethnic groups. The most notable increase is seen among the Chinese Singaporeans, with 7.9% in 1980 claiming to use English at home as compared to 32.6% in 2010. Similarly, the Malay Singaporeans also recorded a large increase in English language use at home with 1.5% in 1980 to 17.0% in 2010.

Looking at the Chinese community, we see a sharp decrease in the use of Chinese dialects as a home language from 81.4% in 1980 to 19.2% in 2010. In contrast, the use of Mandarin in homes has increased from 10.2% in 1980 to 47.7% in 2010. This decrease in use of dialects and an increase in the use of Mandarin could be attributed to the success of the Speak Mandarin Campaign (SMC) that I have mentioned in the literature review, and this was reiterated in the 1990 census. (Singapore census of population 1990, Statistical release No. 3.: 5). The Malay community also noted a slight decrease in the use of Malay from 97.7% in 1980 to 82.7% in 2010, and a similar decrease was noted in the Indian community with 54.0% speaking Tamil as a home language in 1980 to 36.7% in 2010. Through this analysis of home languages, we do notice a language shift away from dialects and in some communities, their 'mother tongue', towards an increasing usage in English even in the home domains. This situation is thus succinctly summarised by Newbrook (1987) when he states, 'Singapore, is in fact, well on the way towards becoming a largely English-speaking society' (12).

The review of recent language censuses provided in this section (Section 5.2) is thus intended to simultaneously provide an overview of recent trends in multilingualism, as revealed by censuses as well as linking the sociolinguistic trends of the present to the record of languages in the colonial past.

6. Commentary

As I hope I have demonstrated, the investigation of language data from censuses is informative in charting the history of multilingualism in Singapore. By looking back into the past, through the means of censuses, we are able to reimagine the linguistic landscape of Singapore and to also note its changes throughout the years. Through the examination of such data, we may also attempt to reconstruct the 'language worlds' of

Singapore in earlier eras (Bolton 2013). Although we are not able to fully reconstruct earlier language worlds in the community by looking at census data alone, nevertheless such data may provide valuable historical evidence of how multilingual Singapore has changed and developed over time. Furthermore, since census taking was carried out decennially (except during the World War II period), we are able to chart the chronological development of language use and literacy in Singapore over time. Thus, the analysis of censuses enables us to chart the macro language trends and development of languages in Singapore, giving us an idea of the changes over time.

That is not to argue, however, that censuses can provide a complete picture of sociolinguistic reality(ies) over time. Studies have shown that languages such as 'Bazaar Malay' (Holm 1988, Adelaar & Prentice 1996) and 'Baba Malay' (Khin Khin Aye 2005, Sasi Rekha 2007) served as an interethnic lingua franca (Bloom 1986: 360) in colonial Singapore. However, it is notable these languages are never mentioned as 'languages' in the census documents that have formed the data for this study. This indicates that the named languages in censuses are typically limited to what are officially deemed as 'languages' at any given point. In a multilingual context like Singapore where language contact inevitably takes place, one might have to look beyond censuses to get a better understanding of the languages used by people. Moreover, as compared to the censuses that were conducted under the administration of the Straits Settlement government, Singapore's post-independence censuses limit language questions to the resident population, which would have left out languages that are spoken by foreigners in Singapore and are also part of the language ecology. In addition, the language questions asked in post-independence censuses are largely skewed towards existing language education policy (e.g. bilingual education policy) and other language policies (e.g. Speak Mandarin Campaign).

7. Conclusion

In Section 3 of this report, the research issues for this research project were specified as: (1) What are the macro trends of language maintenance and language shift that are highlighted through the analysis of census data? (2) More specifically, what can the analysis of census data tell us about the multilingual development of Singapore with reference to Chinese dialects, Indian languages, Malay, Mandarin and English? and

(3) To what extent can the analysis of census data increase our understanding of the multilingual history of Singapore

With reference to research issue (1), the results of the research indicate that there has been a shift away from the use of vernacular languages in favour of official languages such as English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. This can be seen through the increase in literacy rates in these languages over the years. With reference to research issue (2), the results of the research indicate that the use of Chinese dialects has declined, as observed by the decrease in usage in the home domains. Literacy rates and usage of Mandarin as a home language has increased. The literacy in and use of English have seen an increase since its introduction to Singapore during the colonial era till today. Literacy rates in English are high, with about 8 in 10 persons being literate in the language. Furthermore, due to the bilingual language policy adopted in the education system, bilingual literacy rates have also increased throughout the years.

Finally, with reference to research issue (3), the results of the research indicate that to some extent at least, census documents do have value in researching the early sociolinguistic history of Singapore, specifically with reference to the description of macro-sociolinguistics and patterns of multilingualism over time. Not least with reference to the identification and description of patterns of language shift in the Singapore community.

In summary, through the analysis of census data from 1871 to 2010 we are able to track a number of macro trends in language shift from the colonial times to modern day Singapore. To a large extent, we are able to find out what were the languages that were used in Singapore in the early years and the approximate sizes of each speech community, as with the data presented in the 1911 census. The study of the consecutive censuses then allows us to track the development of language trends over time.

This current study is only a preliminary attempt to investigate the history of multilingualism in Singapore, using only census data as a source of information. What was surprising for me as researcher in this project was the evident lack of detailed previous research on this topic. Indeed, in order to carry out this research, I had to compile a comprehensive database of historical censuses, as these were not readily available in any particular library in Singapore. While acknowledging the fact that the research project presented may be seen as somewhat preliminary, it is, to my

knowledge, despite its obvious limitations, the first study of its kind that attempts to comprehensively study all available censuses with particular reference to the history of multilingualism in Singapore. Future research related to the study on the history of multilingualism in Singapore could use other primary sources (if available) such as journals, diaries or recordings of oral history to analyse their use of languages.

Notes

1. The Bengali people originate from the region of Bengal, a region that is between India and Bangladesh. They speak Bengali as their mother tongue.

2. Klings, or Kelings, is what we know as Tamils in the present day. The Klings originate from South India and speak Tamil as their mother tongue. 'Klings' is a derogatory term to some Tamils and it was not used in subsequent censuses.
http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-08-12_114422.html

3. The Boyanese, or Baweanese, were originally from the Bawean Island in East Java. They speak the Bawean dialect.
http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1069_2007-06-20.html

4. The Bugis originate from the southwestern peninsula of Celebes, an island located in between Borneo and the Moluccas. They speak Buginese.
http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2013-08-12_113516.html?s=bugis

5. Cochin-Chinese refers to the people that originate from Cochin-China, present day South Vietnam.

6. Dyak, also known as Dayak, originate from the islands of Borneo.
http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/153116/Dayak

7. Abyssinians refers to the Habesha people that originate from Ethiopia.

8. Macaos, or Cantonese as we now know today, originate from the Guangdong province of China.

9. Straits-Born are ethnic Chinese people who were born in the Straits Settlements.

10. Hylams are what we now know as the Hainanese. They originate from Hainan Island in China, speaking the Hainanese dialect.
http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/251708/Hainan

11. Kehs are now known as Hakkas, and they originate from northern China speaking Hakka Chinese.
http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/252138/Hakka

12. Achinese are people that originate from the island of Aceh in Indonesia.

13. Jawi-Pekans refers to people of Malay-Indian heritage.

14. Manilamen refers to the people that originate from the Philippines.

15. Parsees were people that originate from Iran.

16. Hok-Chiu and Hok Chia/Hok Chhia are branches from the Hokkien 'tribe' (The census of British Malay 1921: 78)

17. Chinese from Shanghai, Pekin and the more Northern parts of Chin were tabulated under a single category, 'Northern provinces'. (The census of British Malaya 1921: 84)

18. Kwongsai, or Kwong Sais, originates from the province that lies between Canton and Yunnan. (The census of British Malaya 1921: 84)

19. Banjarese originate from Banjermiassin, a district south of Borneo (The census of British Malaya 1921: 75)

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[The *World Englishes* (WE) Journal style of referencing is used here at the request of supervisor, Professor Kingsley Bolton]

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