Linguistic Negotiations of Identity Among Malay/Muslim Male Youths in Singapore

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic Negotiations of Identity Among Malay/Muslim Male Youths in Singapore

This dissertation examines the lived experiences of four young Malay/Muslim males in Singapore. Through a critical sociolinguistic approach, the dissertation draws on individual and group observations, interactions and interviews to elicit perspectives on postnationalistic constructions of identity and language in a localised setting. The analysis shows how the negotiation of identities is tied closely to the Malay/Muslim male youths’ experiences growing up, against a backdrop of inherited social structuration and ethnolinguistic marginality, within the rigid management of ethnicity by the State and, its intrusions into the affairs of Islam. The dissertation argues that the relationship between language and ethnicity is not entirely about agency (i.e. what a person chooses to be). Instead, it is about markets within which agency and habitus work themselves out in the contexts of specific histories and politics. The negotiation of the Malay/Muslim identity in dominant discourses is further implicated by the ideological construction of homogeneity and linguistic difference, and has essentialised the Malay/Muslim habitus. In many cases, this has resulted in the normalisation of marginality, exclusion and symbolic domination by those in the market. The examples of constrained agency, of structural marginalisation and of investments in the Malay/Muslim identity that support this research shed some critical light on the complicated political economy of language and identity in the Malay/Muslim market.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)_______________________________________

SOPHIAAN SUBHAN
INTRODUCTION

Linguistic Negotiations of Identity Among Malay/Muslim Male Youths in Singapore

This dissertation demonstrates that the negotiation of identity among Malay/Muslims is largely about markets (Bourdieu 1977) and about the multiple positionings of social actors (e.g. Bamberg 2003; Davies and Harré 1990). These markets are the residual effects of the Singapore government’s structuralist and deterministic multiculturalist policy which equates language with identity as whole, bounded systems and communities along the lines of a homogenising ideology. This ideology links a person’s race with pre-determined ethnolinguistic expectations and enforces the assumption that all Malay/Muslims are the same and that they all speak and behave the same way. The Malay/Muslim identity is perceived to be homogeneous and is distinct and non-ambiguous (Lai 1995). Therefore, a person with a Malay and/or Muslim name is ascribed with the Malay/Muslim category, that they are automatically proud to maintain the Malay adat (customs/culture), are assumed to speak Bahasa Melayu, and practices Islam. The discourse deems phenotypical traits, biological origins or descent irrelevant (Clammer 1990) and maintains the notion of race as an identity category that is immutable (Velayutham 2007).

The State’s ethnolinguistic ascription is employed to organise essentialist expectations and manage performance of ethnic groups in Singapore.¹ The critical perspective approach in this dissertation challenges the normalised view that the

¹ Berita Harian December 30, 2010, p.7 Melestarikan budaya Melayu di sini
ethnic communities in Singapore are simply natural or expected depoliticised social groupings. In fact, this dissertation demonstrates that these communities are carefully constructed and social projects by the members from the respective ethnolinguistic groups. These groups are shaped by the unequal relations of language, ideology and power that present themselves within Singapore’s multiethnic, multireligious, multicultural and multilingual society (Chua 1995; Rahim 2001; Purushotam 1997; Rubdy 2001; Wee 2003, 2005, 2006; Vaish 2007).

Singapore’s multiculturalism policy has historically supported (and, in later years, strengthened) the production and reproduction of institutionalised forms of ethnolinguistic difference. This policy facilitated the development of homogenised ethnic communities, arguably as a means of managing and controlling difference (be it racial, ethnic, linguistic, class, religious, gendered, etc.), which resulted in a distribution of resources along ethnolinguistic and class lines. The consequence is that important and limited resources (i.e. provision of services, opportunities for employment and education and social status) may be organised into divisive and competitive ethnolinguistic markets. In order to privilege those in the society and marginalise others, particular types of actors define symbolic and material capital produced in each ethnolinguistic market.

The Malay/Muslim community is one such market and the objective of this dissertation is to understand the various forms of identities that dominate the market. This objective further includes why particular identities dominate the market, with what consequences and for whom. In particular, as actors who have been passed down this market from their predecessors, young Malay/Muslims must navigate discursive spaces that may be filled with contradictions and that often marginalise them to some extent. The experiences of key informants in this research
reveal strategic negotiations of identity as consequences of having more or less cultural, religious and linguistic capital which constrain (or facilitate) their multiple positioning.

The processes of sociolinguistic structuration within the Malay/Muslim community and how they position and are positioned by dominant views of language and identity is a consequence of the State’s paternalistic governance and hegemonic control over the many facets of everyday lives of Singaporeans (Chew 1987; Chua 1998a, Chua and Kuo 1998; Clammer 1990, 1998; Tamney 1995; Vasil 1995, 2000; Hussin 2004; Ho 2006; Velayutham 2007). These policies have enabled the State to manage the cultural and linguistic diversity in Singapore and align them with the commitment towards nation building and national identity.

Two of the more successfully implemented policies concern language. In Singapore, the relationship between language and society is complicated and often taken for granted. The unequal relationships between language and power are embedded in the policies and initiatives that the State has implemented since Singapore’s independence in 1965 and will be addressed in the literature review. The result is an examination on how people in positions of power can employ perceptions about language and identity to structure certain social groupings where people are excluded or included.

Relevant to this discussion is the impact of modernity on societies due to globalisation. Globalisation not only has presented challenges to peripheral societies but similarly raised tensions and anxieties where local economies are dependent on it for economic and political existence. Singapore is one such example that has embraced a continuous inflow of foreign capital into the country out of socio-economic necessity. However, at the same time, the State expects Singaporeans to
retain a level of tradition, or Asian-ness. Amaldas (2009:985) sums the State’s policymaking style as the “practice of selective globalisation”. Thus, this small nation-state has much to add to the ever-growing understanding of the construction of identities in current times.

This study of identity negotiations is situated within the larger discourses of what social belonging mean and how the informants construct exclusion. Due to the fairly static notion of national identity preferred by State, this small-scale study of four Malay/Muslim young males in Singapore resides between the social-constructionist and poststructuralist understandings that view identity as a discursive situated negotiation and at the same time, emphasise the role of power relations. At the core of this study is to gain an understanding of how the Malay/Muslim informants discursively construct and negotiate their multiple identities considering that the identities they are able to claim are constrained by the dominant discourses in society and their language resources (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004).

This research that examines negotiation of identity in dominant discourses is informed by my own sociolinguistic trajectory and how I negotiated my own Malay/Muslim-ness. As a young Malay/Muslim male, I had no understanding that my preference to use English over my mother tongue, Bahasa Melayu, as affecting my ethnolinguistic identity. However, my peers perceived otherwise. Often I was called a banana, a pejorative term which questioned my Asian-ness and suggested a disengagement with my ethnic identity. As an adult and an English Language teacher, understandably, my vocation seemed to be my core social identity and using English was central to this. At the same time, I realised that that my ethnolinguistic identity had been shifted to the periphery – willingly, or not – as I used less Bahasa Melayu.
What further motivated my interest in deconstructing the sociolinguistic order in Singapore were my experiences teaching in a State secondary school. English was the dominant language among students in the school, albeit they were using many different varieties within and outside classroom contexts. Some students were possibly unaware of the considerations as to what variety to use, when and where it was used and the appropriateness of the context. These considerations also should include who they were interacting with. An alternative explanation is that some of the students were not able to discern between varieties in the first place. More importantly, many students also used English as means to communicate in their second language classrooms where they learned their ascribed mother tongues, much to the frustration of their mother tongue teachers. In effect, I observed that many of these students struggled with their own mother tongues. The larger social issues are, does their lack of proficiency in their mother tongue affect their Chinese-ness, Indian-ness or Malay/Muslim-ness? Does the use of English result in the toxification of the mother tongue language and consequently lead to the endangerment of ethnic identity?

Research Questions

Embedded in the research questions are the social actions for power, legitimacy, agency, categorisation and structural constraints. Based on key themes identified during fieldwork, the following questions emerged:

1. What are the discourses behind the key informants’ understanding and constructions of ‘national identity’? What are the resources used in these discursive spaces?
2. What dominant discourses of Malay/Muslim-ness are constructed, and where? What gets defined as ‘legitimate’ performances of Malay/Muslim-ness in these discourses?

3. What are the factors that produce discourses of difference within the Malay/Muslim identity? What are the resources used in these discursive spaces? What are the consequences, and for whom?

To complement questions around structure, the research has questions related to the informants’ agency and congruence in constructing identity. The questions are:

- How do the key informants negotiate dominant discourses of Malay/Muslim-ness? Why do the key informants negotiate dominant discourses of Malay/Muslim-ness? What are the consequences of their negotiation? Who are involved/affected?
- How are the key informants positioned by these dominant discourses? Do they reproduce, redefine or contest these positionings?

The research questions are important as they explore the role of language in the construction of identity among members of the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore. These questions focus on the productive and dialectic tensions between structure and agency, and between the exclusion/inclusion, centre/periphery and self/others nexus.

It is important to understand that being a Malay/Muslim is not the only frame through which the key informants define themselves or are defined by others. Their identities could be framed through different aspects of identity for example, gender,
socio-economic background, and sexuality, among others. The focus on the construction and management of ethnolinguistic identity may have the unintended consequence of reifying the very concept and the importance of ethnicity as a form of social organisation. However, being a Malay/Muslim is not always, or necessarily the most important identity for the key informants in this research.

Nonetheless, the key informants’ negotiations of identity need to be understood against the backdrop of the ways they invest in their ethnicity. First, by framing my research around Malay/Muslim-ness to understand the political economy of ethnicity, research can produce a critical view of language and identity where ethnicity is intertwined with other social constructs and is structured along ethnic lines. Secondly, discourses of exclusion frequently focus on the concerns of who is in and who resides in the periphery. In this regard, it would be relevant to investigate the types of identities that are significant to the Malay/Muslim young male informants in their everyday socialisation. By examining their social interactions, it moves the frame outwards to provide a larger picture of the discursive construction and negotiation of identity in Singapore and by placing emphasis on the informants’ performance allow for the study of how people as agentive actors position themselves and in doing so become positioned (see Bamberg 2003; Davies and Harré 1990).

In conducting this research, I have imposed some constraints based on careful considerations of the research goals and fully accept that constraints in the research would not yield statistically significant generalisations. Other research limitations are presented in the methodology chapter. Yet, despite these constraints, this research explores socially significant processes of inclusion and exclusion that merit further

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2 In this dissertation, *identity* is used as an umbrella term for both collective identity and personal identity (self).
investigation. I feel that I am still able to present a variety of complex negotiations of these Malay/Muslim informants that reveal the complicated workings of the dominant discourse.

Questions not addressed in this research

For practical considerations and due to some of the potential drawbacks of my research, it is further important for me to limit the discussions surrounding the Malay/Muslim community and constructions of identity by outlining questions that will not be explored in this dissertation.

First, this dissertation will not directly address questions regarding language shift and maintenance in Singapore. These are indeed important questions, in particular, there is a consensus in the literature which indicates the positive and receptive attitutes among young Singaporeans that Singlish may signal a cultural identity (Lee-Wong 2001). However, these issues of maintenance and shift may not be as problematic within the Malay/Muslim community (see Bokhorst-Heng and Caleon 2009; Cavallaro and Serwe 2010).

Second, this dissertation will not delve deeper into the marginalisation faced by the Malay/Muslim community. These issues have been discussed quite extensively in literature (see works by Li 1990; Rahim 2001; Suratman 2004; Kahn 2006; Zuber 2010, among others). In this research, any discussions on Malay/Muslim structural marginalisation relate directly to the key informants’ own experiences in the construction of their identity.

Third, this dissertation does not attempt to explicate what is the Malay/Muslim identity. This dissertation does not aim to be the ideological mouthpiece for the
Malay/Muslim community. It is not a burden I would place on the key informants nor myself as a researcher.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation forwards a theoretical approach that can possibly be described as critical social constructivist in analysing language and identity. My approach is inspired by works by Bourdieu (1977, 1982), Giddens (1984), Gumperz and Hymes (1982), Heller (2002, 2007) and Pujolar (2008), among others, and recognises that language and identity are indeed discursive constructs. The linguistic resources that are used to construct identity at all these levels are therefore broad and flexible. These resources include styles, languages and their variations, implicatures etc.

In keeping with recent scholarship that views identity as emerging in discourse and does not precede it, this research locates identity as discursively achieved by individual as a social and cultural phenomenon. Although social constructions like language and identity are forms of practice, Bourdieu’s (1997) habitus argues that they are often not deliberate actions and are exemplified in repetition. In this perspective, all social practices or discourse develop from the inter-relationship between habitus and specific social contexts, or what Bourdieu refers to as markets. And, because these tools are put to use in interaction, the process of identity construction does not reside within the individual, but in inter-subjective relations of sameness and difference, legitimacy and, power and disempowerment. This discursive approach allows for the understanding that identity is not simply a matter of broad sociological categories but involves complex processes of local positionings, both ethnographic and interactional.
I argue that this discursive construct is structured to some extent by the boundaries of unequal power relations in which they operate. According to the understanding of habitus, while a social actor’s linguistic repertoire serves as an important resource for the negotiation of their identity within a specific interaction, it may also serve as a constraint which limits the identities that the actor can assert (Heller 2002, 2007; Pujolar 2001; Hambye and Siroux 2009; among others). Consequently, individual agency is limited by the unequal distribution of linguistic resources, which is also tied to unequal distribution of symbolic and material resources. By theorising agency as a broader phenomenon than a simply individualistic and deliberate action, this dissertation explores the multiple ways that identity comes into being from habitual practice, to interactional negotiation to representations and ideologies.

**Thesis Structure**

Chapter One provides a comprehensive review of the body of literature relevant to this dissertation. The chapter begins with theorising identity and language, and the situatedness of language and positionality in the negotiation of identity in social and multilingual contexts. The dissertation’s critical sociolinguistic theoretical framework, which examines the central role that language plays in the process of social action through a reflection of structuration and of the construction of knowledge (Heller 2002), will be expanded further in this chapter. Subsequently, literature in the discussion on youth indicates a shift to studying localised meanings of identity and their role as agents-of-change from the traditional representations of resistance and defiance to authority and norms. Chapter One concludes with a
review of Singapore’s language issues that show the pervasiveness of the study of English in the literature.

Chapter Two provides an insight into the State’s management of ethnicities in Singapore with a focus on the Malay/Muslim group. The policy’s reductionist and rigid ethnic-language categorisation is made complicated with the burden placed on the mother tongue to mark ethnolinguistic identity and as a repository of values and cultures. In this chapter, I provide an interpretation of the Singapore Malay/Muslim identity based on localised discussions of the State’s multicultural policy and its management of this group. Because of the long-standing boundary markers of Islam, Bahasa Melayu and the diasporic attachment to the Malay world that define the Malay (Zuber 2010), I suggest that there is a tendency among those who study this identity to portray developments in Singapore as a subset of the more dramatic events, ideologies, groupings and other processes at work in the constitution of identities in Malaysia. I argue that such studies eradicate the dynamism of the Singapore Malay/Muslim identity work and discourse that informs the socio-economic, political and historical experiences of the ethnic community.

Chapter Three informs readers of the qualitative nature of the research design. Essentially, an ethnographic-sociolinguistic investigation, the design demanded my immersion into established friendship groups where I collected data through observations, interactions and interviews in social settings. Subsequently, it informs the challenges the informants and I faced in the field in relation to the researcher-researched relationship. In this chapter, key informants’ biographical descriptions allow readers a way of forming their own interpretations. The chapter concludes on a reflexive note in which my position as an ethnographer is explained, noting the
perspective from which I initially viewed the dissertation and subsequently, approached it.

The remainder of this dissertation is located within an a critical sociolinguistic and ethnographic approach that sees language as a social construct and speakers as social actors competing for limited and unequal distributed resources used to position people in specific spaces and markets (Bourdieu 1977). The three chapters are organised according to key themes identified in the field. In exploring the key informants’ Malay/Muslim male youth social experiences, the processes of inclusion-exclusion, othering and shifting of centres-peripheries will be discussed in the analysis chapters.

Chapter Four presents the key informants’ trajectories and in the ways they construct, negotiate and legitimise self-identifications related to the dominant discourses of ‘national identity’. Why do some informants identify as Malay, instead of the ascribed Malay/Muslim categorisation? Why do some invest in hyphenated identities such as Singaporean-Malay or Malay-Singaporean? I argue that through self-identification and examining the relationship between language and self in articulating national identity may possibly reveal the ubiquitous nature of language as a political and economic phenomenon, both as a resource and in addressing larger concerns in society.

Chapter Five examines the articulation of the religious Muslim identity. In this chapter, the informants’ naturalisation of Arabic resulted in the construction of a language ideology that informs their interaction with and perceptions of other Malay/Muslims. Why do the informants invest in and perform the ‘Muslim’ aspect of their ascribed identity? How do they show legitimacy in the Muslim identity?
The last part of the analysis in Chapter Six explores the significance of and processes in the use of Bahasa Melayu to mark differences between other speakers of the language. In the analysis, the mother tongue, which is supposedly the language that binds intra-ethnic relations, is valued and advantageous in some interactions and not for others. Thus, what are the resources available for the key informants to contest and (re)produce some of the dominant discourses that marginalise themselves and that they can use to marginalise others? This chapter further discusses the perspectives on vernacularisation of Bahasa Melayu that facilitates intra-ethnolinguistic structures at the societal and geographical level.

In the conclusion, I discuss the ways the key informants’ negotiations of the Malay/Muslim identity are examples of constrained agency that emerged from experiences and knowledge of their ethnolinguistic structural marginality. Bearing in mind conflicts, contestations and productive tensions that confront the informants, I suggest that research in exploring identity work among minority groups reflect the ways these social actors use and perceive codes/languages within dominant discourses of marginalised structuration. This critical sociolinguistic approach facilitates insights of identity beyond essentialism and a deeper understanding of postnationalistic constructions of identity and language in the globalised setting.

Concluding remarks

Given the complexity and subjective nature of the discussions in my dissertation, I would like to clarify the parameters that I have set for it. First, this dissertation does not aim to offer solutions. On the contrary, it aims to engage readers in a critical analysis of the findings in this dissertation. If this dissertation has productively articulated complexities in the key informants’ language-identity performance and
provided useful insights towards understanding them, I consider this dissertation to have met its objectives. Second, I am acutely aware of the dangers in an ethnographic endeavour, in particular to being over-sensitive in social contexts in which ethnic consciousness is heightened. For this reason, the dissertation explicitly avoids such attempts at generalisation, rather its study on language, ideology and power privileges discursive rather than prescriptive analysis.
CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

Chapter One presents the theoretical framework that underpins this research project. I have divided Chapter One into three sections. The first looks at critical theorisation of identity and language. Focusing on issues in collective identity, this section affirms the situatedness of language and positionality in identity work. The second section informs readers of the theoretical framework and presents literature surrounding the dialectal interrelatedness between the concepts of discourse, power, language, identity and agency. In addition, for this section, I have engaged in discussion with a cluster of sociolinguistic concepts relevant for analysing the negotiation of identity in social contexts, in particular, those related to young social actors. Chapter One concludes by contextualising this research project, focussing on the Singapore state’s prescribed multiculturalism within the national identity discourse. Subsequently, this section will frame discussions on power and positioning within the social structuration of the Malay/Muslim community.

1.1 Theorising identity

Identity is one of the more complicated and contested concepts in any discipline. However, complementary notions of sameness and difference often frame a conventional understanding of identity. These notions allow for individuals to mark themselves (or be marked by others) such that difference separates those who consider themselves (or are considered by others) as dissimilar from a referenced group. This referenced group consists of those who allow themselves to imagine
that, as individuals, they have commonalities, hence, sameness. These notions further assume that identities are attributes of groups and individuals, and that they are objective states, rather than being social processes and performances that arise from politically and economically situated interactions (Bucholtz and Hall 2004). The distinctions between sameness and difference have been carefully constructed and defended by people who are in the positions of power and who want to limit access to the resources they control (ibid.). Sameness and difference are a part of the same boundary marking process for inclusion/exclusion, centre/periphery and self/other nexus. In determining these binary conditions, definitions of self are made in contrast to those of other which often involves the essentialising of the other’s differences.

Collective identity is often treated as an essentialist construct (i.e. a pre-discursive phenomenon) that is conceived through separation and differentiation and characterised by fixity and continuity over time. Essentialism has its roots in the field of anthropology (Barth 1969) and was particularly motivated by the emergence and onset of nationalism in the early 19th century. Here, nationalism is an ideological discourse that points to an objective reality which biologically binds language to ethnic identity and is characterised by fixity and continuity over time (Bauman and Briggs 2000). The attraction of essentialising other’s differences has entrenched in popular perception that social identities and memberships are natural, internally homogeneous, expected, clearly marked out from one another, and connected to particular social and linguistic practices (Bucholtz and Hall 2004). In particular, essentialism is constrained by social structures that minimise or neutralise a social actor’s capability and ability to construct and reconstruct identity.
1.1.1 Identity as a Product of the Social

Literature in the study of identity as a product of the social is relatively extensive however, its meaning through the years has gradually shifted in relation to changes in theoretical frameworks. Much of the growing literature on the question of identity is structured along the tension in the conceptualisation of identity as a category or as a process. In the second half of the twentieth century, sociological accounts of identity were characterised by a concern with collective group identities, which focused on homogeneous categorisations, for example, ‘adolescents’, ‘working class’, and along the dichotomous racial categorisations of ‘black’ and ‘white’. Studies in the sociopsychological paradigm are concerned with relations of power between groups (Deschamps 1982) and that language as a salient marker in social interactions (Giles and Johnson 1981, 1987).

One of the earliest and key group identity theories developed in this period is the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (see Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986) which marked a discursive turn in analysing identity that was not concerned with analyses grounded on the notion of power. Instead, the theory examined the in-group and out-group phenomenon, in particular, how members instinctively (and relatively) self-impose hierarchisation based on their statuses in the respective groups. SIT and the related Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) foreground a social actor’s self-concept as deriving from knowledge of membership of a social group or groups which involves a process of reflective knowledge of collective membership and emotional attachment. From the perspectives of SIT and SCT, identity is something which lies dormant, ready to be activated in the presence of others. Social identity memberships therefore have something of a causal relationship to actions and behaviours.
Drawing on the intergroup paradigm, Giles and Johnson's (1981) theory of ethnolinguistic identity focused on language as a salient marker of group membership and social identity. Their study found that individual bilingual Welsh adolescents constantly compared their own social groups to out-groups in order to make their own social group favourably distinct and suggested that members in the group can change their social identity by assimilating into another group which they (or their group) view as being more positive. Giles and Johnson's study maintains that if language is a salient marker of group membership, the social actor may face linguistic adaptation that may result in subtractive bilingualism. At the other extreme, the actor may even face language erosion if a larger number of members of a particular group assimilate into another to achieve a more positive identity. Thus, the negotiation between groups in the sociopsychological paradigm is defined in a transactional-interaction process, in which “individuals attempt to evoke, assert, modify, challenge and/or support their own and others' desired self-images” (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001:244).

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985) deconstruction of the race-culture language or ethnicity-language formulae in their investigations of acts of identity in multilingual contexts marked the shift from a purely sociopsychological approach to language and identity to that of a process where social categories are negotiated through language and other symbolic systems by speakers in concrete everyday situations. Studies in this paradigm examined relationships between actors' choices of linguistic categories such as phonology, morphology, syntax and lexis, and the social situations in terms of conversational contexts.

Heller (1982) presents an alternative perspective in the negotiation of group identity using the terms language choice and actual language used in specific contexts.
Heller argues that rather than attending to positive and negative associations of in- and out-group membership identifications, she defines “language choice” as the “manipulation of conventionally-defined ways of saying things” within a chosen code and these choices serve to “indicate social relationships based on shared or unshared group memberships” which construct social identity in specific contexts (Heller 1982:4).

While Giles and Johnson’s study marked a discursive turn in studying identity in their attempts to take individual differences inherent in their participants into account, their categories were too rigid and categorised diverse individuals into narrow categories of ethnolinguistic identity. In particular, they did not take into consideration characteristics that may differ among groups and within the groups such as ethnicity, language, appearance and personality, among others. The sociopsychological approach in proposing a dominant ideology of homogeneity in homogeneous communities has raised other criticisms as it excludes individuals who are either unable to choose, follow or conform to the norm. Subsequently, it does not lend itself easily to comprehensive theorising identity-negotiations of bilinguals and multilinguals who may have complex linguistic repertoires due to membership in multiple and/or hybrid communities. Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001:244) argue that the “monolingual bias is most evident in the unidirectional perspective which posits the necessity to abandon one’s first language and culture in order to learn the second language and acculturate to the target language”.

This section powerfully affirms the situatedness of language use and the positionality of identity. According to Elliot (2001:6), “social practices, cultural conventions and political relations are a constitutive and powerful backdrop for the staging of human experience and the drawing of self-identity”.

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1.1.2 Theorising language and identity

The study of identity as a product and process of social interaction is relatively extensive in the field of sociolinguistics. In particular, sociolinguistics provides important theoretical frameworks which consider language as a constitutive part of that process. These frameworks can traditionally be divided into two main branches of variationist and interpretivist that differ on ontological perspectives on the nature of language.

Founded on the positivist ontological perspective, the variationist approach to sociolinguistic focuses on the language system in the modelling of language and linguistic change rather than on individual change or social practice. In other words, the approach codes language and society into categorical variables which can reduce and reify social realities. These social realities such as gender, social class, age, ethnicity, geography and socio-economic status, among others, are conceptualised as socially and psychologically pre-defined and ‘natural’ entities. According to Coupland (2001:10), variationist sociolinguistics “treats language (in fact, speech) as socially conditioned distributional patterning, rather than as locally motivated and, in that sense, ‘functional’ social action”. Thus, a variationist perspective on identity is fixed and stable.

Cameron (1997) argues that the variationist claim in which a social label can be conveniently assigned to those who showed patterns of linguistic variations that could possibly define a particular pre-defined identity is a “correlational fallacy”. Heller (1984) argues that the approach does not convincingly explain the relationship between linguistics and social variables as it supposes that social reality can be condensed to distinct and homogeneous variables, and which often can be equally weighted.
Further, as the variationist approach assumes for the most part people sound the way you expect them to sound given your knowledge about their social variables, it cannot be used to explain choices a social actor makes when negotiating identity. In particular, this refers to the actor’s decision-making processes between the sociolinguistic variants or variables they identify with are taken to express, rather than negotiate their identities (Chamber 1995). This is not to say that works on language variant-social variables are unimportant, rather more insightful interpretations could take into consideration the historical contexts of the language and actors being analysed, and making regional and extra-regional comparisons. These added interpretations could possibly emphasise the political nature of language in society.

In contrast, the interactional approach broadens the scope of linguistic theories to the level of “communicative practice” (Hanks 1996) as it is founded on the perspective that linguistic practices, or knowledge in general, are socially and locally situated, constructed or produced in interactions (Gumperz 1982). Interactional and ethnomethodological frameworks proposed by Goffman (1974) and Gumperz (1982), among others, set the foundation for the sociolinguistic approach which views language and identity as products of social interactions and situated performances. Interactional sociolinguists (e.g. Gumperz 1982; Gumperz and Hymes 1982; Heller 1987, 1988) believe that “social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language” (Gumperz and Hymes 1982:7).

Gumperz’s (1982) work on language and social identity uses we code and they code to represent the minority and the majority groups’ languages respectively, or so-called the “ethnography of communication”. Hymes (1974) calls for an approach that goes beyond linguistic structure and that also considers “speech events”.

Goffman (1974) argues for a close and detailed observation of situated interactions in order to understand how the interactions are “framed”. Goffman’s conceptualisation of “performance” sets the stage for “social actors to construct identities, manage relationships and position themselves vis-à-vis others in specific discursive spaces. Hymes and Goffman see “interactions” as, to engage in a constant process of negotiation or “meaning making” by concentrating on shared but shifting interpretations (or frames) and “common sense” assumptions (Gumperz 1999).

According to Heller (2007), the interactional approach shifts the attention from the linguistic system to the language speaker and their social system, thus, making “language as performance” central to studies on language and society. The interactionist literature articulates the construction and negotiation of identity through codeswitching, either between languages or between varieties of the same language, and shows that bilinguals and multilinguals creatively and strategically draw on one or more social situations or memberships. This assumes that meaning and language do not exist outside of interaction and are embedded in and created through the interaction itself.

The discussions in interactional sociolinguistics show that bilinguals and multilinguals creatively and strategically draw on one or more social situations and/or memberships. Thus, these social actors create and negotiate complex constructs with specific local social meanings. The key linguistic means of negotiation of identities discussed in the bilingual and multilingual literature include codeswitching and language choice (Auer 1998; Myers-Scotton 1997; Scotton 1983; Fought 2008; Gardner-Chloros 2009). The literature articulates the construction and negotiation of identity through either between languages or between varieties of the same language.
Since Blom and Gumperz's (1972) Hemnesbergert study on codeswitching, it has been widely accepted that the alternation between languages is a social process in which speakers switch codes depending on whom they interact with within the community. Myers-Scotton (1997) proposed a model of markedness in which interaction is seen as negotiation of rights and obligations between actors and assumes those engaging in the interaction have tacit knowledge of the use of marked and unmarked language choices to show solidarity or social difference. Studies using this approach have distanced themselves from the contrastive English and the other language or the dominant versus the less-dominant dichotomies and applied it to variations in localised contexts. For example, Migge's (2007) longitudinal study of the Eastern Maroons community in Surinam and French Guiana examines the types of codeswitching patterns deployed using different Creole varieties (such as urban Creole, Sranan Tongo and Eastern Maroon Creole). From this perspective, language is recognised as a tool for the strategic enactment of identity in which individuals activate different styles in their linguistic repertoire selectively to highlight aspects of their social identities (and to downplay others), as laid out by Bourdieu (1991).

Interactional sociolinguistics has contributed much to the study of social identity further claiming that language is a strong ethnic marker. What is significant in the literature is that the process of codeswitching is not always consistent and involves the negotiation of identities between social actors and that more recent explorations have shifted away from codeswitching situations that are exclusively between English and native language/mother tongue. Nonetheless, not much is known about the extent to which types of codeswitching are related to different types of boundary marking or change processes, or if the presence (or absence) of codeswitching indicates particular configurations of inter- and intra-group relations.
1.1.3 Identities in Globalisation

Social groups and individuals have had their languages, cultures, boundaries and their identities essentialised and/or objectified not only through political, religious and economic forces, but also as part of nationalist and colonial projects (Blommaert 1999; Heller 2007). These modern and democratic nation-states which based their legitimacy in representing a nation emerged during the late 18th and 19th centuries. By defining borders which are anchored historically to specific territory, the nation-state constructed an imagined cultural and linguistic homogeneity among its people and linked standardised languages to cultures and spaces. Thus, reinforcing the monolinguistic ideology of one nation, one language, one people (Blommaert 1999) that came to be understood as being distinctive national and natural properties (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1990). Thus, language gained considerable power in shaping social identities. However, these aspects of social reality that have specific genealogies, or political and intellectual heritage, need to be unpacked as often they are taken for granted or naturalised (Williams 1983; 2001b).

The study of globalisation has opened discussions of the spread of English based on a tripartite model of concentric circles (Kachru 1992a, 1992b), as a developmental process in postcolonial settings (Schneider 2004) and a threat to multilingualism (House 2003) among others. Literature in the development of varieties of English recognises locally adapted and institutionalised variants of English by looking at the developments of multilingualism, questioning perceived errors and divergent forms, and highlighting users' creativity. These studies not only challenge the assumption that language is attached to a bounded community, which is more often identified to a nation-state with definite political and geographic boundaries, but also contest the empirical notion of linguistic imperialism (Skapoulli 2005).
From the European-American perspective, the linguistic imperialistic paradigm resides in the endorsement of capitalism, a modernisation ideology, ideological globalisation and homogenisation of world culture (Phillipson 1992; Tsuda 1994) and contributed towards linguistic and media imperialism (Pennycook 2003). Though this paradigm endorses the protection and maintenance of linguistic diversity based on English linguistic hegemony, it does not show how English is taken up, how people use English, or why people choose to use English (Pennycook 2003).

Further, although it rightly locates globalisation within a history of European and American imperialism, it runs the danger of not acknowledging the diversity of global forces and locations of globalisation from other influential nations and cultures such as China, Russia, Japan and Islam (Blommaert 2010). Blommaert (2010:611) states that “a regrettable feature of much discourse on globalization that it seems to present globalizations as the creation of worldwide uniformity” and hence, does not recognise role of agentivity in the constructions of identity.

The rise of globalisation, the knowledge-based new economy and the rapid circulation of people, capital, products and information across nation and local borders have blurred and the once-relatively uniform, stable and bounded concepts of language, identity and community. These concepts are now seen socially constructed, multiple, fluid and often, contradictory (Gal and Woolard 1995; Heller 2007; Blommaert 2010) and needs to be reassessed. At the core of globalisation are discursive struggles over the positioning and repositioning of actors as a result of changing conditions of productions and consumption of goods and identities.

From a cultural studies perspective, works by Hall (1990) contribute to the understanding of the “politics of identity”. Hall argues that identities are not universal nor are they “transcendental” spirits that live inside individuals. She adds
that identities are not fixed “essences” and pre-determined origins to which actors can make a final or absolute return. Social actors’ position and positioning of history and of power where identities have real, material and symbolic consequences, challenge boundaries and complicate uniformity.

According to Pujolar (2008), the deconstruction of fixed and essentialised concepts such as identity, nation and language, and their reinterpretation as products of action or discourse, and as outcomes rather than pre-existent entities, is evidence of paradigm shift from structuralism to poststructuralism (or constructivism). The strength of a poststructuralist interactional sociolinguistic approach is precisely in its identification and analysis of social phenomena as constructed through locally situated interaction. Poststructuralism views identities as not pre-discursive nor fixed and permanent (Heller 2007; Pujolar 2008). The paradigm shift further allows for understanding of actors’ positioning and repositioning in globalisation, however, it is not able to sufficiently explain why people speak and act the way they do.

A poststructuralist weakness is the analysis of larger and historical social formations, processes and power dynamics in and through which these social interactions occur. Bourdieu (1977) suggests that a narrower focus could dismiss the fact that an interaction consists more than simply the speaker and addressee and should include the actors’ social groups and their positions in the social structure. He suggests drawing from a critical approach to social theory and ethnography or risk observing only that which is immediately visible in the interaction.

The poststructuralist insistence that identities consistently go through transformations, may be an unintended exaggeration. I understand that while a social actor’s identity cannot completely be fixed and homogeneous, an alternate view that states that it has “no stable core but is […] discontinuous and fragmented” (Sermijn
et. al 2008:634) can be quite challenging. The view that identities in modern societies are fractured, fragmented, incoherent, temporary and incessantly flexible may be equally misleading, particularly for individual identities. This perspective is shared in postmodernism. The postmodern concept of identity is connected to globalisation, multiculturalism and focuses on the consumption and political struggles in modern society (see Widdicombe 1998:204-206). Cameron et al. (1992:11), with respect to ethnomethodology, argues:

People are not completely free to do what they want to do, be what they want to be […] On the contrary, social actors are schooled and corrected, that come under pressure to take up certain roles and occupations, they are born in to relations of class, race, gender, generation, they occupy specific cultural positions, negotiate particular value systems, conceptual frameworks and social institutions, have more or less wealth and opportunity […] and so on, ad infinitum.

Inspired by Bourdieu’s social theory and his conceptualisation of “the economics of linguistic exchanges” (1977), Pujolar (2008:5) argues that “the political economy – of social practices and identities” has remained largely ignored within the poststructuralism shift. A critical sociolinguistic dimension will assist to explain the reasons why they speak or identify themselves the way(s) they do.

A critical sociolinguistic analysis examines the central role that language plays in the process of social action because language is not simply a reflection of social organisation; it is a central element of its structuration and of the construction of knowledge (Heller 2007). Such an analysis is based on an “integrationist” social theory (Coupland 2001b) which combines theories of social categorisation and structuration (macro) (Giddens) and social theories that see the world as being
constructed through local interactions and practices (macro) (Gumperz 1982) of actions (micro). Both sets of theories are linked by Bourdieu’s social theory (1977).

Understanding why social actors enact certain linguistic performance over another is dependent on what is being “constructed”, by whom, how or by what means, in what contexts, with what resources and with what consequences for whom (Heller 2007). One way of approaching these salient questions comes from anthropologists and sociologists such as Bourdieu (1977, 1991) and Giddens (1984). Giddens (1984) theory of social structuration argues that uneven distribution of social resources limits social agents’ actions and results in social categorisation or social inequality. Here, resources are conceptualised as the means through which power is exercised and social structures imposed. Bourdieu’s critical social theory connects language and symbolic power by drawing notions of the “symbolic economy” – a space he considers just as powerful as the financial economy, with its own markets, fields, capital and resources – whether economic (i.e. material, money, property), cultural (i.e. knowledge, skills, educational qualifications), symbolic (i.e. prestige, honour) or linguistic (i.e. the ability to speak a standard variety or a variety that has value).

1.2 Language and Power

Fundamental to Bourdieu’s symbolic economy and Giddens’ social structuration is language. It is through language that any means of interaction can occur, and social difference and inequality are reproduced and contested. Bourdieu (1977) further argues that social actors use language more than as an instrument for communication or knowledge, it is also used as an instrument of power. Thus, linguistic difference and inequality may be used as a means of social categorisation as
they are tied to categorisation and hierarchisation (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001). In other words, the distribution of linguistic resources has real consequences because it is related to the distribution of material resource. The linguistic market is one of the most powerful within the symbolic economy because “every interaction has within it the traces of social structure that it expresses and helps to produce (Roberts and Sarangi 2001:174). And, every interaction has the potential of being an act of power, especially when it involves social actors with unequal access to valued resources (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

The value and relevance of the resource is related to its connection to particular interpretations that are culturally constructed, conventionalised and socially situated (Gumperz 1982). Further, it is dependent on the social actor’s definition of what is salient and on their ability to control access to the definition and to the distribution of resources. Being included in or excluded from definition is an act of power that is part of the process of social selection where a social actor’s performance, their resources and their ‘self’ are assessed for a variety of competencies. These competencies include linguistic, social and economic, among others. For example, when Bourdieu (1977:653) examines an interaction, he discovers that “what speaks is not the utterance, the language, but the whole social person […] the whole social structure is present”. The effectiveness of a social actor is in their power to convince whom they are speaking to and, is largely dependent on their authority and position in the social structure. This authority, or lack of, is marked by the way an actor speaks or acts. Central to Bourdieu’s concept of “legitimate language” is valuing of language and of the speaker (1977:650):

[…] it is uttered by a legitimate speaker, i.e. by the appropriate person, as opposed to the imposter (religious language/priest, poetry/poet, etc.); it is uttered in a legitimate situation, i.e. on the appropriate market (as opposed to insane discourse, e.g. a
The surrealist poem read in the Stock Exchange) and addressed to legitimate receivers; it is formulated in the legitimate phonological and syntactic forms (what linguists call grammaticalness), except when transgressing these norms is part of the legitimate definition of the legitimate producer.

Thus, a legitimate speaker is a social actor with sufficient symbolic and linguistic capital to speak that language which is deemed the ‘standard’ and/or ‘correct’. In addition, a legitimate speaker is an actor who uses that language to speak to other legitimate actors under specific social conditions. In other words, who we are, limits to whom we speak to, under what conditions and the way we speak to others. Bourdieu explains, “when one language dominates the market, it becomes the norm against which the prices of other modes of expression, and with them the values of their competencies, are defined” (1977:652). Legitimising a language, a variety of language and its speakers has been a crucial aspect of the nationalist and intellectual projects of the nation-state. Context-dependent, people in positions of power (e.g. politicians, teachers, clergy, journalists etc.) can impose their language variety as the only legitimate one by unifying or homogenising the linguistic market and by measuring or categorising other different varieties against it.

In the sections above, I have presented key concepts from Bourdieu’s economic theory of social exchanges. They include the notion of linguistic marker, legitimate language, linguistic resources, symbolic power and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu, these concepts bring about a re-evaluation of certain key concepts in theoretical linguistics (1977:646). He proposes that instead of examining

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3 Here, the state is considered a political community and the nation is a cultural/ethnic community. The term ‘nation-state’ thus implies that these two communities intersect geographically. Because one of the important defining characteristics of citizenship is the place of birth, the nation-state is thus a community that everyone can belong to (Young 2008:125).
the “linguistic system”, Bourdieu argues for “symbolic capital” and “linguistic resources” which are closely connected to social actors’ position in the social structure. Bourdieu deconstructs the “linguistic market” or “economy”. He emphasises on the “legitimate language” in place of *la langue* (‘the’ language), which replaces the question of meaning with that of power of speech and relations of symbolic power.

In its most general definition, power relates to “the transformative capacity of human action” and the capacity for people to alter their course (Giddens 1993:104) in which the transformative capacity is dependent upon the resources or facilities that are made by or made available to social actors (Giddens 1993:104). Giddens further suggests that “the production of interaction has three fundamental elements: its constitution as ‘meaningful’; its constitution as a moral order; and its constitution as the operation of relations of power” (ibid.). Accordingly, the production of meaningful interaction involves constant negotiation of differences of meaning; the norms of interaction as a moral order are oriented to and interpreted differently by social actors and that these differences are negotiated (ibid.). Contemporary sociological literature on power has revolved around debates on the nature of power in enabling and/or constraining human actions and that discourse is the site where power relations are constantly constructed, practised and reconstructed. Within linguistic anthropology, studies in power and identity have addressed questions of contact, colonialism and power between societies as political and social inequalities with a given culture (cf. Bucholtz and Hall 2004).

To counter Marxist’s false consciousness which views ideology as an effect of economic structures and stands in opposition of true knowledge, Foucault reconceptualises the notion of power, in particular, the relationship between power
and knowledge. He relocates the production of “truth” in social relations instead of social structures. Here, Foucault ([1994] 2000a:15) describes “truth” as a product of social relations and that political relations of power are “the very ground on which the subject, the domains of knowledge, and the relations of truth are formed”. Foucault’s alternate understanding of power designates relationships between “partners” in which he notes, “if we speak of power of laws, institutions, and ideologies, if we speak of structures or mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others” (2000a: 337).

Foucault (2003:33-34) argues that “the delicate mechanisms of power cannot function unless knowledge, or rather knowledge apparatuses, are formed, organised, and put into circulation, and those apparatus are not ideological trimmings or edifices”. And, whenever these mechanisms are mobilised, he argues that there are also opportunities for resistance. Hence, these support the understanding that power is a socially constructed concept (see works by Fairclough; van Dijk 2001; Wodak 2001). As a socially constructed notion, power may be exercised in covert or/and overt ways (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 2001). Central to the issue of power as a social phenomenon are the concepts of dominant discourse and ideology.

1.2.1 Discourse and ideology

The concept of discourse has a central role in the work of Foucault (1978, 1980, 1984). Here, a discourse refers to a social actor’s system of thoughts or knowledge for making sense of the world and the social practices and identities of individual actors are produced through a set of signs. These signs include words, ideas, labels and symbols, among others. Extending this understanding, Foucault explains that our sense of self and positioning of others are constructed through the engagement with
multiple discourses. When socialising with others, social actors constantly draw upon pre-existing discourses as resources (De Fina et al. 2006; Wodak et al. 1999).

These discourses further influence or informed our casual acceptance of relations of unequal power (Foucault 2003). From his poststructuralist view, the production and circulation of discourses are simultaneously mechanisms of social power (ibid.). Foucault asserts that those who wish to exercise this power should use discourse to do so. In other words, a discourse is a way of representing and defining a particular reality through language. It contains meanings that are understood by a community of people and can be used to “identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (2003:131).

However, making sense is “always a social and variable matter” (Gee 1996:90). This means, what makes sense to one community or individual may not make sense to another – the style or variety of language (or combination of languages) helps to enact a social activity and is situated and associated with a particular social identity (Gee 1996:156). This dissertation is broadly informed by a socio-cultural perspective, which argues that language is a tool used to communicate information, and at the same time, support social activities, social identities and affiliations within and between cultures and institutions.

Gee emphasises that central to discourse is recognition. Social actors are recognised by others as particular types of people who engage in particular types of social activities. As social actors, people are attuned and know how to perform in different situations through language and actions (Gee 2005). More importantly, he suggests that whatever prior performance an actor has experienced has to be similar enough in other performances for it to be recognisable. Gee (2005) argues that social actors use particular languages – words or phrases uttered that are socially
meaningful for the group in these performances. These actors reflect the context within which the languages are spoken and simultaneously shape the context. Understanding particular discourses thus play an important role in how language is interpreted and how identity is performed.

Extending the discussion above, a dominant discourse refers to a particular way of thinking and talking about a matter which is characteristically regarded by the majority in a society as “common sense” or “the truth”. Here, common sense is an understanding that the world is “inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed” in which there is a tendency to reproduce “moral and political passivity” (Gramsci 1971:333). This is because the dominant discourse is driven by the motivations of people in positions of power or dominant groups. Unless and until the balance of power in the society or in a specific interaction shifts, dominant discourses maintain their dominance by defining the socially accepted terms of reference and dismissing or categorising any alternatives. Consequently, these discourses become deeply rooted as knowledge that is unchallenged and that should not be questioned (i.e. universal and objective).

Ideology(s) can be produced and reproduced in society through a multitude of ways, one of which is through the consequence of normalisation or naturalisation of practices – hegemonic patterns in which ideological claims are perceived as “normal” ways of thinking and acting (Gramsci 1971). Traditionally, ideology can categorically be divided by means of institutional, semi-institutional and everyday practices in schools, public administration, business, advertisement, media, literature, art, music, jokes, stereotypes, etc. (Blommaert 1999). Gramsci’s work proposed a reinterpretation of the Marxist theory to illustrate the concept of hegemony. Here, hegemonic power is the prevalent from of social power that relies on voluntarism
and participation in everyday “common sense”. However, Gramsci argues that it is not the sole work of the State. The responsibility of producing and disseminating power is by large the works of “civil society” which includes the church, schools, mass media and/or the family (Gramsci 1996:91).

The works of social theorists like Gramsci, Foucault (1972) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), among others, argue that ideological processes are accomplished through symbolic domination or symbolic violence. In other words, certain ways of doing or thinking are imposed by people in positions of power in a discursive way that masks the sources of domination by convincing others involved that the “rules” are legitimate and objective, and it is in everyone’s best interest to comply. The powerful/dominant group defines these rules in order to maintain their powerful/dominant position.

The traditional concept of language ideology also concerns the set of beliefs about language articulated by the users to rationalise or justify perceived language structures and use (Silverstein 1979) and often emphasise its role in the legitimisation of power abuse by dominant groups. However, van Dijk (2004) and Foucault (2000) argue that ideologies are not exclusive to dominant groups, as non-dominant groups may articulate ideologies that may resist and oppose. Foucault (2000:21) states that “at the very heart of the power relationships, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom”. Thus, the conservative view that power equates to dominance is limiting. Instead, power should be viewed as multidirectional and something that is negotiated situationally through language. In this study, I propose that positioning produce ideology through practice and results to social actors’ understanding of the power inherent in linguistic differentiation and performance.
1.2.2 Discursive Processes of Legitimacy and Power

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2004), sociolinguistic research has used concepts such as stereotypes or attitudes to characterise sociocultural beliefs about languages and their speakers. Kroskrity (2009) argues that in contrast to beliefs and attitudes, language ideologies are rooted in the social practices. Language ideologies are commonly understood in sociolinguistics as the discursive process through which legitimacy and power are attributed to certain linguistics forms and practices are commonly understood in the field of critical sociolinguistics as dealing with language ideologies (Schieffelin et al. 1998; Blommaert 1999; Kroskrity 2000, 2009). Kroskrity (2000) proposes a theoretical notion of language ideologies in which in forming beliefs, proclamations and evaluations of linguistic forms and discursive practices, social actors’ simultaneously problematise their consciousness to their language and discourse as well as their positionality in political economic systems. Blommaert defines language ideologies as “socially motivated ideas, perceptions and expectations of a language, manifested in all sorts of language use and in themselves objects of discursive elaboration (ibid.). His definition did well to emphasise that they are “objects of discursive elaboration” because discourse is central to the process that produce social categories, relations and forms of organisation – all of which involves the negotiation of difference resources in social interaction (Gee 1996). According to Heller and Martin-Jones (2001:2-3):

By exercising control over the value of linguistic resources […] groups simultaneously regulate access to other resources (such as knowledge, friendship, or material goods) and legitimate the social order that permits them to do so by masking (that is naturalizing) their ability to do so. Debates over linguistic norms and practices are, in the end, debates over controlling resources.
These discourses or ideas about language are not neutral. They have real consequences for social actors because they help shape the processes of social difference and social inequality. The ideologies used to hold up these debates are often seen as ideas which people happen to have. Without examining the underlying power relations, people seldom question where, when and how the ideas come about. Williams (1983) argues that often these common sense/knowledge have been dehistoricised, and thus, depolitised as they are defined in linear and synchronic terms.

Blommaert (2010) emphasises that in the face of such discursive and ideological “domination”, an ideology or a discourse’s hegemony does not imply total consensus or total homogeneity. On the contrary, ambiguity and contradiction may be key features of every ideology or dominant discourse, and a social actor’s attachment to one over another may be inconsistent and will depend on specific interaction. In order to avoid the potential for overly deterministic results, we need a more socially situated analysis that identifies the actors, discourses, practices and contextual factors involved in specific processes. More importantly, if dominant discourses are constructed by people of power and based on assumptions and expectations (Fairclough 2001), how do social actors form their own perceptions and attitude towards a language? And, how are these language ideologies articulated in interactions as means of legitimising existing social relations and show differences in power and outcomes of power struggles?

1.2.3 Productive tensions between social structures and social agency
In order to comprehend why social actors speak and act the way they do, and not any other way, another theoretical concept we can consider is Bourdieu’s
interpretation of the notion of *habitus*. Bourdieu explains *habitus* as a social actor’s “socially constituted nature” (1994:11). In other words, it is the way of being in the world or social norms (i.e. language use, skills and orientations, dispositions, attitudes, and schemes of perception, etc.). Bourdieu refers to the interrelationship between habitus and specific social contexts that develop into social practices or discourse as “markets”. The market can be seen a system of interrelated positions and is determined by the distribution and evaluation of resources (Bourdieu 1991:27). As the system is associated with negotiation processes such as players (actors) and positions, winning and losing, resources and rules, and challenges and opportunities, the “game” metaphor has been used by Bourdieu (1994) and Heller (2001) among others, to interpret habitus.

Through their participants’ interactional patterns, habitus assisted Roberts and Sarangi (2001) interpret social interactions and some of the ways in which inclusion and exclusion are operated. They observed that in the classroom (or in any social institutions, for that matter), the linguistic capital required to perform well in the “game” corresponds to the habitus of the dominant group who creates and shapes the rules and the markets. When the dominant group’s powerful habitus is reinforced and reproduced, the non-dominant group is subsequently (and constantly) faced with double marginalisation. The consequence is a cycle which the non-dominant group cannot completely break free from as the opportunities to do this may be limited, and the methods may be challenging. Bourdieu (1984:165) explains:

The dominated classes allow [the struggle] to be imposed on them when they accept the stakes offered by the dominant class. It is an integrative struggle and, by virtue of the initial handicaps, a reproductive struggle, since those who enter this chase, in which they are beaten before they start […] implicitly recognize the legitimacy of the goals pursued by those whom they pursue, by the mere fact of taking part.
The reinforcement and reproduction of dominant group’s successes in Roberts and Sarangi’s classroom are naturalised as “intrinsic merit” which discursively masks the sources of symbolic domination/violence (Roberts and Sarangi 2001:176). In this case, habitus can serve as an analytical tool for achieving an understanding in the connectedness between power and social reproduction.

Extending on Bourdieu’s works, Wacquant (2005) comprehensive analysis of this oft-contentious notion defines it as social actors’ tendencies or trained capacities to think, feel, act and speak in certain ways that result from the “sedimentation” of society, or individual and group history. According to Wacquant, actors learn these tendencies from infancy. These dispositions are then used beneath the social actors’ level of consciousness to guide their productive responses to the constraints and opportunities present in different contexts. Insofar, habitus tends to produce and reproduce practices patterned after the social structures that created them. Therefore, it can be seen as a social aptitude that leans towards guiding social actions rather than strictly determining them. For Wacquant, habitus may vary across time, place, and most importantly, across distributions of power. This means, habitus is both “structured” by past social interactions as it influences interactions that are in the present (Wacquant 2005:317).

1.2.4 The possibility of agency

While the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu, Giddens and Barth offer insights into the ways that linguistic interactions sustain our hierarchical and unequal society, these frameworks can be criticised for being over-determining and under-representing individuals’ ability to resist, contest or the modify social structure (see among others Woolard 1985; Bernstein 1990). Concepts such as habitus, symbolic
domination and the reproduction of social inequality can lead to defeatist interpretations which can challenge a critical ontological position which prioritises social action, discourse and social constructivism. Are there possibilities for social change or individual agency in the face of such overpowering structural constraints?

Agency is the capacity or ability to act given existing structural constraints and is dependent upon the resources or facilities that are made or made available to social actors (Giddens 1994). There are four conceivable “agentive” positions that the dominated group can assume in relation to the rules of the “game” (Roberts and Sarangi 2001). One, the dominant group may not acknowledge the “game” and may choose to follow the rules as a way of “bettering” itself. Not acknowledging the game may be seen as “passive or unwitting naturalisation” of the dominant group’s ideologies. Two, the group may keenly acknowledge the “game” and may choose to follow the rules as a way of “bettering” itself. Three, the group may acknowledge the “game” and for a duration of time, may work within it to revise certain rules to better its advantage. The last “agentive” position relates to the dominated group in which this group may resist the dominant ideology by exposing how the rules of the “game” privilege the dominant group. It is important to note that these “agentive” positions are not mutually exclusive to specific groups.

Thus, although social categories and social order serve to maintain the dominant positions of particular groups, the resources and rules themselves are never fixed or definite. In fact, they have the potential to change as they are interactionally constructed. Giddens (1993:104), working within the notions of the centre and the periphery in which social actors negotiate and renegotiate pre-established, prescribed and performed identities, suggests that “the production of interaction has three fundamental elements: its constitution as ‘meaningful’; its
constitution as a moral order; and its constitution as the operation of relations of power”. Accordingly, the production of meaningful interaction involves constant negotiation of differences of meaning, the “norms” of interaction as a moral order are oriented to and interpreted differently by social actors and that these differences are negotiated (ibid).

1.2.5 Reflexivity in agency and social structure framework

Central to Giddens’ sociology is the emphasis on social actors as active agents. He refers this as the reflexivity of self. Reflexivity in the process of individuals reflecting upon, monitoring and modifying their actions on an ongoing basis and includes two other processes, rationalisation and the motivation of agents’ actions. Rationalisation refers to where individuals “routinely and for the most part without fuss, maintain a continuing theoretical understanding of the grounds of their activity” (Giddens 1984:5) whereas motivation is grounded in practical consciousness in which the agents move “along the paths of daily activities, and to the institutions of society, which are such only through their reproduction” (Giddens 1984: 60).

In Giddens’ agency and social structure framework, when once particular sociological conceptions have been formed, they are filtered back to everyday world. This interplay of motives and actions may affect the way social actors think about existing structures and emphasises the concept of “duality of structures” and that they are continually changing and evolving. Heller and Martin-Jones (2001:6) recognise that actors create a discursive space in which they may contest social conditions and that it is possible for them to challenge and resist the existing social structure:

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* Emphasis added.
While there are clearly ways in which no interaction can be said to start from scratch, nonetheless there is always possibility (the extent to which always remains to be empirically established) for challenging and modifying social order.

By focusing entirely on individual agency can also be seen as a strong neoliberal position in which social actors are perceived to be responsible for negotiating their own way through structural constraints successfully with minimal assistance from the State. However, to say that social actors can act/respond in completely free and creative ways, with social positionings, resources and values recreated almost “on the spot” is misleading (Pujolar 2001). Consequently, failure to achieve individual successes could then be constructed as a deficiency in a social actors’ capacity or ability and not the results of unequal power relations in a hierarchical social structure.

1.2.6 Youth identity and agency

In the first half of the twentieth century, studies on youth from the sociological perspective concentrated in the late modern western societies and emerged from the University of Chicago and Birmingham University. The American tradition examined the concepts of subcultures and deviance and its social consequences in youth cultural practices whereas the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Culture (CSCC) in the United Kingdom investigated highly visible working-class youth identities using neo-Marxian perspectives of culture and symbolic analysis by observing youth groups who formed anti-academic identities centred on popular culture like music, fashion and other delinquent activities (cf. Bucholtz 2002; Williams 2007).

These approaches have been criticised on several grounds as mostly
theoretical analyses and that they focused on homogeneous collective identities based on socio-economic structure as a primary means of analysis. Further, the extensive body of work neglected non-Anglo and non-working class youth sub-cultures and similarly, they were produced in isolation from youths’ actual practices. Despite the criticisms, early investigations proposed core concepts for further explorations of co-cultures including style, resistance, space and media, societal reaction and identity and authenticity (see Williams 2007). These concepts established key axes of much of the later works in youth cultural studies however there has been little attention to the ways in which language use becomes involved in the articulation of youth identities.

Globalisation and the ambivalent engagement of youth in local contexts have escalated the study of the group in recent years. In particular, this anthropology is concerned with how identities emerge in new cultural formations that creatively combine elements of global capitalism, transnationalism and local culture, which is characterised by its attention to the agency of young people. It is concerned with documenting not just highly visible youth cultures but the entirety of youth (see Androutsopoulos and Georgapoulou 2003; Coupland 2007).

Further, due to shifts in the disciplines of biological and psychological stages of development and the expansion of world cultures, the notion of youth no longer foregrounds age as a trajectory but as sense of self that is flexible and constantly evolving (Bucholtz 2002). Bucholtz (2002:532) states that “the study of youth emphasises instead of the here and now of young people's experience, the social and cultural practices which shape their world”. The shift from comparing youth between adult and children categories has conceptualised youth as membership in groups and foreground their agency as social actors.
Within the discourse of modernity and globalisation, Wyman (2004) longitudinal study of the Yu’pik community shows the possible effects of youth practice on language issues within their immediate community, which may further impact the future of its speakers. Wyman (2004) argues that unless young Yu’pik people adopted their endangered language as a language of peer culture, the chances of that language surviving into the next generation is small. Skapoulli (2005) argues that due to globally available resources that are actively and creatively appropriated by young people in local contexts, new identity work frameworks should be developed to capture the localisation processes beyond the levels of class, delinquency and co-cultures.

What emerged from these categorisations is that youth practices offer a collective identity, a reference group from which youth develop through membership. Within this membership, young people create meanings and understanding of their reality and develop a stable set of routines and activities that shape life experiences. Williams (2006) argues that the identity discourse itself may be further differentiated into two analytically distinct layers: a social identity and a personal identity. A social identity identifies young people as members of groups whereas personal identity is used to differentiate young people from within the group membership.

There have been a number of ethnographic investigations of youths' identity practices through language variation and change including, among other considerations, racial hierarchy while positioning cultural appropriation (Bucholtz

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Much of the works on group membership reside within the Community of Practice (CoP) framework which recommend that the status of an individual as a youth is based on participation in situated groups emerging from shared interests or activities and is ethnographically extracted (e.g. Barton and Tusting 2005; Davies 2005; Androulidakis and Georgakopoulou 2003; Eckert 1989, 2000, 2008; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1995; Eckert and Wenger 2005; Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999).
localised group practices and meanings relationships within the educational systems and labour market (Eckert 1989, 2000), belief systems and social assessments (Wyman 2004), and experiences of young people at the periphery of western cultures (Skapoulli 2005). These studies not only enhance our understanding of how young people use their linguistic repertoire in constructing and negotiating various facets of their identities, they provide the impetus for more sociolinguistic research on young people’s agency in localised ethnographic environments.

For example, Doran’s (2004) investigation explores aspects of multiple identities through the notion of hybridity as the “third space”. This concept is developed in recognition that identities are susceptible to fashion and individuals and institutions reform accordingly to identity options that are dominant at that particular time. To enable the emergence of new and alternative identity options, identities go through fragmentation, de-centralisation, multiplication and shifts (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2003). Doran’s Parisian youths’ use of the sociolect, Verlan, allows them to construct an alternate “sociocultural universe” where they can “occupy complex, hybrid identity positions” (2003:120). These youths negotiate distinct identities from those imposed on them by the hegemonic and assimilationist discourses of the mainstream French society.

Motivated by the lack of research on Daoism in Singapore, Chew (2009) interviewed nineteen active Hokkien-speaking Daoist youths in her ethnography. In her study, Chew acknowledges her participants’ agency by recognising youth as a category that is characterised by cognitive and social changes. Chew (2009:16) explains the correlation between the promotion of English as the principal language of instruction and the decline of Hokkien use to the declining practice of and
membership in Daoism:

The switch away from Daoist/Buddhist faiths is because of youths’ disenchantment with the practice of seemingly “senseless” and “endless” ritual/rites and their inability to operate in the youths’ preferred language choice, which is often English or Mandarin.

The contentious relationship between Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) and Chinese dialects in Singapore and the recent emergence of China as an economic power, made the Daoist youths see the pragmatic value in learning Mandarin. Conversely, they articulated that the treatment of Putonghua in Singapore’s linguistic landscape is disadvantageous toward the maintenance of their south-eastern Chinese identity and culture, specifically when the language is “not a culture bearer where the majority of Chinese Singaporeans are concerned” (Chew 2009:14). Chew’s study shows how local social meanings come to be embedded in language by providing explanations for broad patterns found in her informants’ experiences, understanding and linguistic development as they engage in life as young male members of the Hokkien-speaking Daoist community.

However, ethnographically-driven investigations like Chew’s that create correlations between local practices and memberships in extra-local and broad categories are currently underrepresented in the study of young people in Singapore, how they employ linguistic practices to construct their identity through day-to-day experiences which are articulated through their participation in activities. As in any given society, multiple youth identities develop in parallel and interact with each other to produce diverse experiences for these young people to negotiate and navigate among themselves (Eckert and Wenger 2005).
1.2.7 Linguistic Other-ness Among Youths

The works of Hewitt (1986) and Rampton (1995) on crossing demonstrate powerfully the effects of language ideologies in the construction of linguistic otherness that motivates such acts of identity appropriation, creation and hybridisation (e.g. Rampton 1995, 1998, 2005, 2006; see also Coupland 2001a, 2001b, 2007, 2010). Fought (2008) notes that there seems to be a high frequency and focus on crossing involving youths from dominant Anglo ethnic groups into minority ethnic groups. However, the concept of crossing itself, where members of certain groups use forms of speech from other groups, is not peculiar to these youths. The framework can be applied to any multicultural and multilingual community as it explores “the intricate ways in which people use language to index social group affiliations in situations where the acceptability and legitimacy of their doing is open to question, incontrovertibly guaranteed neither by ties of inheritance, ingroup socialisation, nor by any other language ideology” (Rampton 1999:422).

However, there are debates on what constitutes crossing. As Rampton (1995:278) explains, crossing is “a disjunction between speaker and code that cannot readily accommodate as a normal part of ordinary social reality”. For discussions in this research, I will use the definition that involves interactions when social actors consciously and deliberately choose a code that is not their default within the local context.

The concept of styling (e.g. Bucholtz 2002; Cutler 1999, among others) has emerged to include clear instances of crossing and at the same time linguistic occurrences that may look similar to crossing but are not (Rampton 1999). Contemporary sociolinguistics have extended this understanding of crossing to include, more broadly, a repertoire of linguistic forms that are associated to or used
to mark particular identities (Eckert 2000; Shilling-Estes 2004). It is explained in the 
“ways in which people use language and dialect in discursive practice to appropriate, 
explore, reproduce or challenge influential images and stereotypes of groups they 
don’t themselves (straightforwardly) belong to” (Rampton 1999:421). Central to 
styling is the choice in selecting linguistic features from all the possibilities in a 
language. Selecting a linguistic feature for a desired effect can only be understood 
intuitively, thus the notion of styling could be used to explain the effects used in the 
discursive construction of identity in my key informants’ interactions.

What is important in this dissertation is to also explore the symbolic meanings 
of language use and the significance of border crossing/styling. This is relevant in 
order to understand how such performances of crossing/styling may signal not only 
social motivations but discursive possibilities of resistance, subversions etc. Fought 
(2008) notes that in most cases of crossing, the social motivation in crossing does 
not include trying to pass as members of the other ethnic group. Thus, crossing can 
be executed by anyone who has access to the ‘other’ code. Crossing also does not 
require validation from the other and that the social actor who crosses may even be 
openly criticised by the group that they are crossing into.

On the other hand, passing requires validation from the ‘other’ and “the ability 
to pass (ethnically) is often affected by factors such as skin tone that do not play the 
same role in crossing” (Fought 2008:211). According to Bucholtz the use of a 
particular language or variety of that language is crucial to construct aspects of an 
ethnic identity. In post-apartheid South Africa, a person of ‘coloured’ descent could 
pass as a ‘white’ by speaking in English as Afrikaners were less able to detect reliably 
the ancestry by accent in English compared to if the ‘coloured’ had spoken in 
Afrikaan (McCormick 2002). Bucholtz argues that the social motivations for and the
meanings of linguistic passing are more complex than has been assumed as it involves “the ability to be taken for a member of a social category other than one’s own” (1995:351) and “the active construction of how the self is perceived when one’s ethnicity is ambiguous to others” (ibid.:352). Although the ‘coloured’ community viewed negatively the reclassification of their identity as ‘white’, to linguistically ‘pass’ by using English can be used against discriminatory practices by white Afrikaners. This exemplifies the coalescence of the two functions of passing, that the shift in identity could be temporary and it is not necessarily to reject the speaker’s ‘real’ identity (Fought 2008).

As mentioned earlier, in multilingual societies like Singapore, switching between one language to another (e.g. mother tongue to English) is commonplace and is essentially the unmarked choice in intra-ethnic communication (Ho and Alsagoff 1998; Ho 2006; Alsagoff 2005) and usually found in the speech of young people (e.g. Singlish). Codeswitching, whether between the standard English variety, Singlish or mother tongues, are related to notions of modernity, prestige, solidarity, belonging, legitimacy, conflict etc. is loaded with symbolic meanings (see Myers-Scotton). By engaging dialogically with the cluster of concepts such as crossing, styling, passing and codeswitching which may demonstrate the complex relationship between language and social meanings such as ideologies about identity, authenticity, legitimacy and ethnic stereotypes. The combination of symbolic and sociolinguistic orientations creates a powerful instrument to explore sites of identity beyond language use, as I will discuss in the analysis chapters.
1.3 Power and linguistic difference

The dominant discourses (e.g. national identity project, multiculturalism, education, media etc.) in Singapore is controlled by the State and works to maintain relations of power within the society and that is being exercised by consent – what Gramsci called “ideological hegemony”. The power imbalance presented in the State’s language ideology and the practice of linguistic instrumentalism has moved away from political to economic considerations and has resulted in social difference and inequality among Singaporeans.

Central to the discussions on language ideology in this chapter is the State-prescribed multiculturalism based on a one-culture-one-language ideology in which each ethnic group has a distinct culture reinforced by and intimately connected to a mother tongue. There are two guiding principles behind this ideology that is fundamentally based on linguistic difference.

1.3.1 Guiding Principle One: Ethnolinguistic Categorisation

One principle guiding the one-culture-one-language ideology assigns mother tongues (e.g. Mandarin, Bahasa Melayu and Tamil) to Singaporeans that inherently ascribe (and embody) their ethnically defined identities. According to Irvine and Gal (2000:35), “the significance of linguistic differentiation is embedded in the politics of a region and its observers”.

To illustrate the marking of worldviews contextualised within the interrelatedness of language use and socio-historical settings which informs the social actors’ hierarchical positioning of values, perceptions and preferences, Irvine and Gal draw on the notion of voices (Bakthin 1986). Irvine and Gal (2000) discuss three semiotic processes of iconisation (i.e. semiotic process of essentialism informed by
particular linguistic features of the speaker), \textit{fractal recursivity} (i.e. the differences which are made to be iconic, are used in the creation of an \textit{other}) and \textit{erasure} (i.e. distinctions are created and maintained and \textit{other} identities are disregarded or ignored). Irvine and Gal (2000) recommend that when exploring ideologies of linguistic difference, analysis should not only be concerned with the structure of the ideologies. The consequence in executing these ideologies and how the informants explore ideologies concerning boundaries and differences that may contribute to language use should be important considerations.

Iconisation, if seen from the State’s conception of language and culture that is bounded as essentialised units which has condensed language and dialect diversity and placed the burden of language as core to one’s identity. Similar to the semiotic process of iconisation by which people construct ideological representations of linguistic difference, the standardisation of mother tongues and ethnic categorisations assume that groups have stable identities that do not change over time and contexts and, that language-culture-identity processes are the same for all the groups (Gopinathan et al. 2004).

Though speaking the mother tongue may be a way of explicitly asserting ethnolinguistic identity, the fluency in the mother tongue can be employed to authenticate and legitimise that identity. Wee (2006:249) argues that “both mother tongue and English are not merely contingent features of particular ethnic identities but are instead treated as inalienable and essential”. This explanation can similarly be used in ways to exclude those who do not speak or are not proficient in it. This dichotomising process illustrates recursivity which involves a situation whereby within a given group, the same principle that differentiate a group from the rest can further be employed to create a subgroup(s).
Erasure is “the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some individual, activities or social phenomena invisible (Irvine and Gal 2000:38). Here, distinctions are created and maintained and ‘other’ identities are disregarded or ignored. In addition to erasing internal ethnic variations, the State’s ideological framework reifies the distinctiveness, origin, cultural traditions between these ethnic groups and rejects identities that may be multiple or overlapping (Anderson 1983; Brown 1989, 1994).

The State’s one-culture-one-language ideology also affects issues of who can claim ownership of that language (i.e. the ascribed mother tongue and/or English) and that groups of speakers may have more symbolic capital than others (Bourdieu 1991). Given the State’s problematic reductionist and restrictive ethnolinguistic categorisation and ideological construction of linguistic difference, Purushotam (1997) argues that it is almost impossible for the Indian community in Singapore to think in terms of a singular elite culture due to their more heterogeneous language profile.

1.3.2 Guiding Principle Two: Bilingualism

The other principle is the promotion of bilingualism in which English has been selected as a lingua franca as it serves as a neutral language for inter-ethnic interactions, supports meritocracy and orients young Singaporeans to a Western perspective on the world (see Wierzbicka 2006, 2010). Ideally, by speaking English and the ascribed mother tongue languages proficiently, young Singaporeans can construct multiple identities within their local community and present themselves as part of an English-speaking culture. Here, Said (2004) argues that we need to distinguish between ‘living in’ and ‘knowing’ a language. He argues that the idea of the
possibility to achieve equal proficiency in two languages from two different worlds and two linguistic families may be challenging. Further, Said’s argument recognises the role of languages as boundary markers as it questions the ways in which each language may create barriers against the other, specifically as the speaker moves or transitions from one identity to another.

Chua argues that the neutrality of English is an “ideological illusion” (2003:71) and not “class neutral” (2003:73) as it was a common language of a privileged few during colonisation and thus undermines the State’s claim of meritocracy. Chua explains that children with tertiary-educated and upper-middle class English-speaking parents have an advantage over children from non-English speaking families in the use of English as the primary language of instruction. Bourdieu argues that children who are socio-economically advantaged receive both more of and the right kind of cultural capital for school success. Through familial socialisation, these children’s habitus become their cultural capital. Here, the notion of cultural capital may be used to describe the disadvantaged position of the linguistic (and ethnic) minority groups. At the same time, the notion problematises that the State-managed education system is built on meritocracy and equal opportunity.

Also, the so-called English neutrality is problematic and there is a need to closely analyse if, and how, it can be a broker language in Singapore and the consequences it can have for cultural identity, especially from English-dominant speaking Singaporeans and their use of mother tongues.

1.3.3 Interaction between national identity, language ideology and language policy

In the pioneering studies of the 70s and 80s, variations in English were as much as a feature of a speaker-hearer’s linguistic repertoire as the rules that govern their
linguistic competence. These variations were tied to speaker-identity based on educational level – those with minimal schooling used the basilect, the mesolect was spoken by those who had successfully completed a secondary-school education, and those with a tertiary education were assumed to be the acrolect-speakers (Tongue 1974; Platt and Webber 1980). Tongue (1979) further categorises speakers into specific job scopes. The mechanical application of the Labovian paradigm that links linguistic variants to social variables has overlooked crucial aspects which concerns appropriate contextualisation when transferring Western concepts to a non-Anglo society.

The correlation-variationist approach has failed to recognise (or accommodate) the immensely political nature of language as a social phenomenon (Joseph 2006) in Singapore post-1965. The conditions surrounding the creation of a nation-state after independence may have contributed to the depoliticisation (or apoliticisation) of language in sociolinguistic discussions. That is, the politics in and about language belongs to politics (i.e. language planning and policies) rather than linguistics or any of its related disciplines.

On the other hand, the exclusion of the political from the social in the early studies may have focused on a linguistic market that was dominated by educational and employment imperatives of the State. Thus, in the sanitised linguistic market, complex and contextual questions about identity, linguistic behaviour and variation may have been downplayed. For example, the studies have not acknowledged

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6 Early studies that investigated the features of the Southeast Asian English variety in Singapore classified it as diverging from the standard (Tongue 1979; Platt and Webber 1980) or wrong (Crewe 1977). Tongue (1979:8) uses descriptors such as standard and sub-standard in a sort of vertical hierarchy and argues for a formal end-of-range English spoken in Singapore as a norm in its own right, and which “may possibly culminate to the establishment of a Singapore Standard English (SSE)”.

7 See Cameron (1990) for a methodological critique of the Labovian model.

8 Although not necessarily following the correlationist-variationist approach, there is an extensive literature that focuses on the ways variations occur in English within the educational and institutional contexts (Alsagoff 2010; Alsagoff and Ho 1998; Wong 2004). These studies provide insights into its structural properties such as grammar and register.
speakers’ ability to switch between different styles of English according to who they are talking to, where they are and what they are talking about. Style, in the traditional Labovian (1972) view, refers to intraspeaker variation of language use.

Drawing on Anderson’s (1983) imagined community that ties the nation to an emotional and institutional being, Castles (2000:133) defines the nation within the context of citizenship as “a group of people who have a feeling of belonging together on the basis of shared language, culture, tradition and history”. Though Castles’ broad definition does not problematise the ways in which the nation and national identity are made salient, he acknowledges the salience of a shared language in constructing a sense of identity in relation to the nation. From the Singapore literature, it seems that English has been pervasive in the discussions surrounding the construction of a national identity. There is no doubt that the correlationist-variationist studies have contributed to the understanding of the nation-state project in Singapore. However, as part of its research objectives, the approach has failed to consider the ideological debates about English (and the ascribed mother tongues) and their roles in signposting the political competition in society over ethnic or national identities. ⁹

Contemporary perspectives on the study of variations in English in Singapore have shifted to focus on its patterns and shifts. This body of work has increasingly been informed by the study of sociology of language and draws on concepts such as culture, capital and identity and orientations (e.g. Chew 2007; Chong 2007; Rubdy 2001, 2007; Wee 2002, 2003, among others) and takes its cue from the literature on language policy and planning. Central to the early literature on language policy and planning is bilingualism and language-in-education issues (see among others, Afendras ⁹

⁹ Subsequent studies on English features apparent in Singapore focused on analysing of vowel patterns (see among others Deterding 2004; Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo 2000) and pronunciation (see among others Brown, Deterding and Low 2000).

The national identity discourse has remained a contentious issue in Singapore’s context in which the importance of the national identity campaign is constantly underlined with language. The role of language in national identity comes in the form of the State’s language and education policies that have been mobilised to facilitate “banal nationalism” (Billig 2010) among Singaporeans. This phenomenon describes routine adherence to systems of the State in the reproduction of national identity and nationalism. Accordingly, this banality has a naturalising effect as it is often unnoticed and left unquestioned. Arguing the salience of language in the construction of banality, Billig (2010:30) states:

The concept of ‘a language’ – at least in the sense which appears so banally obvious to ‘us’ – may itself be an invented permanency, developed during the age of nation state. If this is the case, then language does not create nationalism, so much as nationalism creates language.

Discussions of banal nationalism among Singaporeans could closely be tied to the State’s language policy anchor around the ideology of pragmatic multilingualism where the considerable language and dialect complexities are reduced to a one
national language and four official languages formula. Accordingly, this *pragmatism* espoused by the State aims to ensure continuous economic progress through the commitment to the rationality of accomplishing practical results (Chua 1995). Common in literature is that language learning issues have tended to focus on skills and acquisition rather than on the mother tongue being taught with the explicit intention of providing learners with the appreciation and knowledge of cultures, competency in inter-cultural interactions and competencies in negotiating cultural borders. However, the learning of mother tongues in schools has not achieved the State’s desired outcomes, that is, by being able to read, write and speak in one’s mother tongue, the language can similarly act as a cultural repository and contribute to the creation of cultural elite.

Central to discourses of national identity and language in Singapore is the focus on the possibility that the colloquial Singlish may have provided Singaporeans with a social identity (Ho 2006; Lee-Wong 2001). Singlish is characterised, among others features, by borrowings from mother tongues, strong codeswitching, slang, the use of local particles and the reduction of consonant sounds (Brown et al. 2000; Deterding 2004, 2007). Singlish is used in limited to specific domains such as the marketplace and for affective interactions, and is associated with the “bilingual speaker’s culture” in the local context and as “a language to signal cultural identity” (Lee-Wong 2001:44).

Singlish could be a conscious effort extended to show solidarity, comradeship and intimacy despite the speakers being from different ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. The consensus in literature indicates that for some young Singaporeans, they are more positive in their attitudes towards Singlish and it has become a style of speaking. While Singlish may be seen as encapsulating a people's
social identity as an unmarked lingua franca for wider intra-group communication, and as a unifying force across ethnic and socio-economic boundaries, there is no real consensus about its merits as a marker of national identity (Ho 2006; Lee-Wong 2001; Wee 2002). Conversely, these studies reflect a certain uncertainty among these youths about their cultural identity, who they are and what their place is in the world.

The convergence in contemporary literature on national identity in Singapore has shifted to focus on role of the State in the construction of a nation (e.g. Tamney 1995; Chua and Kuo 1998; Hill and Lian 1995; Hussin 2004; Velayutham 2007; Ortmann 2009) and through the management of ethnicities (e.g. Clammer 1990, 1998; Vasil 1995, among others) leans toward the consensus that Singaporeans lack a clear national identity. Ho (2006:23) describes the situation as an “identity influx” in which Singaporeans find it challenging to identify themselves with the West despite English being the State’s official and working language and that they are also already far removed from their Asian identity. More significantly, the discussion has revealed instances in which discourses relating to language policy and planning (e.g. management of education and ethnolinguistic groups) have become the instrument and the object of power (Ball and Goodson 2007:177). Consequently, these discourses work to maintain relations of power throughout the society as a whole.

The next section continues to focus on boundary marking through social practices. This phenomenon underscores much of the theorisation of identity and ethnic identity. Section 1.3.4 explores the close interaction between ethnic boundary marking and class dynamics produced by unequally distributed resources.
1.3.4 Structural marginalisation on language and ethnic identity

Questions of class that emerged in the analysis warrant an overview of this notion before moving to the wider implications of structural marginalisation on language and ethnic identity. Class is built around boundaries that are defined by social actors in positions of power to establish differences, which are advantageous to them. Subsequently, these social boundaries create an ideological hierarchy based on social categories such as language, identity, class, gender, sexuality, race, religion, etc. This ideological hierarchy enables the social categories of those in positions of power to become the norm.

From the Marxist (1906) perspective, a class is a dynamic and relational construct that does not exist in isolation from other classes. At the core of the traditional Marxist approach to class is the notion of the function of ethnicity for capitalism. In Marxist’s class, the working class status can conveniently be associated with ethnic differences because of the congruence between ethnicity and class, for example as in the case of imported immigrant labour that occupy low-paid positions in society. Class inequality emerges from the unequal relations of production in which those who control the means of producing goods are considered part of the upper (ruling) classes. Consequently, one of the characteristics of the lower (working) class is exemplified by the lack of control in producing goods. Intergroup tensions between the immigrant working class groups and established working class groups may result to economic dissatisfaction over access to job opportunities when the former are more likely to work under any conditions. Here, the different ethnic groups are constructed as class rivals and is central to maintaining segregations in the working-class.
According to McAll (1992:74) class dynamics based on ethnicity “displace working class hostility from its natural enemy – the owners of the means of production – onto those who are seen to be class rivals” thus, making it challenging for the working class to be unified and to contest for access to resources and social inclusion. Ethnic identity is thus functional for capital, specifically for those in positions of power such that it can be used for other social differences like language, race, gender or religion, to maintain a divided society.

Marx’s class construct is expanded by Weber (1978) beyond the relationship of production to include social class and status. These concepts account for symbolic positionings that also need to be considered when deconstructing negatively and positively privileged social statuses (McAll 1992). Similarly for Bourdieu (1977), the question of class inequality can be explained by considering both economic and symbolic practices. Bourdieu’s notions of capital and class habitus attempt to understand the reproduction of class dynamics. Capital is the amount of material, cultural and symbolic resources a social actor possesses and emphasises on conflicts and power. Here, power relates to social relations that may elevate social actors’ ability to advance their interest/position. Bourdieu suggests that social actors reproduce particular structural tendencies that result in the perception of self and their position in the social order as natural and inevitable.

Bourdieu relates this status quo as a consequence of the early process of socialisation, which includes experiences related to growing up in the family and the surrounding social background. For example, according to Bourdieu, because of their lack of social or cultural capital, social actors in a working-class habitus believe that they are not able to partake in work that require intellect/intelligence such as politics or education. Therefore, groups in that are characteristically in the working-class
habitual and/or in the periphery of society are excluded from the act of governing. More importantly, those in this group believe that they are not in a position of power due to some natural inability rather than structural marginalisation. Such structural marginalisation can be concealed and revealed by establishing difference along ethnic lines.

Like class and identity, ethnicity is a boundary marking social process of interaction between groups over unequally distributed resources (Barth 1969). There is the tendency in established class society that classes use ethnicity to mark the specific spaces they occupy and to protect the benefits and privileges of limited group membership which is exemplified by excluding non-members (Weber 1978). Subsequent generations vis-à-vis youths that are brought up in a class-divided society may experience the process of ethnic marking differently from their parents. The marking may be reinforced when it is a closed-class environment (ibid.).

Works by Marx/Hegel and Weber inform many of the critical concepts that support my analysis, including the theories of social structuration (Giddens 1984), capital economics of linguistic exchanges (Bourdieu 1977). Admittedly, due to its extensive scope, the discussion on the construction of class in this literature is insufficient. What I have attempted to present is that in the theoretical construction of class, ethnicity and social inequality, a social actor’s ethnicity is dependent on their position in the social structure and is an essential part of their class that both marks and masks it.

1.3.5 Power, positioning and the discourses of ethnic minority identity

In examining the interaction between language ideology and official language policy, Wee (2006) found that certain beliefs, rationalisations and conceptions of language
use have been instantiated, mediated and altered by a range of official practices. Wee (2006:344) outlines the ways in which language ideologies are “created, sustained and…ultimately abandoned in favour of alternative ideologies”. In the official discussions of Mandarin Chinese and Chinese dialects and their value in Singapore, Wee (2006:352) argues that the State’s discourse on the language has construed it as “a resource for economic advancement” and has created the process of “linguistic instrumentalism” alongside the other mother tongues.

A related ideology in the discourse on Mandarin Chinese and in relation to the way bilingualism and multilingualism issues are addressed by the State in official commentaries is that language can be treated as “bounded and countable identities that can be stored into a human being, in and through the process of language acquisition” (Tan 2012:346). The then Prime Minister Lee in a 1978 speech illustrates the State’s ‘container’ metaphor:

Let me assure all parents: your child has a bigger brain than the biggest computer man has ever built. While the world’s biggest computer cannot handle two languages, most human beings can, especially if they are taught when young […] the fact is your child has a brain which can use two languages, whilst the computer as yet cannot (in Wee 2006: 354).

Within the national discourse, the State’s elevation of the status of Mandarin Chinese against other dialects and affirmation that a high proficiency is necessary to correspond to the rise of the Chinese economy has systematically ranked the language based on utilitarian criteria (Tan 2012). Further, linguistic instrumentalism has endowed Mandarin, which is one of the four official languages, with economic advantage (Wee 2006). Thus, its perceived economic value have privileged Mandarin Chinese speakers in Singapore. It would be relevant to explore the discourses of
minority identity such as the Malay/Muslim which has been disenfranchised due to the Mandarin bias and language ideology. And, identify the effect of the constraints on access to symbolic and material resources for Malay/Muslims to occupy different social positions (Fairclough 2002, 2006).

In the context of modernity and globalisation, the “commodification of language” is highly visible in Singapore as language gradually becomes “amenable to redefinition as measurable skill, as opposed to a talent, or an alienable characteristic of group members” (Heller 2003:464). An understanding of power embedded in the negotiation of identity is relevant in a multilingual context such as Singapore primarily because of the power imbalance presented by the State’s language ideology and linguistic instrumentalism. In particular, when the distribution of linguistic resources has real consequences because it is related to the distribution of material resource.

In discussing the available resources to social actors in multiethnic communities like Singapore, we must remember that not all uses of language indicate choices to mark a particular ethnic identity. A particular code selected may have high symbolic value for an ethnic group or conveniently selected for its communicative value. Indeed, these processes are context-dependent (Fought 2008).

In relation to agency and the State- and self-imposed language boundaries, it should be acknowledged that while certain aspects of identity may be negotiable in given contexts, others may be less so. In particular, the State’s ideological framework of one-culture-one-language that links identity and language in tight interdependent formulation limits the range of identity options that social actors can exercise. For example, actors may be positioned by dominant groups in ways they did not choose (Bamberg 1997; Davies and Harré 1990).
Identities that are available to be claimed can also be constrained by the dominant discourses in society and their language resources (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). Given that the Malay/Muslim identity is negotiated in relation to dominant discourses of marginalisation, the conflation of their ethnic and religious identities and language inequality raise the question if those in the community have complete freedom or control over their linguistic choices. This raises a number of questions. Do they contest or preserve these State- and self-imposed linguistic boundaries? What role, if any, does agency play in their identity construction? Is agency a conscious or an unconscious act?

From the perspective of positioning theory developed by Davies and Harré (1990) in which positioning “allows us to bring together views of identities located in discourses” (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004:19), social actors or groups may seek to challenge, resist or adapt in order to allow for greater or alternative identity options. These identity options are negotiated in interaction though the social actors’ linguistic repertoires and facilitated the understanding of the ways they actively and agentively position themselves in interactions (Bamberg 2004). Alternatively, social actors may also accept ascribed identity categories.

In this research, positioning privileges the analysis of identity constructions as two-fold. First, is the possibility of analysing the way my informants’ referential world is constructed with characters emerging in time and space as protagonist or antagonists. Second, positioning affords the possibility of analysing how the referential past is made relevant to the present, thus providing an understanding how social actors index their sense of self in the here and now (Bamberg et al. 2007).
1.4 Closing remarks

Chapter One has explored the theoretical framework that informs this study by showing the dialectal interrelatedness between the concepts of discourse, power, language and identity. My critical sociolinguistic ethnographic approach (Heller 2002) negotiates between two perspectives, the essentialist and the poststructuralist (and postmodernist). Some readers may criticise my position as a weakness. However, I take the view that considers identity exists in a continuum, with fixity on one spectrum and by variability on the other. Taking a middle course further allows for the understanding of discursive deconstruction and reconstruction of identity by social actors who may have multiple and contradictory positionings and accords for how they experience their identity (or aspects of it). From this perspective, someone who is Malay/Muslim does not always have to identify their self as Malay/Muslim; they may appropriate several identities at varied times and in different interactions depending on access (or lack of) to symbolic and material resources. Also, someone may choose to identify as Malay/Muslim but does not speak Bahasa Melayu or know much about the culture.

Due to the social structuration and issues of marginality faced by the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore, I have situated my key informants’ interactions and their sociolinguistic habitus in Bourdieu’s (1977) economic theory of linguistic exchanges that takes power, resources, capital, legitimacy and markets into consideration and adopted a theoretical approach that acknowledges that language and identity are discursive constructs that are socially structured within the boundaries of power relations.

This chapter has also foregrounded the notion of youth as a sense of self and the construction of identity as flexible and constantly evolving. Examining youth as
having greater agency and social power as compared to adults and shifting from age as a trajectory contributes to the current body of work that privileges more localised explorations, particularly when it is evident in the cumulative body of literature on youth, language and identity in Singapore that the Malay/Muslim ethnolinguistic group is underrepresented. And, in line with poststructuralist views of identity, a sustained investigation from a cultural perspective is essential to provide insights into discourses which serve to control not just what, but how identities are constructed and negotiated.

The next chapter situates the key informants’ experiences within the framework of social structuration and sociolinguistic capital dominance. The Malay/Muslim marginality and the State’s privileging certain languages have created a particular kind of habitus. Chapter Two revisits socio-historical events that may provide some understanding of the Malay/Muslim community and my key informants’ identity performance. They include dominant discourses of multiculturalism in Singapore, which work to normalise the segregations between and within the ethnic groups as homogeneous ethnolinguistic markets and privileged capital dominance on particular languages.
CHAPTER TWO

The Malay/Muslims in Singapore

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter provides a critical overview of the Malay/Muslim ethnolinguistic group in Singapore by examining the historical and socio-political forces that have impacted how members of the group perceive themselves and how others perceive them.10 Chapter Two aims to contextualise the deconstruction of dominant discourses of Malay/Muslim-ness and situate the multiple but structured positionings of the Malay/Muslim youth within an ethnolinguistic community that can be understood as a market. To meaningfully understand the socio-political forces at work in the construction and production of structuration in the small but complex island city-state, it would be advantageous to explore the State’s concept of multiculturalism through the national identity project. In the concept reside two problematic elements; the national myth of survivalism and the racial categorisation framework (Chan 2011; Velayutham 2007; Vasil 2000). In critiquing the State’s conceptualisation of a national identity, this chapter specifically focuses on the language policies that informed the State’s ideology.

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10 In this dissertation, the use of the terms ‘Malay’ and ‘Malay/Muslims’ are interchangeable. The Malay/Muslim ascription has been pervasively used in the Singapore discourse.
2.1 **Contextualising the Malay/Muslim Identity**

For historical reasons, the Singapore Malay ethnic group is regarded as the indigenous people of Singapore as they were the dominant numerical community until the mid-1830s. However, a historical reconstruction of this indigenous group is not a straightforward practice as it shares a “‘myth’ of common descent” (Rahim 2001:13) with approximately 300 million indigenous people in the Malay Archipelago, consisting of 243 million Indonesians, 29 million Malaysians and those from Brunei, the Philippines and some southern provinces in Thailand. From a traditional sociolinguistic perspective, the Malays in Singapore could undisputedly be categorised as members of the same community with those who reside in the Archipelago and speak Bahasa Melayu (and its variants). The Malay’s majority status declined after 1830, due to the constant stream of immigrants that took advantage of the trading access created by the British colonials. Based on Table 2.1 below, the term ‘minority’ is an appropriate descriptor for the contemporary Malay/Muslim community.

**Table 2.1:**

Key indicators of resident population by ethnic composition (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malays</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Censuses of Population 1980 - 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore

After Singapore’s independence in 1965, the newly formed State maintained the Malays’ indigenous status and accorded certain privileges to the group. As stipulated

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11 Berita Harian December 30, 2010, p.7 Melestarikan budaya Melayu di sini
in Article 152 of the Singapore Constitution, the State privileges the Malays in Singapore with ‘special position’. The Article states:

(i) it shall be the responsibility of the Government to constantly care for the interests of the religious minorities in Singapore

(ii) the Government shall exercise its function in such a manner as to recognise the special position of the Malays, who are the indigenous people of the island and who are in the most need of assistance and accordingly shall be the responsibility of the Government of Singapore to protect, support, foster, and promote political, educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests and the Malay language.

I must however draw an important distinction in the granting of ‘special position’ to the Malays in Singapore. Unlike the politically-privileged bumiputeras (indigenous Malays) in Malaysia, these privileges were intended to redress the socio-economic situation of the Malays in post-independent Singapore (Chua 2003:63). These privileges include making Bahasa Melayu a national language, free education for Malay/Muslims from primary to tertiary levels, Malay presence in political and parliamentary representation and the administrative attention given to Islam (cf. Chua 2003). In addition, the State acknowledges Islam in ways afforded to no other religion in Singapore. For example, Muslims in Singapore are exempt from critical portions of the law and the community has a representative in Parliament in the form of the Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs. The State’s political recognition of a particular ethnic group legitimised an important aspect of the group. It also emphasises an important and inherent difference among the other ethnic groups in the Singapore nationalistic discourse.
2.1.1 The Ethnicisation of Islam

Due to the strict demarcation between religion and politics by the secular State, Islam has not been institutionalised in the Singapore Constitution as the basis of Malay identity to the same degree as in neighbouring Malaysia. Unlike Malaysia, the religious dimension has been excluded in defining a ‘Malay’ person. Paradoxically, it is important to highlight that in the Singapore’s dominant discourse, it is presumed that ethnicity and religion are synonymous in the Malay community. This perceived homogeneity is reinforced by the fact that around 98.7 per cent Malays are professed Muslims.\textsuperscript{12}

Based on the 2010 Census of Population, the Muslim population totals 14.7 per cent and places it as the third largest in Singapore’s demography based on religion.\textsuperscript{13} The Census indicates stability among the Malays in their religious affiliation when compared to other ethnic communities and that they have remained homogeneously Muslim across three decades with insignificant shifts observed in conversions to other faiths.\textsuperscript{14}

The Singapore Malays are predominantly from the Sunni Islam of the Shafi’i school such that the values of Islam, doctrines and practices are deeply embedded in the Malay ethnic culture (Li 1990). Among all the ethnic communities in Singapore, Islam is most closely identified with the Malay community (Alatas et al. 2003; Kadir 2004) and this affiliation has been a constant in dominant discourse and informs how the Singapore society perceives, understands and positions the community. In many instances, the terms ‘Malay’ and ‘Muslim’ can be used interchangeably. Often, Islam

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[12] See Table 2(a) in the Tables section.
\item[14] The percentage of Malays who are identified as Muslims was at a constant high at 99.6 per cent from 1980-2000. It was only observed in the Census of Population collated in 2010 that statistics showed a shift in the Malays to 98.7 per cent. The Malay/Muslim community agonises over the 1.2 per cent of those in their community who are non-Muslims. See Table 2(b) in the Tables section.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
has been used by the State as an explanation for issues concerning the Malays (Rahim 2001, 2009b; Tan 2008). It can be further interpreted that for the Malay/Muslims, the religious and ethnic affiliation is not primarily a statistical correlation, Islam can possibly be the Malay/Muslims’ habitus – their way of being (i.e. language use, skills and orientations, dispositions, attitudes, and schemes of perception, among others).

One explanation for the ethnicisation of Islam is the fundamental difference between the Malays and the other ethnic groups. By default, the Malays are born Muslims as they adopt the religion of their ancestors who were generally Muslims (Hussin 2005). While the Chinese and Indians can profess atheism, agnosticism, subscription to mainstream religions or worshipping of deities, Islam is indistinguishable from the Malays.

A more grounded historical explanation for the State’s conflation of ethnicity and religion perhaps lies in Singapore’s historical connection to pre-independent Malaysia. It relates to the colonial government’s recognition of the Malay sultans as the guardians of the Islamic faith when Singapore became one of Her Majesty’s colonies in 1819 (Tan 2008), and the signing of the Federation of Malaya Agreement in 1948 that formally recognised Islam as an essential component of Malay-ness (Rahim 2001). The Agreement considered Malays in Malaya and pre-independent Singapore as “one who is Muslim, speaks Malay, and observes the traditions of Malay culture” (Rahim 2001:17). The Malay/Muslim identity conflation may also be the residual adherence to Article 160 of the Constitution of Malaysia. This Article took effect in 1957 after Malaysia’s independence and defines a Malay person as one who professes to be a Muslim, habitually speaks the Malay language, adheres to Malay customs, and is domiciled in Malaysia or Singapore. However, this Article has not officially applied to the Malays in Singapore since 1965.
My experiences in the field revealed the pervasiveness of the State’s management of Islam and how this may affect the key informants’ negotiation of their Malay/Muslim-ness within the broader Singaporean society. In this sense, the collective ethno-religious identity ascription in dominant discourses embedded within the Singaporean society and in the psyche of Malay/Muslims has indeed resulted in a ‘natural’ or essentialist category of identification that can be characterised by its fixity and continuity over time. In an ideological driven discourse, this essentialist construct points to an identity that is constrained by social structures and that may neutralise and minimise the possibility of agency in shaping and reshaping the identity. Though this seems to be an exaggerated view of identity in particular to the concept of identity linked, I argue that the Malay/Muslim identification is unchallenged in nationalistic discourse.

2.1.2 The Malay/Muslim

Within the national discourse, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong positioned the Malay/Muslims in Singapore as distinct from others in the region who share similar aspects of cultural tradition, historical association to the region, religion and linguistic affinity. The State consistently plays the comparison card by highlighting its economic competitiveness and successes and the material, social and educational well-being of the Malays in Singapore in comparison to Malay communities in the region. These boundaries emphasise the shared experiences among Singapore Malays and the success of the State’s multiculturalism, Lee (2010) states that “you have retained your roots, culture and religion, but with uniquely Singaporean open and forward looking outlook”.15

15 Source: Prime Minister’s Office, Singapore.
Aljunied (2010:307) argues that the State created its own definition of the Malay/Muslim identity through the use of political rhetoric and media representations. This definition is based on two factors, one is “the emergence of a network society that was shaped by global and regional developments and the rise of Malay ethnic resurgence on the island as a reaction to state policies and the perceived threat of modernization and deculturation”. The other is a political rhetoric which is marked with boundaries the State employs to distinguish between Malays in Singapore and those from Malaysia.

Nonetheless, the dominant discourse in contemporary Singapore is that the Malay/Muslims are seen as a community that remains at the periphery of socio-economic achievements such as education, employment and housing when compared to the Chinese and Indian ethnic communities (Suratman 2004; Singh 2010). The community’s social structuration has become part of the cultural fabric of Malay/Muslims and has “real practical effects as they are incorporated into the daily lives of ordinary Singaporeans and into national political processes” (Li 1990:167). Suratman (2004) argues the Malay/Muslim marginalised representations in the media have been continuously and currently reproduced since the 1960s, despite the community’s progress as reflected in socio-economic and education indicators. Thus, prior to unravelling the Malay/Muslim structuration in Singapore, it is important to situate the construction of ethnolinguistic community within the broader context of the State’s multiculturalist discourse.

16 A complete historical account of the socio-political situation in Singapore’s Malay/Muslim community is beyond the scope of this dissertation. See Rahim (2001) for a comprehensive analysis of the ethnolinguistic community’s marginality.
2.2 The State’s investment in multiculturalism

In the early 1980s, the ideology of the national identity project articulated the State’s intent to counter the negative impact of globalisation such as westernisation and individualism and was therefore fashioned after Asian values and cultural traditions. One of the fundamental principles in fostering a Singaporean identity is the emphasis on multiculturalism through the Chinese, Malay, Indian and the residual ‘others’ (CMIO) racial framework. In Singapore, the terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ are used interchangeably and synonymously in everyday language, though the former is the de jure in dominant discourses. The bureaucratisation of race as the structuring principle and accepted reality in Singapore is a legacy inherited from the British colonials. Literature shows the many hegemonic aspects of colonial administration have been inherited by the postcolonial nation state.

The (mis)conceptualisation of race in Singapore is so entrenched in the society that it has been institutionalised and reengineered by the State as a model of multiculturalism. The racial framework is essentially a rigid administrative management of diversity in the population with the objectives to supposedly accommodate and assure equality and rights for minorities. Understandably, the CMIO framework came about due to and as a preventative measure to the threats of ethnic and religious tensions. This framework was fostered through every conceivable means such as in all forms of official cultural representations, celebrations, schools, the media, national holidays and tourism (Velayutham 2007:30). Under the CMIO framework (Chua 2003:3) notes:

[…] every Singaporean is officially racially typed at birth. A child is automatically assigned the father’s ‘race’ and all possible ambiguities of racial identities are summarily dismissed. The State thus insists that everyone be a hyphenated citizen. Each hyphenated Singaporean is supposedly embedded in his/her race-culture. For
example, if one is Chinese, one is supposed to be a Confucianist; never mind that few, if any, Singapore-born Chinese under 35 or younger have ever read a Confucian text, and that their knowledge of Confucianism is almost non-existent.

In many societies, religion and ethnicity are intrinsically linked and often religion is seen as part of an ethnic identity (Clammer 1998:13). What distinguishes Singapore from these societies is that the ethno-religious relationship has been politicised by the State’s two distinct policies that attempt to control and prevent religions from taking active participation in politics (ibid.). The State has politicised the relationship between ethnicity and religion by managing its function and role, and enshrining it in the Maintenance of Religions Harmony Act (MRHA) as “inculcating moral values congruent with state building (honesty, industry, filial piety, etc.)” (Clammer 1998:13). Despite the comprehensive nature of MRHA, Rahim (2009b:2) observes that the State has not provided a definition of what constitutes religious harmony nor has it clearly defined permissible parameters for religious activities. Other legislative frameworks to pre-empt and forestall extremisms and inter-faith conflicts include the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the Sedition Act. The policy is the State’s rigid culturalising of religion with ethnicity in which being Malay equates to being Muslim (Clammer 1991).

In the multiculturalist policy and as a way to manage intra-ethnic differences, all ethnic groups are spurned to create umbrella organisations (i.e. cultural, educational, entrepreneurship, religious) so as to be able to interact with the State and compete for unequally distributed resources. One of the early organisations that appeared in the Malay/Muslim market is the MENDAKI Foundation. Formed in 1981, the foundation was a self-help ethnic-based organisation, with the support of the State to
enhance the academic performance of Malay students and long term prospects of the Malay as a community (Chua 1998b).

In 1968, the State supported the establishment of Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS or the Singapore Muslim Religious Council) in order to manage the Muslims. As a central body to govern and administer Muslim affairs. MUIS came after the inception of the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) and is the body advises the President of Singapore on matters relating to Islam in Singapore. The influence of the State in Muslim affairs can be seen in the appointment of key office-bearers in MUIS, including the Mufti (Muslim religious leader) (Kadir 2004: 360). MUIS has acted as the body that has standardised and centralised the practice of Islam since 1966, and thus has played an important role in the organisation of Islamic affairs, by providing guidance to the Muslims through its numerous policies. One of these policies is the ‘Ten Desirable Qualities of Ideal Muslims in Singapore’ (MUIS 2006). What the State is promoting through MUIS’s ideal Muslim is a synthesis of Islam and modernity which fits with Singapore’s secular society.

More recently, the State introduced compulsory education for all primary school aged children. This compulsory action impacted the ability of Muslim parents to send their children to madrasah (Islamic religious schools). In state schools, Muslim female students were banned from wearing tudung (headscarves). Suffice to say that these mandates were not well received by the Muslims in Singapore as they were concerned about their religious and community identity vis-à-vis mainstream national identity (Zuber 2010:193) and, the right and ability to maintain consistency in the religious beliefs. Rahim (2009b) argues that the management of Islam has been

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17 As a state-sponsored statutory board, MUIS functions autonomously and reports to the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MYC).
18 See Appendix Two for the list of ten desirable qualities of ideal Muslims.
19 For a comprehensive discussion of how the State promotes the prescribed desired attributes in the curriculum used in the madrasahs (non-secular Muslim religious schools) see Tan (2009).
the consequence of the State’s micro-managing every aspect of nation-building and demonstrating influence over Islamic institutions. This is recently evidenced in the counter-terrorism measures that are handled through community initiatives like the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) and the Asatizah (Teacher of Teachers) Recognition Scheme.

As highlighted in Section 2.1.1, the strong affiliation between Islam and the Malay identity in Singapore means that views towards Malays are indistinguishable from views towards Muslims. For example, Omar (2004) cites the merging of the collection of monies for the Mosque Building and MENDAKI Fund (MBMF) as exemplifying the Islam and ethnic Malay connection. In 1975, the Mosque Building Fund (MBF) was established as a mechanism to gather funds for building mosques in new public housing estates as a result of the initial resettlement of residents. In the MBF scheme, Muslims in the work force contributed a fixed amount deducted from their monthly salaries.20 The State saw the feasibility of integrating the MBF and the funding needs for the newly established ethnic-based academic organisation. At present, the amount deducted from the monthly salaries for MBMF is divided equally for the spiritual and educational pursuits of the Malay/Muslim community. Nevertheless, the State’s Malay/Muslim ascription allows for the exclusion of Muslims who resist the acculturation and assimilation into being culturally Malay, for example the Indian Muslim group and Malays who are non-Muslims (ibid.).21

20 The privileges of the indigenous Malay, as stipulated in the Singapore Constitution (i.e. the ‘special position’) are subsequently transferred to the Muslims. Because of the State’s commitment to build a mosque in every new town, it allocates sites to MUIS (Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura) at usually a much lower market price. Accordingly, non-Muslim religious groups need to tender for a site (Kong and Yeoh 2003).

21 The assumption based on the State’s rigid boundaries in essentialist categorisation of racial identities (and its successful internalisation) has resulted in the ambiguous identity of the sub-ethnic Indian-Muslims (Kahn 1998).
2.2.1 Multiculturalist policy: Homogenising ideology

Unopposed since 1959 when self-government was first achieved, the People’s Action Party (PAP) leadership has been committed to “the establishment of a ‘Singaporean Singapore’ multiracial society where all citizens enjoy equal privileges” (Rahim 2001:54) and the guiding ideology consists of two principles, namely, multiculturalism and meritocracy (Clammer 1990; Rahim 2001; Vasil 2000).

In the absence of any prevailing ideology at the time of exit from the Malaysian Federation in 1965, the State has strived to construct a national identity primarily on economic grounds.\(^2\) And, because of the abrupt expulsion, the Singaporean identity was subjective (or intersubjective) for some Singaporeans. Further, tensions with other newly formed states within the region necessitated the Singapore state to create a founding myth to bring about a cohesive social foundation of an ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse immigrant population with a short historical trajectory (Chan 2011).

Chan (2011:11) illustrates three distinct stages that marked the development of the national identity in Singapore: (1) creating the ‘local’ in order to successfully engage in the ‘global’, (2) protecting the ‘local’ against the global, and (3) embracing the ‘global’ while staying ‘local’. Chan’s stages show that the construction of a national identity has been largely driven by the State through its engagement with challenges posed by global processes and has for some time been a balancing act between the East-West dichotomy. In a sense, the ‘Singaporean’ identity is imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their

\(^2\) In 1959, the British granted Singapore internal self-government and merged the island with the other 13 Malayan states to form the Malaysian Federation in 1963. However, Singapore was ordered out of the Federation due to tensions between the State’s first generation leaders and their Malaysian counterparts that resulted in racial riots between the Chinese and Malays in both countries.
fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1983:15).

According to Heller (2002), the “founding myth” recounts an event in the past that has supposedly epitomised the “essence” or the “destiny” of an important group of people, and an event that still shapes a nation’s collective identity. Amaldas (2009) argues that unlike the processes in the construction of national identity from other colonised counterparts, the Singaporean project was largely driven by the State and not by grassroots movements and the support of the general population. It is clear that Singapore’s national identity project is synonymous with nationalism, and both are aimed at complementing the national objectives of globalising the economy in which the idea of national survival is coherently and closely linked to economic survival (Chong 2010).

The nationalist and multiculturalist policy implies an ideology that every Singaporean belongs to a culturally and spatially unique (i.e. homogeneous) community. And that, each Singaporean should be able to participate equally in a democratic society. However, such an ideology into the Singaporean psyche is wrought by contradictions. First, by homogenising ancestral experiences to create an illusion of equality, the voices of the varied ethnic communities have become unfortunate casualties. In addition to erasing internal variations that existed within the respective ethnic communities and categorising them as fixed races, the framework reifies the distinctiveness, origin, cultural traditions between these ethnic/racial groups and rejects identities that may be multiple or overlapping (Anderson 1983; Brown 1989).

Second, the ideology assumes that the Malays (and other ethnic identities) in Singapore are homogeneous and makes other co-ethnic identities within the
community less visible. Co-ethnic identities that consist of a spectrum of regional dialectal variations such as the Banjarese, Bataks, Boyanese, Bugis, Javanese and Minangs exist within the Malay community. Benjamin (1976:124) argues that “Singapore’s multiculturalism puts Chinese people under pressure to become more Chinese, Indians more Indian and Malays more Malay in their behaviour”. The State’s principle of multiculturalism assumes that each race has a distinct culture reinforced by and intimately connected to its own language. This is one way ethnic communities constitute themselves in which language is presented as the “verbalization of the shared beliefs, fraternal bonds, [and] communal historic ties…of a people” (Gallagher 1968:32).

As an additional measure to manage ethnon linguistic diversity, the State included three mother tongues that act as official mother tongues to major ethnic communities: Mandarin for the Chinese, Malay (also the national language) for the Malays, and Tamil for the Indians. The inclusion of the languages had “a strong rhetorical resonance to the then newly-elected State’s founding myth of multiculturalism whereby cultural and linguistic equity was promised” (Chong 2007:58). It is noteworthy that the ‘Others’ category has not been ascribed to any particular language.

In the discourse of Singapore’s language policy, ‘mother tongue’ is ironically (and conveniently) defined as the ethnic language affiliated to one’s father. Generally

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23 Source: Census of Population 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore
24 The term ‘co-ethnic’ have been used in this dissertation to avoid inferior/subordinate/low worth connotations that may arise from the use of ‘sub-ethnic’ in Singapore’s identity discourse. Others in the population are classified into the following racial categorisations: ‘Chinese’ refer to persons of Chinese origins such as Hokkiens, Teochews, Cantonese, Hakkas, Hockchias, Foochows, Henghuas and Shanghainese among others. ‘Indians’ refer to persons of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan origins such as Tamils, Malayalis, Punjabis, Bengalis, Singhalese. The last racial category, ‘Others’ refer to persons who cannot be categorised under the three main racial categorisations. This group refers to, among others, Eurasians, Parsees and Caucasians.
25 In Singapore, the term ‘multiracialism’ is the equivalent of multiculturalism, a practice that I found difficult to avoid when writing Chapter Four.
(and traditionally) the term is understood to mean the language a person grew up speaking in the home. However, the use of ‘mother tongue’ is ambiguous, especially in the contemporary context. In the current education discourse, it is often used to refer to the language that is learned in school as a second language and not necessarily to the language used at home.

The restrictive formula that prescribes official mother tongues to ethnic communities has considerably condensed the language and dialect complexity and placed the burden on the language as the key constituent of a person’s identity and on the ethnic communities as the guardians and promoters of their language(s). Speaking the ethnic language may be a way of explicitly asserting ethnic identity and the fluency in one’s ethnic language can be employed to construct, authenticate and legitimise the ethnic membership. Conversely, this means that the ethnic language can similarly be used in ways to exclude those who do not speak or are not proficient in it.

Evidently, the State’s language policy has homogenised the diversity of dialectal and regional linguistic identities of co-ethnic communities into singular mother tongues. For example, as highlighted earlier, the Malay/Muslims in Singapore have internal linguistic dialectal-divisions, embracing groups from neighbouring Indonesia and those from Borneo as well as the Peninsula Malay origins. However, the policy officiated Bahasa Melayu as the common language for all of these groups. Similarly, though Mandarin is the official language for the Chinese, the main Chinese languages spoken by older Singaporeans are Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese. In addition to Tamil, other South Asian ethnic languages such as Malayalam, Telegu, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi and Gujarati are used by pockets in society, albeit in decreasing numbers. Wee argues: “both mother tongue and English
are not merely contingent features of particular ethnic identities but are instead treated as inalienable and essential” (2006:249).

Thus, though the State supposedly practices ethnolinguistic heterogeneity, language and ethnicity in Singapore are neatly isolable from other facets of a person’s identity. According to Gal and Irvine (1995:974), “simplifying the field of linguistic practices renders some persons or activities or sociolinguistic phenomena invisible”. Conversely, the standardisation of mother tongues and ethnic categorisations assumes that these groups have stable identities that do not change over time and contexts and, that language-culture-identity processes are the same for all the groups (Gopinathan et al. 2004).

Chua (2003) highlighted the complexity of the rigidly-ascribed mother tongues, assumes that both parents are from the same ethnic community. Chua cited a situation in which disagreements may occur and/or economically determined strategic decisions need to be made if the child has parents from different ethnic communities. Amidst the ambiguity and irony in deriving a working definition of mother tongue in the Singapore’s education system, the State had intended that by learning the mother tongue the child could establish a connection to Asian-ness and values, emphasising the language-culture-identity ideology. Lying at the core of ethnic management, bilingualism in education has been a feature since independence, albeit interpreted differently at different stages of Singapore’s developments. The former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, emphasised the significance of the bilingual policy:

[...] if we abandon our bilingual policy, we must be prepared to pay the grievous price of becoming a people who have lost their cultural self-identity. Once we lose this emotional cultural ballast, we will cease to be a separate and distinct community, with pride in ourselves. Instead we shall become pseudo-Westernised, alienated from our Asian background.
To make English more easily accessible, in 1966 the State introduced a modified concept of bilingualism in its education policy. As a way of unifying and aligning the education system to national objectives, all students had to learn Standard English and a mother tongue (English eventually replaced Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction in schools). In the interest of accuracy, the State’s policy of bilingualism does not translate into academic discussions of a bilingual education where it is traditionally defined as education in two languages, with instruction in both (Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarthy 2009). In Singapore schools, Standard English is the medium of instruction for all subjects and is considered neutral and cultureless whereas the child’s ascribed mother tongue which is learnt as a second language is “a demarcation and embodiment of culture, acting as a cultural ballast and anchor for the Singaporeans” (Rubdy 2001:342) and as a defensive mechanism in “avoiding the excesses of westernisation” (Gopinathan 1994:67).

There are, however, doubts as to whether Singapore schools are producing effective bilingual students who are fluent in both languages. In 2004, Lee Kwan Yew announced in Parliament what seemed to be an acknowledgement of the failure of bilingualism (cited in Chong 2007):

I have reluctantly concluded that very few people can be fluent in two languages...The more you use one language, the less you use the other. So at any one time, you have one language which is dominant.

The distinction and consequence of bestowing English as a language of higher status and the facility that gives learners access to western science, technology, economic mobility and modernity, subsequently, resulted in more Singaporeans using the language in their daily interactions and as a first (or home) language. Though the State’s language and education policies led to an increase in the number of English
language speakers, the manner it is acquired would not necessarily produce speakers who are proficient in standard English (Gupta 1997) as various kinds of English, including the colloquial variety and imperfectly learned English, are used in familial and social contexts simultaneously. Linguistically, Singapore is evidently very unique, for while “it is too small for any real regional variation in English to have emerged” (Deterding 2007:5), there are substantial variations, presumably along the lines of ethnicity. There is also a debate amongst scholars about Singapore English and the colloquial variety Singlish, who question if these variations exist along a continuum (Pakir 1998), or involve distinct switching between two styles according to the situation where the interaction takes place (Low and Brown 2005). Both approaches agree that the English language variation in Singapore is a matter of the speaker’s choice and intent where one’s educational level and socio-economic status are non-determiners. Following the trends for English as a Lingua Franca, generally, the Singapore variety “has come to be the means of expression of this Asian-cum-western culture, a reflection of the fact that today the vast majority of people consider themselves primarily Singaporeans rather than Chinese, Malay, Tamils, or whatever” (Schneider 2003:264).

The expansion of English as the emerging language of the young in Singapore has similarly resulted in the declining numbers of those speaking mother tongues at home. This decline further resulted in language shifts (see Table 2.1 in this Chapter). Pakir (2004) highlights that the future of Bahasa Melayu, Mandarin and Tamil will hinge on what will happen in the next fifty years with the ascendancy of English and its global impact on urban nations like Singapore. Gopinathan et al. (2004) question the possibility of intimate affiliation of a person’s ethnic identity and culture and, even loyalty to the language without having full mastery of the language.
At the time this study was conducted, young persons in Singapore are expected to be able to juggle diverse sets of language ideologies prescribed by the State. However, as the subsequent discussion illustrates, the way in which youths in Singapore are exposed to, learn and use their two languages are not the same as other bilinguals. Further, these differences are intertwined with the enactment of aspects of their identity.

The following sections discuss the ways the Malay/Muslims, as a community, has been structured in relation to the State’s multiculturalist discourses.

2.3 The Malay/Muslim structuration
Throughout the colonial exercise in Singapore, the Malay community persistently remained on the socio-economic, educational and political peripheries of society. The colonial administrators explained the Malays’ socio-economic under-achievements through negative representations that included: “traits of complacency, indolence, apathy, infused with a love of leisure and an absence of motivation and discipline” (Rahim 2001:49). Rahim argues that these representations justified the “‘white man’s burden’ associated with colonial rule and obscure the pivotal role of colonial policies in marginalising the Malay community and education terms” (2001:49) and propagated the “ideology of Malay cultural deficiency” (2001:50; Li 1989). In essence, the cultural deficiency ideology rationalises and racialises social inequality and socio-economic marginality and provides convenient explanations for issues of marginalisation. The ideology asserts that the marginality experienced by certain ethnic communities is due to their inept cultural values and attitudes (Rahim 2001). More significantly, the colonialisit ideology has been adopted by the State to

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26 For an extensive study of the Malay community during colonial times, see Alatas (1977).
enable it to rationalise its minimalist assistance toward Malay marginality so as not to “create a welfare of crutch mentality, increase crime, single parent-families and threaten the well-being of a free-market economy” (Rahim 2001:51).

The two representations of the Malay/Muslim community in dominant discourse are related to socio-economic development and nationalist identity. One of these representations resulted to the initial and intentional exclusion of Malay/Muslim young men from military conscription into the National Service (NS). Malay/Muslims have “doubtful loyalty” (Suratman 2004:1). As a consequence to this exclusion, from the 1960s to mid-1970s, many Malay/Muslim young males struggled to get employment as the successful completion of NS was seen as an essential requisite for many employers in their recruitment process (Rahim 2001; Aljunied 2011b). Although Malay/Muslim males are now conscripted into the military and some have made careers in this area, the loyalty of the ethnic group remains a political issue. Aljunied (2011b) argues that the State perceives the over-representation of Malays in the military as dangerous due to its fear that in the event of conflicts, the Malays might be “sympathetic to their Muslim brethren in the neighbouring countries”. The State has not denied this discrimination against not having Malays among the top ranks in the military and in strategic and defence-sensitive vocations in the armed forces and suggested the potentiality of a Malay person’s dilemma when at war with Malaysia or Indonesia (Chua 2003).

According to Chua (2003:8) the dilemma is that the Malay soldier “could be placed in a situation of either having to shoot his own ‘ethnic brethren’ or fellow Singaporeans”. Here, we can sense the powerful contradictions in the State in positioning the Malay/Muslim identity – one on hand, this identity is attached to the
national project while the other, still attaches it to a geographical/regional association.

The other representation in the Malay/Muslim discourse is the issue of the ethnic group’s underachievement in education which has been prevalent since pre-independence and has strongly contributed to the marginal socio-economic standing of the community.\textsuperscript{27} Rahim (2001) establishes the link between the Malay/Muslim community’s class and educational achievements with English language proficiency (cultural capital). Rahim (2001:186) argues that the Malay/Muslim community’s weak education foundation can be attributed to the “elitist and socially hierarchical nature of the colonial education regime” and other factors such as general poverty of the community, poor educational and teaching facilities of village and religious schools. These factors extended to the avoidance of Malay/Muslim parents sending their children to secular and Christian mission schools that offered better educational facilities for they feared their children would be converted to Christians. The focus on the Malay community’s cultural deficiencies to explain its educational weakness in post-independent Singapore enabled the State to place the burden on the community to resolve the issue and “deflect attention from the weaknesses of the education system and their [the Malays] socio-economic status” (Rahim 2001:186).

The education system was further politicised by the State and disadvantaged the Malays (and Indians). One of the policies was through the establishment of the Special Assistance Plan schools and its implications on the Malays. The Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools ensure that “ethnic and academic exclusivity, only the top Chinese PSLE students are eligible for enrolment in the prestigious SAP schools

\textsuperscript{27} Other socio-economic disparity between Malays and non-Malays in Singapore include: low representation in non-public/private housing dwellings, income levels and occupational categories (see Rahim 2001).
where English and Chinese are taught as a first language” (Rahim 2001:128). The inception of Chinese-only SAP schools which coincided and complemented the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* in 1979 meant that Chinese students are provided with an elite education that privileges Chinese culture and language and would subsequently turn them into cultural elites as intended by the State. Responding to criticisms of unequal treatment of the Malays (and the Indian community) arising from the SAP program, from 1986 students from these minority communities could learn their mother tongue as a first language. However, unlike their Chinese peers in SAP schools, students from the minority groups have been inconvenienced, as they have to travel to language centres. These lessons are also conducted outside normal school hours (Rahim 2001).

The State has sustained the representations of the Malay/Muslims as living on the margins of society by continuously identifying areas that need attention and making comparisons of progress between ethnic communities using real-time snapshots instead of looking at longitudinal achievements (Suratman 2004:20). The State’s explanations showed correlations between large families, poverty and performance in school, poor supervision by Malay/Muslim parents and lack of interest in studying amongst the community’s youths (see Rahim 2001). Suratman cited examples when Malay/Muslim students have made overall progress in education, the State directed the focus to the specific subjects that these students were not performing well in.29

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28 In the Singapore system, the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) completes a student’s 6-year primary school education. After which, the students enter the 4-5-year Secondary School system which culminates the General Cambridge Examination Ordinary level.

29 Suratman (2004) observes that issues of Malay marginalisation were less noticeable in newspapers. They were replaced by issues pertaining to the Malay’s loyalty to the State and further reinforced by events such as September 11 and arrests of members from a terrorist collective in Singapore.
Consequently, contemporary Malay/Muslims have to live with essentialised representations in post-independent Singapore that converge into representations of a community living in the socio-economic marginality since colonial times in contrast to the progress of the Chinese and Indian communities. In this dissertation, I have used ‘inherited market’ to refer to this condition. Juhari (2011) argues that the community’s inability to develop a habit of critical thinking as a result of ‘negative mental models’ has contributed to the perennial status quo. The negative mental modals are based on or influenced by the community’s self-perceptions of biological, cultural and structural deficits, colonialist capitalists and knowledge of social-political and economic marginality and religion.

However, a constant in some of the informants’ construction of their identity indicates resistance and contestations of essentialised representations of their selves and their positions in the social hierarchy in Singapore. Chua (2003:75) argues that “with rising education expectations, [the Malay community] has objected publicly to instances and areas of actual and perceived inequality and has, in the past decade, publicly voiced its dissatisfaction with the government and its Malay politicians”.

2.3.1 Construction and investment on Malay/Muslim-ness

Rahim (2001) argues that the construction and expression of Malay/Muslim-ness across generations has shifted, as contemporary Malay youths do not experience the same degree of marginality experienced by their elders. This can be attributed to the gradual and positive developments across many indicators that were not experienced by their parents and grandparents, such as employment and housing. Literature on the Malay/Muslim young people show an upward trend in Malay/Muslim youths’ academic attainment through better general performance and lesser school
attrition for both the primary and secondary levels and progression to post-secondary and tertiary institutions have also partly contributed to this shift in representation. Thus, in reflecting the current socio-economic environment, the Malay/Muslim youth has gained some respect and status within the Singapore society as one of its minority communities.

The progress in these indicators suggests some degree of access to social mobility for younger Malay/Muslims. Nevertheless, when compared to progress made at the national level, the post-separation gap still exists (Kassim 2008; Rahim 2001). What seems constant in the Malay/Muslim youth literature is the positive correlation between their Bahasa Melayu in the construction of Malay/Muslim-ness in contemporary Singapore when compared to the other ethnolinguistic groups. Despite examples of constrained agency and structural marginalisation experienced by young Malay/Muslims and the ethnic group in general, is it interesting to observe that the mother tongue seem to have symbolic and material capital, possibly for those who invest in Malay/Muslim-ness, to whatever extent that may be. This further supports the State’s multicultural policy in maintaining one’s ethnolinguistic identity.

Fishman (1989, 1999) argues that language has been accorded priority by many although it is not a defining characteristic of ethnicity for all people. As indicated in the Census of Population 2010, no other ethnic group in Singapore shares such high level literacy in a common language as indicated by the 82.7 per cent of Malays who are literate in Bahasa Melayu. Based on a 10-year performance of students who sat for the General Cambridge Examination ‘Ordinary’ (GCE ‘O’) level, the only subject the Malay students seem to excel in is their mother tongue exams when compared to the Chinese and Indians (see Table 2.3 on the next page).

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30 Source: Census of Population 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore
Using a variation of the matched-guise with ethnicity and socio-economic background as independent variables, Bokhorst-Heng and Caleon’s (2009) study examined ethnolinguistic attitudes on status and solidarity dimensions towards the mother tongue, English and when code-switching between the two languages occurs. The Malay youths expressed no significant difference in attitudes towards all three linguistic components compared to their Chinese and Indian peers who expressed lower attitudes for all. According to Bokhorst-Heng and Caleon, within the State’s discourse, the Malay results can be explained by the fact the Malays are least concerned with the arguments against ‘English only’ and the campaign to adopt one’s mother tongue. Conversely, as a community, their mother tongue maintenance is high.

In another study, which was specifically conducted on the Malay/Muslim youth community, Cavallaro and Serwe (2010) examined the maintenance and shifts in the use of Bahasa Melayu among two hundred and thirty-three speakers. Through semi-structured interviews and by comparing the use of Bahasa Melayu and English across different age-groups and domains, the youngest group (i.e. those aged 12-17)

Table 2.3

Student performance in the GCE ‘O’ levels in Mother Tongue language by ethnic group (2001-2010) (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>99.7</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>98.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>97.2</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>96.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

consistently reported a higher use of Bahasa Melayu than the other groups. The study explains that the high use of the mother tongue could be due to the group using the language as an in-group capital, or simply because they are currently actively studying the language at school. According to Cavallaro and Serwe, when the 12-17 age-group grow up and join the workforce or pursue higher education, their social network goes through further transformation and they then tend to use more English. This phenomenon is represented in the findings from the 18-24 year old group in which the lowest of Bahasa Melayu use is reported. Here, young women in the community are over-represented and so are those from high socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

Understanding issues regarding maintenance and shift in the use of Bahasa Melayu have provided new focus in examining the linguistic situation in Singapore which has predominantly centred around Singapore English and Mandarin. Although this dissertation will not directly address questions of ethnolinguistic language shift and maintenance, these discussions are important in expanding research on the connectedness of the language with the young Malay/Muslim identity. Against the backdrop of those who do not use Bahasa Melayu to invest in an ethnolinguistic identity, could possibly reveal if there are tensions for the community in defining ‘legitimate’ Malay/Muslim-ness specifically when the identity has been essentialised based a shared language, beliefs, fraternal bonds and communal historic ties.

It is plausible to suggest that for the Malay ethnic community, its mother tongue is one of the core constituents in the group’s identity as the figures consolidate the interdependent language-ethnicity relationship in the construction of self based on the State’s deterministic ideology. The ideology (explicated in Section 2.1) affirms the ethnic identity through the mother tongue. Pakir (2004:288)
articulates the tension in this language-ethnicity relationship in Singapore such that there is an expectation for the speakers of the respective languages to be proficient in them so as to be able to link the language to their ethnicity, culture and values. The pervasiveness of this ideology formulated by the State is illustrated in the subsequent analysis in Chapter Four.

2.3.2 Bahasa Melayu Marginality

The linguistic ecology of a place or country provides a perspective on the relationship between languages guiding language policies with the objective in achieving harmony between all languages in the environment (Mühlhäusler 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas et al. 2003). Bahasa Melayu marginality requires three considerations. The first consideration is the demography and practicality of the language belonging to the ethnic group vis-à-vis the dominant Chinese dominant and Mandarin. Rahim (2009a) states that although Bahasa Melayu is the most widely spoken language in Southeast Asia, Singaporeans see almost no incentive or prospects in learning the language. Secondly, a marginalised language is not only the language used by the linguistic minority population, its speakers subsequently form the least favourable socio-economic standing among the speakers of other mother tongues. The Malay/Muslim’s lack of socio-economic achievement has been discussed in Section 2.3.1. The final and most significant consideration is, a marginalised language takes into account evidence pointing towards the linguistic bias experienced by the linguistic minority in relation to the dominant mother tongue, Mandarin. This form of linguistic bias propagated by the State is explicated in Rahim (2009a:39):

[The State has] continually reminded the Chinese community of the economic value of Mandarin and its role in transmitting the rich and ancient Chinese cultural tradition. In addition to engendering pride and identification with their cultural heritage,
Singaporean Chinese have also been enjoined to study Mandarin as a means of establishing close social networks (guanxi) with the rapidly industrialising mainland Chinese state.

One aspect of identity negotiation in a multilingual community is the status of a given code as the majority or minority language in a particular society (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001). Symbolic associations and socio-pragmatic meanings of a certain code choice may vary across the societies, as well as within them. In the initial formulation of Singapore’s language policy, each mother tongue was chosen as the cultural repository of values and traditions for its associated ethnic group. In this regard, all three mother tongues are therefore considered to be of equal status where no single ethnic community can claim privilege over the other. Again, this is the primary stance represented in the State’s notion of multiculturalism. However, in recent years, the State has iterated and enforced the learning and positioned Mandarin favourable largely because of its economic value, particularly after China embarked on its economic transformation. Wee (2006) argues this has compromised the State’s commitment to multiculturalism and is evident from the numerous Speak Mandarin campaigns, non-Chinese parents requesting their children learn Mandarin in primary schools, working adults taking up Mandarin classes, and employers seeking job-seekers who are bilingual in English and Mandarin. In this case, the hierarchical social status of Mandarin has been elevated in comparison to Bahasa Melayu and Tamil as it has been commodified as a mother tongue with economic privileges and possibly, social mobility (Heller 2010).

The factors in the previous paragraph explicate what scholars have termed as ‘sinicisation’ (Lai 1995; Rahim 2001). Sinicisation is a process undertaken by the State that is most directly felt over minority language issues (see also Rahim 2001; Vaish
Though maybe unintentional, the State has played a decisive role in effectively and gradually weakening the status and usefulness of particular mother tongues through preferential treatment towards Mandarin (and its speakers) in the education system, and the rigorous promotion of the Speak Mandarin campaigns that consequently create anxieties and suspicions among speakers of other mother tongues.

Although Bahasa Melayu constitutionally remains a national language, it is not used in public administration and commerce. Neither is it a valuable language to be studied by non-Malays. Supposedly given equal status to Mandarin and English, the selective use of Bahasa Melayu and its lack of promotion and bias by the State are apparent. Due to the strongly sinicised social environment in Singapore, most non-Malays do not speak the national language nor are able to sing the national anthem, Majulah Singapura (which is in Bahasa Melayu). Through sinicisation, the status and function of Bahasa Melayu as a national language has been devalued to a language associated with those holding menial occupations such as “the subordinate Indonesian maid, humble postman, office cleaner and despatch rider and less affluent neighbouring countries to the immediate north and south” (Rahim 2009a:39).

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) point out the correlations between stereotypes (or attitudes) to beliefs about language and their speakers and how that addresses understandings about political and social inequalities within a given culture or community.

Conversely, the devaluing of particular mother tongues strengthens that of English (Schneider 2003). Gupta (1994a) identifies this situation as ecological niches that weaken mother tongue identity and enable language shifts (see Table 2.4 on page 96). Gupta adds that because of the near universality of childhood bilingualism
and the high degree of intermarriage among different ethnolinguistic groups in Singapore, there is a weak sense of proficiency and identity to mother tongues. English has gained dominance and has shifted from a language of commerce with no cultural value to one that is the preferred mode of communication in all domains and even in the home due to further internationalisation of its economy. Relevant to this dissertation is the shift in language use among the Malay community in Singapore.

Table 2.4

Key indicators of the resident population aged 5 and over by language most frequently spoken at home (%)

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>62.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese dialects</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahasa Melayu</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Censuses of Population 2000 - 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore

Table 2.4 shows a general increase in English used in the home across all ethnicities over a period of 10 years. When compared to the other ethnicities, the Malay community’s figures show a significant rise from 7.9 per cent of Malays from aged 5 and above using English at home in 2000 to 17.0 per cent in 2010. The figures further indicate a decline in the use of Bahasa Melayu in the community from 91.6 per cent in 2000 to 82.7 per cent in 2010. In the 15 - 24 age group, the number of Malay youths (males and females) who frequently speak English at home in 2010 is 17.9 per cent, a substantial increase from 7.2 per cent in 2000.31

31 See Table 2(c) in Tables. Source: Censuses of Population 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore
This rise of English use within the Malay/Muslim community and in comparison to the other ethnicities is significant as it shows that the mother tongue is losing its intrinsic value as a home language as it is gradually replaced by a language which is seen to have more economic value (Cavallaro and Serwe 2010). In a way, the State’s language and education policies have tilted in favour of English and definitely found success in embracing modernity in the form of a western language and its cultural capital. However, this success is at the expense of blurring ethnic heterogeneity and ethnolinguistic diversity. Ironically, it is also seen as bringing harm to the nation as the language is seen as promoting excessive individualism and western-type liberalism (Ho and Alsagoff 1998).

Fishman (1989, 1999) argues that language has been accorded priority by many although it is not a defining characteristic of ethnicity for all people. As indicated in the Census of Population 2010, no other ethnic group in Singapore shares such high level literacy in a common language as indicated by the 82.7 per cent of Malays who are literate in Bahasa Melayu. Based on a 10-year performance of students who sat for the General Cambridge Examination ‘Ordinary’ (GCE ‘O’) level, the only subject the Malay students seem to excel in is their mother tongue exams when compared to the Chinese and Indians (see Table 2.5 below).

Table 2.5
Student performance in the GCE ‘O’ levels in Mother Tongue language by ethnic group (2001-2010) (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>99.7</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>99.4</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>96.8</td>
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<td>Indian</td>
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<td>96.8</td>
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See Table 2(d) in Tables. Source: Census of Population 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore
It is plausible to suggest that for the Malay/Muslim ethnic community, its mother tongue is one of the core constituents in the group’s identity as the figures consolidate the interdependent language-ethnicity relationship in the construction of self based on the State’s deterministic ideology. The ideology (explicated in Section 2.1) enforces the ethnic identity through the mother tongue. Pakir (2004:288) articulates the tension in this language-ethnicity relationship in Singapore such that there is an expectation for the speakers of the respective languages to be proficient in them so as to be able to link the language to their ethnicity, culture and values. The pervasiveness of this ideology formulated by the State is illustrated in the subsequent analysis in Chapter Four.

At this juncture, it would be relevant to make some linguistic distinctions amongst the varieties of Bahasa Melayu in Singapore. First, Bahasa Melayu Baku is the standard taught in schools as a first, second and third language. In the Singapore bilingual education system in which English is the medium of instruction, all mother tongues, including Bahasa Melayu, are taught as a mandatory second language as explicated earlier in Section 2.2. Able students have the option to take up Bahasa Melayu as Higher Malay (first language) or as an additional foreign language (third language). The Bahasa Melayu Baku variety is used in limited local media such as in television and radio broadcasts, newspapers and is highly valued as a refined variety and symbolically used by highly prominent Malays and scholars and Bahasa Melayu-speaking members of parliament. The emphasis on the use of Bahasa Melayu Baku in Singapore schools saw its revival about a decade ago, and is distinguished by sebutan (articulation) of words. More recently, this variety has created quite a debate among Malay scholars for the constant stream of English-loan words into the Malay vocabulary and coining of agglutinative words to keep up with developments in
science and technology. However, using this variety does not necessarily associate the speaker with power and wealth.

On the other hand, the vernacular Bahasa Melayu is the dominant variety in daily interactions and mainstream/popular media. Also referred to as Bahasa Melayu Bazaar/Pasar, the vernacular is used by the many speakers collectively (and loosely) termed as Malays, Malay/Muslims or Muslims in Singapore. The vernacular is also used by some Chinese and Indians, not only to interact with the Malays but amongst themselves. This variety of Bahasa Melayu was once distinguishable by accent of ethnic dialect-groups within the State’s racial categorisation, such as the Javanese, Boyanese, Bugis and those of Arab ancestry. However, this distinction is no longer observable, with the probable exception of the older speakers in the various dialect-groups.

2.4 Concluding remark

The objective of presenting a critical background of the Malay/Muslim habitus allows me to situate my informants’ experiences discursively and structurally in the competitive local market where access to legitimate resources is constrained by conditions from within and beyond the local market that make a certain kind of habitus and sociolinguistic capital dominant. Only then reader will begin to understand why it is that some Malay/Muslim young people invest in dominant performance of Malay/Muslim-ness and others do not. This chapter has critically revisit some of the defining ideologies and policies that have shaped what is it means to be a Malay/Muslim in Singapore which are often taken for granted or unchallenged by the ethnolinguistic communities themselves and by dominant groups. This raises questions such as, who and what is included or excluded of? Who and what resides
in the centre or the periphery? The State’s multiculturalist policy has historically and discriminatory discourses that have privileged certain groups in the society and legitimised the creation and promotion of essentialised ethnolinguistic groups. In the Singapore multiculturalist context, however, these groups are somehow meant to be on an equal footing despite their historical, geographical and political differences.
CHAPTER THREE

The Methodology

The methodological approach that I have identified for this research explores social relations that are made up of locally situated interactions that are constrained by the unequal production and distribution of symbolic and material resources. The primary method of data collection was through individual and group semi-structured interviews and observations. Central to the critical sociolinguistic ethnography (Heller 1999, 2002) approach is the researcher’s extended and direct participation in the research process. In other words, the researcher’s presence and participation assist in what Duranti (2003) describes as “communicative ecology”.

In establishing the appropriate research methodology, I have drawn inspirations from explorations that depended on researcher-researched relationships for over a period of time (e.g. Blom and Gumperz 1972; Milroy 1987a, 1987b, among others) prior to forming testable hypotheses. Further methodological motivations related to specific research on young people in localised contexts which reveal the situatedness of language use and symbolic meanings in interactions, and the ways these actors positioned themselves and are positioned by others in discourse (e.g. Barton and Tusting 2005; Davies 2005; Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou 2003; Eckert 1989, 2000, 2008; Eckert and McConnell-Ginnet 1992, 1995; Eckert and Wenger 2005; Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999). Before shedding some light onto the fieldwork, it is necessary to first explain the ethical considerations surrounding it.
3.1 Ethical Considerations

I have made every reasonable effort to assure my informants’ anonymity by removing information that is recognisable from the biographical descriptions and interview transcripts. In this dissertation, pseudonyms were used for every informant. I have also generalised their ages. As advised by the university’s ethics review committee, I have sought informed and consensual participation from all involved, including (from?) the polytechnics the key informants were then attending. Key informants were informed of their right to refuse involvement at any phase of the research without the need to explain. The same informed consent and exclusion from research was extended to others who were part of the key informants’ social experiences reported in this dissertation with the exception of when I was not present in the interactions. Nonetheless, due to Singapore’s geography, the polytechnics may be recognisable to some readers. Further, some key informants’ identities may still be recognisable by readers who may also share a history with this researcher. In order to minimise the risk of recognisability, I have respected some key informants’ requests not to be asked certain questions that might be intrusive or revealing. At times, I have ceased observing or interviewing when I felt that certain key informants showed signs of discomfort or apprehension.

When considering other possible ethical issues that may arise from this dissertation, I anticipated and acknowledged that my critical interpretivist approach to research may be criticised by some readers. These readers may criticise the research for discussing topics that may possibly undermine and question the State’s multicultural policies, which are at the core of Singapore’s racial harmony. Second, some readers may argue that ethnic segregation in Singapore along linguistic and socio-cultural lines do not exist (or should not exist). By drawing attention to this
social issue, readers may criticise my research for suggesting (or creating) inter-ethnolinguistic stratification. Here, I argue that segregation along socio-cultural, economic and linguistic lines are present within and between all ethnolinguistic groups, however, I happen to believe that in Singapore, this is characterised by trivialisation, repression and censorship by the State, media and dominant discourses. Some of the Malay/Muslim readers may also criticise this research for highlighting intra-ethnic segregation within the community. Thus, some readers may see that I have an ethnolinguistic and ethical responsibility to present a positivist view of the Malay/Muslim community and the Singapore society in general.

These ethical issues have less to do with the way I have conducted fieldwork, rather they relate to my findings. More accurately, these issues are related to my positioning as the sole researcher and how readers may interpret my discussions about they ways a marginalised group (i.e. young males of Malay/Muslim descent) negotiate definitions of Malay/Muslim-ness (i.e. through language, identity and practices) in specific discursive spaces. In their negotiation of multiple (and sometime, contradictory) identities, the question of positioning (Bamberg 2003; Davies and Harré 1990) is central to this research and discussed in Section 3.5 in this chapter.

Indeed, the questions that I have sought to resolve in this research are sensitive to particular groups and institutions. Hence, they are not neutral or comfortable to some readers. They tell of how language is used to include and exclude certain social actors within and between ethnolinguistic communities (i.e. social structuration) and as means of symbolic domination by those in positions of power (i.e. issues of marginalisation). In discussing these questions, I am of course aware that I may emphasise or (re)produce ethnolinguistic stratification which may
challenge the society’s familiarity with dominant discourses and views of the Malay/Muslim homogenised identity. Nevertheless, these questions on the discourses of language and identity are necessary to understand the tensions emerging from naturalised ideologies.

3.2 Research Design Overview

The fieldwork started in July 2009 and ended in early January 2010. During the six months, I interacted with four key Malay/Muslim informants from two friendship groups. The decision to focus on a small number of informants over the course of fieldwork meant that I could conduct a closer analysis of the data. At every level of the data collection I was sensitive to and made aware of the physical and affective conditions, and experiences of the informants, and how I had positioned myself as an insider or an outsider within their social system.

The fieldwork observations and interviews were conducted like any other social interaction between social actors rather than those of formalised settings. I recognised that in order for the key informants to be able to share personal experiences and thoughts about their identity, attachments to language and culture, I would have to establish a good relationship and create a safe space for them to open up about topics that would have otherwise been too uncomfortable or sensitive. And, like Milroy (1987a, 1987b), I joined these friendship groups not as a researcher but as someone whom the informants had already formed a relationship with or as ‘friend of a friend’. These observations and interviews were mostly conducted at two local polytechnics which were located close to each other.

Throughout the duration in the field, I was the primary instrument for the collection of data, except when the key informants recorded their interactions in my
absence. As an extra measure and to complement the recorded and transcribed materials, I kept fieldnotes on what happened in the field. The fieldnotes were resources that I relied heavily on when I needed to recall specific interactions and interviews.

In reporting the findings, ‘key informants’ refer to the group of informants that constitute the primary interactions in the field. I initially recruited nine key informants who met the ‘Malay/Muslim’ criteria demanded by this project (see criteria in Section 3.3). However, due to commitment issues and challenges in meeting on a regular basis, in the end, the research worked around the experiences of four key informants. They were the ones that I spent the majority of the time in the field with. There were about twenty-one other informants who were part of the key informants’ experiences. These informants, if reported, are referred to as secondary informants or contextualised within the respective analysis.

3.2.1 Methodological considerations

Often questions are raised around an ethnographic qualitative inquiry satisfying the criteria of validity, reliability and neutrality. This is a consequence of the researcher’s degree and extent of involvement with the researched and possibly, observer bias at the cost of objectivity (Labov 1972).

Before proceeding further, it is essential to provide a working definition of qualitative research project. For this purpose, and because of my views about the researcher-researched relationships and its relevance in my research, I rely on Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000:8) definition that:

The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and the processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined and measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress
the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social is created and given meaning.

This recognition of the researcher-researched relationship and its application in qualitative research (i.e. positionality) may be considered by correlationist/positivist sociolinguists as laden with personal reflection, bias, ideological manipulation and inter-subjectivity. Thus, this approach has strong potential in violating principles of neutrality as any research project demands. This sociolinguistics concern is justified, in particular in examples where the personal self and ideological baggage of the researcher are not monitored and when there are pre-determined agendas. However, I argue that those investigating social worlds rely on common sense knowledge and to recognise, not reject, that they have an effect on the social phenomena they are studying as, essentially, an ethnographic relationship “is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:15).

However, one of the core understandings in terms of ethnography, is that awareness and analysis are inseparable and concern how the identities of the researcher and researched affect the research process. Cameron et al. (1992:5) argue that as ethnographers, “we inevitably ring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process and this influences the questions we ask and the ways in which we try to find answers”. For this reason, I have made transparent my orientation and positionality by declaring them in this dissertation in Section 3.4. In addition these declarations of positionality have been repeated throughout the dissertation. I am aware that these declarations are not able to
replace and completely ensure neutrality, however, they can go some way towards ameliorating the effect of bias, particularly ideological bias.

Another consideration in the methodology is the sample size consisting of four Malay/Muslim male informants (and the people they socialised with). Since the methodology is located within a small-scale qualitative ethnographic research, the small sample size of key informants was significant for me to have enough time to meet regularly with them and with the people in their social networks. My research goal was not to present a representative array of characteristics, but rather a rich and multi-layered selection of experiences. And, given that this ethnographic study is an exploration of multiple and specific identity constructions from male-only informants, it is important to first explain the rationale behind the male research bias.

Though there is no evidence of strict social roles between genders among Malay/Muslim youths in Singapore, the concept of ‘mahram’ remains a sensitive issue in this community and informs mixed gender Malay/Muslim interactions, specific to interacting with females. A mahram refers to a male person from familial backgrounds or blood relatives. As a male person who is a non-mahram to female informants, potentially it would be challenging for the researcher to conduct work in the field based on religious and cultural considerations governing Malay/Muslim male-female interactions. These challenges may impact on the frequency, quality of interviews and interactions, and intimacy of the interactions. Thus, it was appropriate and less challenging for me to gain access into established male friendship groups compared to those consisting of females.

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33 A detailed explanation of these socio-cultural and religious norms is not within the scope of this dissertation. I have presented a simplistic translation and illustration of ‘mahram’, sufficient for readers to understand its application in this research project. This concept is more complex than the considerations of family and blood ties. It involves the intersections of many other considerations relevant to the Muslim habitus.
3.2.2 Observations and semi-structured recorded interviews

The recorded group and one-on-one semi-structured interviews started after five weeks of interacting with the friendship groups, and lasted throughout the fieldwork. This time frame has allowed me to build some discursive questions based on my observations and for the informants and I to develop familiarity. It was explained to the informants at the outset what the interviews were designed to accomplish; to share their descriptions and interpretations of their language use and patterns of behaviour observed. Key informants were assured that there was neither a right nor wrong response. The interviews lasted between ten to over sixty minutes. In total, slightly more than thirty-eight hours of recorded peer interactions and interviews were collected during the six months with the groups. Unlike Labovian-type research, it was decided that high quality recordings were not central to the analysis, specifically it was not concerned with refined linguistic analysis of language. Often the researcher started the recordings with small-talk.

On occasions where I was unable to record interactions due to practical or ethical reasons, and also to be able to explore language(s) used by key informants in my absence, participants were given the option of self-recording. In this instance, the groups shared a digital audio-recorder every fortnight supplied by Nanyang Technological University (Singapore) where I was a visiting scholar during the fieldwork period. In addition, the self-recording addressed my concerns of power relationships (see Section 3.4). Here, I acknowledge that even with my immersion or acceptance into the friendship groups, unmediated linguistic behaviour from my key informants could be hindered by my presence.

The initial interview questions focused on drawing out informants’ experiences and perceptions on broad conceptions, constructions and contestations of
Malay/Muslim-ness in the national space (discussion is presented in Chapter Four). The interview process was initially challenging, again it made me conscious of my orientation, positionality and the power structure embedded in researcher-researched interviews. As a reflexive researcher, I was aware of choices relating to what is central and what is peripheral in the interviews, thus I was opportunistic if a topic presented itself in particular discursive spaces. For example, interviews on discourses of identity in Islam were conducted when the topic of religion or religiosity was brought up or during the Eid-Ul Fitri celebration.\(^{34}\) However, it is important to note that everyone in the interaction carefully negotiated the questions and spaces.

As group consensus can at times dominate the interview process, semi-structured individual interviews provided another level of depth to tentative interpretations. This approach was effective to draw out self- and shared experiences and pertinent information such as family background and other experiences relevant to this research (see Section 3.3.1). It was also productive in balancing the retrospective aspect in interviews by drawing out accounts and perspectives of particular events from different informants.

While in the field, and to complement my interpretations of the interactions and interviews, I relied heavily on my fieldnotes. The fieldnotes consisted of extralinguistic observations (e.g. informants’ use of space, body gestures and other social practices) that could not be identified in the audio recording. Fieldnotes were drawn up in situations when there was excessive noise, when recording was obtrusive or inconvenient, or when I was not able to record interactions as I did not have the necessary consent. Most times, the fieldnotes were discretely written.

\(^{34}\) Eid-Ul Fitri is the Muslim celebratory month which marks the end of a month-long fasting during Ramadhan.
during the interaction and interviews. Other times, they were written as soon as the event was completed. For the same reason that interviews are retrospective accounts, I am aware that the fieldnotes were based on my own account of these events therefore, they were not records of the interactions and interviews. Rather, the fieldnotes were representations of those interactions and interviews. Nevertheless, these reflexive accounts assist to contextualise and inform my analysis.

The key informants and I reviewed most of the recorded materials and the outcomes from this process were included as part of the fieldnotes. This collaborative inquiry enabled me to review the recordings with the informants so as to be able to elicit immediate clarifications or elaborations when necessary and allowed for the materials to be checked for factual precision and interpretive sensitivity.

3.2.3 Interview and observation sites

During fieldwork, there was flexibility in selecting the interview locations. As I usually met up with the informants while commuting to their respective polytechnics, some interviews were conducted on public transport such as the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) trains. The bulk of the interviews were conducted during breaks and after-school hours at two local polytechnics in the western part of Singapore where many of the informants were students. Other fieldwork locations reveal the typical Singapore landscape: hawker centres, food courts, fast-food outlets, shopping malls, outside a mosque, while waiting at bus-stops, a cinema and at an informant’s four-
room Housing Development Board (hereafter, HDB) flat\textsuperscript{35} and void-decks.\textsuperscript{36} One interview was conducted in the lorongs (back lanes) of Singapore’s red-light district of Geylang. These alternate sites offered insights into linguistic patterns of behaviour that could possibly emerge in different places.

3.2.4 Transcribing oral data

Through the time-consuming process of listening to and reviewing oral data, I identified sections that contained overarching themes. An overarching theme foregrounded in the recordings was the human agency in social interactions. In particular, the informants constantly position themselves in social interactions and groups that they perceived to be privileged or that would be advantageous for their habitus. Other themes identified included issues of marginalisation, contestation or reconceptualisation of prescribed identities and linguistic bias. Indeed, themes related to social structuration are not uncommon in the literature of Malay/Muslims in Singapore. These were reviewed further and examined against my fieldnotes. In addition, the data produced content that ranged from a tell-all of who-was-seeing-who, social commentary on other Malay/Muslim peer groups and the occasional discussions on religion and morality.\textsuperscript{37}

One of the challenges I encountered post-fieldwork was deciding on how to represent the oral data. The challenge was made more difficult as the oral data contained a high frequency of brief codeswitching, exchanges in Bahasa Melayu that

\textsuperscript{35} Managed by the State’s Housing Development Board (HDB) these flats are affordable housing and house 85 per cent of the population. It should not be confused with public housing in other countries such as Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom as a sign of living under the poverty line and/or a welfare-mechanism.

\textsuperscript{36} Void-decks refer to the communal spaces on the ground floor of each HDB flat. These spaces have many social and practical functions. Among others, the Malays use the void-decks for wedding receptions whereas the Chinese use them to hold their funeral wakes. It is common to find seats and tables for residents’ use. Some areas of the void-decks can be converted to bomb-shelters.

\textsuperscript{37} Informants were given the option to identify parts of a recording that they did not wish to be reported. This is stipulated as a clause in the agreement in the use of recordings for this research.
required some way of translation and, the use of the colloquial Singlish with its distinctive features of pragmatic particles and borrowings.

In deciding how the oral data is represented, I have considered the needs of the average reader who might be interested to engage with this dissertation. In this case, this reader would need to be able to follow the transcriptions with minimal difficulty. In order to interpret transcriptions in the analysis chapters, the use of a denaturalised style which represents oral discourse form when transcribing data (e.g. indications of pauses and interjections, and reformulations) (Bucholtz 2000) was not required. For these reasons, the research design has selected a transcription style which privileges the contextuality of language and its instrumentality as a resource in identity work. In addition, translations of borrowings, Bahasa Melayu vocabulary and codeswitching have been transcribed within the main transcription body or in the particular discussions in the text. Descriptive and interpretive contexts surrounding particular interactions and where possible, contextual transcriptions have been provided for more information related to the oral data.

3.3 Selection and involvement of key informants

Due to time constraints and practical considerations, a decision was made to contact former Malay/Muslim male students whom I have taught in a secondary school in Singapore. Here, the initial selection process of key informants hinged on my own social constructs of a ‘Malay/Muslim’ in contemporary Singapore. Through my own lived experiences, I was already familiar with the broader contexts of the Malay/Muslim habitus which informed my own interpretation of the ‘authentic’ construction of the ethnolinguistic identity. One of the restrictive criteria was to

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38 See Appendix One for transcription conventions and short transcription example.
include only Malay/Muslim male students who were born and raised in Singapore. A strict requirement to this criterion was that their parents were also born and raised in Singapore and belonged from the ethnolinguistic community. This criterion is based on an assumption that I have made in line with the dominant discourse, that the selected informants would have inherited the Malay/Muslim market from their parents and would have similar ideological expectations and perceptions on how to authentically perform Malay/Muslim-ness in Singapore’s context. It also addressed my own questions on the legitimacy and authenticity in performing the Malay/Muslim identity.

Another criterion was that key informants and their parents are able to speak in English and/or Bahasa Melayu to each other. This criterion assumed linguistic and socio-cultural transference from parent to child, including as customary traditions and ways of being Malay/Muslim-ness i.e. their habitus. As this study is concerned with how language choice may contribute to the understanding of social actors’ multiple identities, the ability to communicate effectively in the language could complicate the interpretation of the language and identity relationship. In this study, two of the informants admitted to not being able to speak in their mother tongue with confidence and all of them speak varying degrees of English.

However, I have not imposed a criterion based on proficiency and frequency of use to any of the languages since my research questions explore the negotiation of identities of the dominant discourse surrounding what it means to use English and/or Bahasa Melayu in the market. Thus, proficiency in any of the two languages is not examined through formal measures and fluency. It is their attested identifications with the different languages, not their measurable ability in the different languages that was most at issue in the field. Nonetheless, the level of an informant’s
proficiency in the two languages and how it was tied to their identity constructions must be made transparent and have been included in their biographical descriptions in Section 3.3.1.

The key informants further had to be above 18 years of age such that parental consent was not required for them to be part of this research. At this age and as young adults, it can be assumed that the key informants would have some level of maturity to engage in discussions relating to their constructions, deconstructions and reconstructions of their Malay/Muslim identity.

In June 2009, through Facebook, I contacted former male students who I had taught in a secondary school and I would consider to be authentically Malay/Muslim based on the restrictions I have placed. I contacted a number of these students whom I further felt could identify with three participatory roles required from the key informants. These key informants had to convince others in their friendship groups or family to participate in the study and, they should display attitude and aptitude to talk about issues relating to social experiences in Singapore and those that relate to their linguistic behaviour. Due to the initial six-month commitment and demanding contact time that was required from key informants, many former students were not keen. At the end, the informants in this study belonged to two friendship groups. It was coincidental that all informants were students based in two local polytechnics.

The selection approach for the key informants was strategic and practical. As the research does not make claims of being empirically generalisable, the key informants’ non-representativeness to the wider Malay/Muslim community is worth noting. Insofar as, my key informants are representative where their education levels are concerned as they are a part of a growing number of Malay/Muslims who are in
tertiary education. In particular, the informants are polytechnic students. Their experiences of identity negotiations in contemporary Singapore may differ in some ways from peers who are undertaking a more academic route via junior colleges, those who may have not had the opportunity to further their studies beyond secondary school and those who are currently in the workforce.

It is important to reiterate that this research is an exploration of identity constructions of four key male-only informants from the Malay/Muslim community. I have imposed this limitation due to religious and cultural considerations governing male-female interactions and practical reasons in working with small groups so that I was able to immerse in my informants’ daily lives and experiences. This immersion demanded a certain amount of time to establish trust and, at the same time, it created and facilitated a space where my informants could feel safe to share their thoughts. In addition, the immersion included gaining access into established social networks which involved other social actors who interacted closely with the key informants on a daily basis; polytechnic coursemates, girlfriends, friends who are not from their respective polytechnics, family members, among others.

While writing up the analyses, specifically from June 2010 - February 2012, I contacted the key informants on a regular basis via emails and Facebook messages. This was to update them of my progress, explore with them themes that may be underdeveloped or when I needed to seek clarifications about practices that I may have observed in the oral data.

The next section introduces the four key informants and their respective friendship groups. In Section 3.3.1, I have included group and individual biographical descriptions, with details on informants’ language repertoire and backgrounds.
3.3.1 Group and biographical descriptions

Through Bourdieu’s habitus, the context of a particular event extends into past histories of all informants in the event. In order to be able to understand how my key informants negotiate and construct their identities, group and biographic descriptions reveal their personal histories and culture. Key informants in this study have been given pseudonyms accordingly. Below are descriptions of the chill threesome group in Section 3.3.1(i) and its members Aziz, Ramlee and Sudin.

3.3.1(i) The chill threesome

This friendship group comprised of three 18-19 year olds: Aziz, Ramlee and Sudin. Aziz and Ramlee were my former students of close to three years. Sudin was a student in the same school. When in school, the informants were in different classes and convened daily in one classroom for their mother tongue lessons. They spent a lot of time together during breaks and after school. They often played soccer at the school’s concrete basketball court after school and caught public transport home together. At the time of conducting the fieldwork, these informants have formed a tight-knit friendship group for slightly over five years as they have known each other since they started secondary school.

The chill threesome lived within close proximity to each other in HDB flats located in the eastern part of Singapore and were quite involved in each others’ lives. They had other stable friendship groups respectively. These groups mostly consisted of polytechnic course-mates and childhood friends and overlapped somewhat.

The following sections are biographical descriptions of the chill threesome members that have been collated through observations and self-descriptions. The
descriptions focus on informants’ language behaviour and social networks. It is intended that these descriptions could assist in elucidating the informants’ discursive identity performance, that is, questions about who they are and how they position themselves in the Malay/Muslim market.

3.3.1(ii) **Aziz**

Aziz was 18 years old when fieldwork was conducted and lived in a 3-bedroom HDB flat. He was the younger of two siblings whose parents held supervisory administrative positions. When the *chill threesome* left school after their General Cambridge Ordinary Level Examinations in 2007, we remained in contact. Aziz had been the most consistent in maintaining contact through the social network, Facebook, and via emails. In his friendship group, Aziz seemed to be somewhat of a leader as he organised its movements and activities.

Aziz had a rather interesting linguistic arrangement in his household; he spoke English with his mother and Bahasa Melayu with his father. Unable to explicitly explain why he used a different language with each parent, he linked this behaviour to a narrative about how his mother had tutored him English in primary school. Aziz used English with his brother, the younger members of his extended family (for example; cousins, nieces and nephews) and his peers. Though he style-switched between Singlish and Bahasa Melayu numerous times during our interactions, English was his dominant language in which he showed a higher proficiency compared to his mother tongue. He seemed self-conscious in his Bahasa Melayu-use as evidenced from his self-corrections and, deliberations between formal and informal vocabulary.

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39 The Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) confers the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level Examination which marks the successful completion of secondary education in Singapore.
3.3.1(iii) Ramlee

Ramlee was 19 years old when fieldwork was conducted. He was third in a family of four siblings. His elder siblings were already in the workforce and the family lived under the same roof in a four-room HDB flat with his retiree father, housewife mother and grandmother. One of his elder brothers was married and occupied one of the rooms in the flat with his spouse. The other rooms were shared among the rest of the family. Ramlee’s family was typical of many Malay/Muslim households where single and working children (and even those who are married) still live with parents. Ramlee admitted to having it hard as a child as his father was the sole breadwinner.

Ramlee grew up in a dominant Bahasa Melayu household and this showed in his high proficiency in the language compared to the other members of chill threesome. Ramlee spoke with his grandmother in his dialect Javanese, albeit he admitted: ‘tak bagus sangat’ (not too good). He shared that he picked up the dialect in the household as it was still used by his parents and elder extended family members like aunts and uncles. I observed that Ramlee had a higher level of maturity when compared with the others in the group and usually composed his thoughts before sharing his views. Ramlee was a confident English-speaker but struggled when it came to written English in school.

3.3.1(v) Sudin

Sudin was 18 years old when fieldwork was conducted. He lived in a 4-bedroom HDB flat. He was the elder of two siblings. Both his parents were working. He shared that his parents completed their secondary education and studied in the
same school. Sudin seemed to be the 'intellectual' in the group and was always eager to discuss the project and my preliminary interpretations.⁴⁰

Sudin was more comfortable using English than Bahasa Melayu with his family and friends. He seldom interacted with his parents and 10-year-old sister, unless it was necessary. Sudin recalled his parents stressing the need for him to be proficient in English, yet according to him, they 'can't even speak English properly'. I rarely heard Sudin use Singlish or switch between English and Bahasa Melayu. When Sudin had used Singlish or style-switched in our interactions, they would have been deliberate. Sudin wanted to learn Mandarin while still serving National Service as he saw the advantage of the language in providing him more options for employment.

As a group, the chill threesome used both English and Bahasa Melayu in their interactions. There was no marked difference that distinguished the use of English among the informants with the exception that Sudin spoke almost entirely in English, most of the time. Throughout the duration of fieldwork, there were no drastic shifts in the chill threesome’s language behaviour.

The next set of descriptions in in Section 3.3.1(iv) is that of the makan-makan collective, a group from a different polytechnic. As Samad was the person-of-interest in the makan-makan collective, only his biographical description in reported in this section.

3.3.1(iv) The makan-makan collective

The makan-makan collective was a group of five males from different ethnicities and personalities who were between the ages of 17 - 18; there were two Chinese, an Indian, a Eurasian and, Samad. Daniel, the Eurasian, was charismatic and the unofficial

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⁴⁰Informants were encouraged to participate in discussions with the researcher as a form of collaborative inquiry used in interpreting data for this study.
‘spokesperson’ for the group. The ethnic Indian, Sanjit, was the ‘joker’ of the group. Samad seemed to be the default mediator and organiser in the group. The texting function on his mobile phone was his primary mode of communication with the rest: ‘Meet outside, now!’

The makan-makan collective members were in their first-year in the polytechnic and followed the same timetable – there was no difficulty meeting them as a group. It was similarly easy to have the members at one location at the same time as almost all of the interactions were conducted either in a food court or in one of the learning alcoves in the School of Aeronautical Engineering within the polytechnic. Due to constantly being in the presence of food during our interactions, the group's name literally means ‘eat-eat’ in Bahasa Melayu. Their interactions were always filled with friendly banter, teasing and the ubiquitous swearing. Sometimes they called each other names, which to an outsider could constitute racial slur and conflict, but indicated affection and solidarity.

3.3.1(vi) Samad

Samad was 18 years old when fieldwork was conducted. He was my first person-of contact for the makan-makan collective due to our shared history. He lived in a four-bedroom HDB flat with his mother, who works in administration, grandparents and younger brother who is in secondary school. I have known Samad since he was a 13-year old student-cadet in a uniformed group, the National Police Cadet Corps (NPCC). In the NPCC, we spent after-school hours and Saturdays together for training and related activities. For the four years Samad was in the NPCC we worked closely as he assisted in projects and overseas expeditions. For an 18-year old polytechnic student, he was disciplined and organised. He took pride in trying his
best in his academic pursuits as wanted to be a pilot for Singapore Airlines. He said: ‘That’s why I study aeronaut (sic)’. From my observations, Samad seemed to have more friends from different ethnicities than those from his own Malay/Muslim ethnic group.

At home and with his peers, Singlish was Samad’s dominant language. It could safely be said that those around him influenced his linguistic behaviour. Often, I observed that he was capable of having conversations in a variety other than Singlish when those around him did not use the colloquial. Throughout the course of fieldwork, I did not observe Samad speaking in Bahasa Melayu with one exception when I was invited to his home during Eid Ul Fitr. Then, he used Bahasa Melayu with his Malay/Muslim friends and relatives who were visiting.

At the time of reporting this dissertation, Aziz, Ramlee and Sudin were serving their compulsory Nation Service (NS) or may have completed the conscription. Aziz was in the Singapore Police Force (SPF) while Ramlee and Sudin were in the Singapore Armed Forces. And, the makan-makan collective members would have completed their three-year diploma course and would be waiting for or have been enlisted into National Service.

The next section aims to reveal that issues of language and identity are complex and positional. It reveals aspects of my identity in the field and address the researcher-researched relationship, highlighting challenging issues and my own experiences of positioning myself or being positioned by the informants as an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ in the field.
3.4 Researcher-researched relationships in the field

As a Malay/Muslim, I was in a privileged position to know enough about the culture and socio-economic and political issues. Having a shared history with the key informants meant that it was not challenging to be granted access to observe and assimilate into established friendship groups and social networks. It is important to acknowledge that although my key informants and I have similar shared experiences, it was inevitable that there was power relationship at play, particularly in the initial stages.

I observed that I was constantly negotiating my position as an insider/outsider in the field. During the early interactions, the informants positioned my identity not only as an adult, I was an English Language teacher, and possibly perceived to have a higher social and economic standing compared with where the informants were then. Clearly, I was in the position of institutional power in relation to a past history I shared with them. This power was further amplified by the fact that I was working on a doctorate, which in the Malay/Muslim market endows one with some perceived status and prestige. Thus, my key informants might have assumed that I was someone with a legitimised Malay/Muslim sociolinguistic habitus. These identity-conceptions marked me as an outsider and further carried with them the burden of authority, status and knowledge.

One of the main challenges in the field was the positioning of myself as the insider/outsider vis-à-vis youths and how the informants were positioned in their socialisation. The age difference and dichotomous relationship were at times apparent in particular instances when I had to position myself with authority in a context where everyone was at equal standing. Who am I, really? Often, it was a difficult choice to decide who to be in the space: do I be an active participant in the
interaction or do I stop the interaction to ask questions? The constant challenge was to try mediating my dual-identity with minimal intrusion and mark lines of identification in the field.

In another example, a secondary informant suggested a rendezvous at a local club frequented by the young and trendy. Upon considering the invitation, I declined the invitation as there were some in the group who were below the legal drinking age in Singapore. What if they consumed alcohol in my presence? What if they wanted me to purchase the drinks for them, or on their behalf? Cassell (1998:97) advises that ethnographers “should adopt a role of identity that meshes with the values and behaviour of the group being studied without seriously compromising the researcher’s own values and behaviour”. At times it was problematic to draw those lines of identification even when careful consideration has been taken.

There was a shift in the informants’ behaviour when I dressed down and stopped scribbling notes when socialising. The topics in conversations started to focus less about studies and more about boy-girl relationships, racism and those that were informant-initiated. I made a point not to pay for their food and drinks, even though I could have; it seemed that some of the informants understood my purpose – the convergence of my identity with that of the informants’ was crucial and necessary. It is unusual for researchers and the researched to have absolutely nothing in common (Davies 2008), albeit, complete elimination of the power imbedded in our interactions was not possible.

The insider/outsider demarcations were useful during fieldwork to explicitly establish researcher-researched roles. This was evident in a number of interview sessions in which I had positioned a more dominant role. Capitalising on my role as the researcher enabled me to elicit the types of data relevant for the purpose of
research. Therefore, determining one’s status as an insider/outsider depends on the specific interaction, the social actors involved and the resources at stake. Throughout the fieldwork I was constantly made aware of my insider/outsider identity and the power-relationships in the field. Occurrences like these made me recognise that the identity of the researcher in the field is not watertight. This section has emphasised the importance of guarding the ideological intrusion of insider into the outsider (or vice versa) while acknowledging the ideological nature of a socio-political construct.

The reflections in Section 3.4.1 deal with aspects of my linguistic behaviour in the field. In focusing (on?) aspects of my language behaviour, I attempt to show the field as sites of positionality.

3.4.1 Language in the Field

My familiarity with the Malay/Muslim discursive spaces in Singapore and choosing to do research that did not require learning another language should have been advantageous for me. However, this was not as straightforward in practice as it seemed in principle, given that I was as an English Language teacher to the key informants when they were in school and this influenced their perceptions of my identity as a researcher. It seems that I was in a position of institutional power in relation to the key informants.

During the initial observations and interactions, the key informants might have assumed that I was there to police or assess their language proficiency. During initial interactions, I was still seen as ‘Mr Sophiaan’ the English Language teacher. It was apparent that some informants had used variety of English or proficiency level that was not natural to them. Sustaining this pretence of ability in an ethnographic
research project, however, is often short-lived. It took a couple of interactions before the informants and I were able to interact without the awkwardness of defining which language or variety to use. In spite of my attempts to establish my position as an insider, it was not surprising that early in the fieldwork, this did not happen. Even though, I was a Malay/Muslim, it required time to develop trust to be part of the groups.

Another methodological implication was it is often easy to assume a shared congruence of meanings when the informants and researcher speak the same language(s). However, this shared understanding did not exist in the field. Considerable time was taken to learn what could be assumed to be shared vocabulary but that held different meanings. In many instances, misunderstandings occurred when I did not have knowledge of certain cultural codes, including cinematic and pop music references, and slang. Occasionally, I resorted to asking the informants: what does that mean? There were times when I sought no clarification for language that I was unable to comprehend. I noted these in the fieldnotes to be reviewed at a later time. In this regard, the power balance in the researcher-researched relationship had shifted as the informants had knowledge that was different from mine.  

Another language issue in the field is what I describe as my ‘researcher language’ – the authoritative tone in questioning, convoluted phrasing of questions and the sequential-type approach in getting responses from informants. This affected the natural flow of interactions. There were situations when my ‘researcher language’ caused momentary disruption to casual and uninhibited interactions which

\[41\text{Over time, I observed a higher frequency of ubiquitous swearing in my repertoire, which came about with the familiarity and adapting to my informants’ linguistic behaviour. It is interesting that the informants’ linguistic prerogative use of slang did not influence much on my language in the field. There was once when I used ‘coolio’ (a derivation of ‘cool’) to indicate agreement but it felt odd.}\]
probably indicated the informants had positioned my identity as an outsider. What is of interest was that some informants responded to my linguistic behaviour by alternating to a more formal register – which could imply that they were positioning their identity to that of the researcher’s. The ‘researcher language’ was more apparent earlier in the fieldwork when the researcher role was more transparent and the distinctions between researcher-researched interviews and interactions more distinct.

Within the different contexts in the field, being positioned by the informants (or positioning myself) as an insider has strengthened the researcher-researched relationship and allowed access to markets that I would not necessarily have. Being an insider is dependent on the specific interactions, the actors involved and the resources at stake. Nonetheless, being positioned (or positioning myself) as an outsider has enabled the informants and I to engage dialogically with the research, applying their lay knowledge to my academic vocabulary. Although being an outsider did not offer a guarantee of neutrality, it has enabled me to separate out my ethnolinguistic identity in the field from my researcher identity in the field. This separation made me aware of my experiences, personal and historical trajectories, feelings, opinions, bias and beliefs etc. in attending to the research project.

The next section continues with declarations of my positionality in the field. This is to alert readers of the possibility of bias in my analysis and for them to be less trusting in the value-neutrality of an ethnographic qualitative research project.
3.4.2 Researcher reflexivity in ethnography

It is relevant to conclude this chapter by situating my orientation and position in this research. In many aspects, this research is motivated by my attempts to understand the ways I negotiated being a Malay/Muslim growing up in Singapore.

I am a post-graduate student whose interest is in exploring the intersections of language and identity, particularly in minority and marginalised communities. I am the by-product of the State’s early bilingual education policy in which my mother tongue was taught as the ‘second language’, and English as the ‘first language’. Like many Singaporeans my age, when asked about my first language, I find it difficult to respond. The eldest son of a working class Malay/Muslim family whose parents completed secondary school, I was raised in a time when the State managed the racial composition of those living in my neighbourhood. Then, my mother was a factory worker and my father was in the military. Until I was thirteen, I grew up in a two-bedroom HDB flat with my parents, two younger siblings and two uncles. My father placed high importance in education – he tutored his children and a few of my cousins in English in the home kitchen almost everyday after the maghrib (dusk) prayers. For seven years before embarking on this research, I was a teacher in government schools. This was when I became quite aware of the acute educational and socio-economic marginality of my Malay/Muslim community.

As a Malay/Muslim adult and looking at my experiences growing up in Singapore, I recognise the dominant discourses that I have grown up with and the inherited ideologies of my ethnolinguistic market. However, what have I internalised such that the realisation of ethnic marginality only emerged when I entered into adulthood? What does it mean to be tertiary educated when the Malay/Muslim market is underrepresented in educational achievements? Does a lack of proficiency
and use of the mother tongue affect a person’s Chinese-/Malay-/Indian-ness? Why did I have to attend religious and Qur’an recitation classes? If I was neither proficient in Bahasa Melayu nor English, did I straddle between two identities? What is my first language? Why was I called a ‘banana’ in primary school?

Because I am a Malay/Muslim, to a certain extent my key informants and I have shared lived experiences. Thus, the questions that I asked my informants were those which I have thought about myself. These questions, experiences and practices influence the way I make sense of Malay/Muslim habitus and my understandings of the dominant discourses that operate within the Malay/Muslim market.

3.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have attempted to make clear the relationship between my theoretical framework and the ethnographically informed qualitative research methodology. Investigating the unequal power relations that position certain social actors and their performances in the Malay/Muslim market in contemporary Singapore requires critical reflection of my own positioning. Fundamentally, the methodology demands a reflexive approach in which I have to be aware of my own orientations and positionings while I contextualise and deconstruct my key informants’ competing and complex identity processes over the duration of fieldwork. Reflexivity is at the core of ethnographic approaches and social sciences that shape critical sociolinguistics research. It is widely understood that those researching social issues are influenced inevitably by their own socialisation experiences, political affiliations and inclinations, as well as moral tendencies and prejudices. The list of issues that influence the ethnographers’ relationships with and within any given society is not exhaustive.
As Gramsci (1985:183) writes, “every time the question of language surfaces [in society], in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore”. Thus, observing language through the theoretical concepts of agency, habitus, resources, legitimacy, structure and essentialisation assist to unpack the tangled web of social and political realities that are revealed not only by letting people tell their own lived experiences, but how the processes they described unfold over time.
CHAPTER FOUR

Negotiating and Investing Malay/Muslim-ness in the National Space

INTRODUCTION

The construction of national identity in Singapore involves an affiliation with a politically defined ‘Singaporean’ identity and membership in a linguistically and culturally ascribed ethnic group. The nationalist logic is based on the State’s language ideology in its commitment to multiculturalism and possibly, as a pre-emptive measure of inter-ethnic conflict (Wee 2006). This chapter examines investments of Malay/Muslim-ness within understandings of national identity and how this is facilitated or constrained by ideologies of language. More specifically, these questions of investments and discursive negotiations are explored through the key informants’ habitus and their perspectives on the Malay/Muslim market they have inherited from the generations before them.

Following Bourdieu’s economic theory of linguistic exchanges and that agency is limited by the discursive resources available, I deconstruct the key informants’ references of self in order to reveal the symbolic and material resources that position these actors within particular social structures in Singapore. Of interest is how these actors situate their references of self as emerging from perceived social, economic and political value of particular languages. The salience of language is key and highlights the significance of language practice as a reflexive performance in their investment of Malay/Muslim-ness in the national space.

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Taking into consideration that the discourses of national identity can be both constructed and constitutive, it is relevant to problematise and question the order of social relations and associated language practices arising from the State’s language ideology. How do the key informants speak of the constraints of a national identity? How does the State’s multiculturalist policy inform the informants’ negotiation of their identity? These issues will be explored in Section 4.1.

Theoretically, the degree to which individuals described themselves as members of an ethnolinguistic group is critical to the understanding of their language attitudes (cited in Gudykunst and Schmidt 1987). Thus, throughout this chapter, it will be important to understand the investments in and the negotiations of Malay/Muslim-ness against a backdrop of the ethnolinguistic social structuration and the State’s linguistic instrumentalism as discussed in the previous chapter.

4.1 Conceptualising structuration

After the first week of observing and interacting with the four key informants, we talked broadly about our experiences in Singapore. Central to the exercise on describing their selves in the national space, I requested that the informants share experiences that involved the use of language in social contexts. Almost all the informants’ explored how they managed tensions living as an indigenous minority and in which the privileged position of Mandarin and the preferential treatment Mandarin-speakers receive in Singapore Excerpt (1) on page 132, is an example of ethnolinguistic structuration in dominant discourse experienced by Sudin:
Excerpt (1)

SUDIN: You have to know that when in the papers, if the job wants someone who is bilingual, that means English and Mandarin. not English and Malay or English and Tamil. I called up to check. It’s like, um, when I think about this, I get really annoyed, so angry. You feel like, how am I going to find work when I can’t speak Mandarin? Weird sometimes that companies that don’t do business with China also want people who can speak Mandarin. Oh, and the shitty thing is sometimes they won’t specifically put down in the ad. You find this out when you actually go for interview.

In excerpt (1), the focus of Sudin’s experience is the issue of employment. He voiced his concerns and questioned the use of the linguistic marker ‘bilingual’ in Singapore in the local newspapers. Here, he suggested the lack of transparency in regard to the language requirement criteria for jobs advertised. Sudin, who is a confident English speaker, addressed his real life anxiety over what lies ahead due to his inability to speak Mandarin: ‘You feel like, how am I going to find work when I can’t speak Mandarin, that kind of thing, you know?’ Here, he has tied restricted access to economic opportunities and could possibly limit his social mobility as a non-Mandarin speaker.

As a consequence of Mandarin being viewed as a resource for economic advancement in Singapore, the State’s pragmatic linguistic instrumentalism compromises the relationship of parity across the three official mother tongues (Wee 2003) and is felt the Malay/Muslim market. The preferential treatment of language in Singapore is not a recent phenomenon as evidenced in the State’s decision to include English in Singapore’s linguistic ecology. However, English is

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42 Researcher’s note: The preference for English-Mandarin candidates is a prevalent feature in advertisements that do indicate the language requirement criteria.
currently commonplace in Singapore in which all Singaporeans have access to. Its value as a commercial currency is not as high as it used to be.

On the other hand, the economic currency placed on Mandarin is a direct reaction to the Republic of China’s progresses and the mutual benefits that Singapore acquires from this partnership. Sudin’s concerns may possibly explain current figures that indicate a rise in Mandarin-use of 0.9 per cent (see Table 2.1 in Chapter Two). When these numbers are put alongside each other, the increase in Mandarin-use among Malay/Muslims and correspondingly, the decline in Bahasa Melayu-use as a home language is the most significant.

Consequently, the significant drop in Bahasa Melayu has created some concerns among the Malay intelligentsia, as Bahasa Melayu is not only used widely as a means of communication within the Malay community, it is further “interwoven with Malay society” and “regarded as the core element in cultural identification” (Kassim 2008). On the other hand, there are commentators who are not particularly concerned that the shift in English-use as a home language in many Malay/Muslim households will effect language loss. According to them, Bahasa Melayu is still strong, extensively used among its speakers and as a cultural resource for maintaining family values and religious instructions (Aman 2009; Rahim 2009b).

As a non-Mandarin-speaker, Aziz shared a more detailed and complex experience in excerpt (2) below. More precisely, Aziz described his awareness of structuration informed his behaviour towards a co-participant in interaction:

Excerpt (2)

AZIZ: I can be honest, I feel sometimes like outsider in my own country. Singapore is supposed to be multicultural, multilingual, what I hear around me is Mandarin. sometimes, not even English. one time, at NTUC, I went to the cashier, she told me the
price in Chinese, I went ‘what?’ I don’t understand Chinese. she got annoyed that I can’t speak Chinese. I mean, what the fuck? but I more pissed than her. she asked why I cannot speak Chinese. she said in Chinese. I mean Mandarin. I can understand Mandarin a bit lah, and can speak a bit. I learnt from my Chinese friends. you know like that, I can actually reply in Mandarin to her. but what for? what the hell? expect me to speak in Mandarin when she the one who should be talking in English. I told her off. I told her off in Malay. I told her ‘aku bukan orang Cina lah. kau bodoh ke apa?’ (I’m not Chinese. are you stupid?) then I just left. I know it’s not nice to do that but so angry.

In excerpt (2), Aziz’s experience can be divided into three parts. In the first part, Aziz’s ‘outsider in my own country’ provides an orientation of identity being outside of a national space. Aziz was aware of his marginality within the dominant discourse and central to this is that the Singapore national identity is metonymic with Mandarin-speakers: ‘what I hear around me Mandarin’. In the second part of the excerpt, Aziz contextualised the dominant discourse through telling of an experience in which a Mandarin-speaking supermarket cashier has created conflict by not using the local lingua franca, English, in the interaction: ‘she the one who should be talking in English’. Aziz may have perceived that the cashier has not only abandoned the notion of multiculturalism by not using English, she has subsequently privileged the dominant Chinese/Mandarin-speaking identity. The third part of excerpt (2) is concerned with constructing difference and contesting the discourse. Here, Aziz’s response in Bahasa Melayu: ‘aku bukan orang Cina lah, kau bodoh ke apa?’ foregrounded his identity as a Bahasa Melayu speaker.

In excerpt (2), Aziz described his experience as ‘one of the most uncomfortable in my life but I have to do it. I cannot stand it anymore’. Usually mild-mannered and always affable, Aziz perceived the imposition of Mandarin onto those
who are not Chinese nor Mandarin-speaking as a form of frustration and conflict. Here, he articulated a sense of displacement as a person who was born in Singapore and has observed changes in the linguistic ecology arising from the State’s hierarchical language treatment of the three official mother tongues.

In light of the discussions of ethnic representations in the dominant discourse, excerpt (3) is an example where Samad had to negotiate the Malay cultural-weakness orthodoxy (Rahim 2001; Li 1989) through inclusionary and exclusionary strategies. Excerpt (3) is a self-recording between Samad, Sanjit and Daniel from the makan-makan collective:

**Excerpt (3)**

1. SANJIT: How come not many Malays huh?
2. DANIEL: Because Malays lazy *mah* [laughs]
3. SAMAD: Bloody hell. I'm not lazy, okay. and not all Malays lazy
4. *lah*, you people think we lazy. I work my ass off okay. you
5. guys not in there also what. dare to say some more.
6. DANIEL: *Aiya*, play-play only. no need to get hot. we know
7. you not lazy *lah* [laughs]

In this excerpt, Samad and his peers were reading through a list of students’ names and their achievements. As this was a self-recording, I was not able to establish the nature of these achievements (e.g. academic, artistic, sporting, or others). Sanjit (who is of Indian parentage) commented on the lack of Malay representation in the list of achievers: Daniel’s response in line 2 showed that the lazy-stereotype of the Malays is evident in the Singapore discourse. Samad seemed affected by his Daniel's response and reacted by situating a position that excluded him from the
unfavourable identity association by using the personal pronoun ‘I’m not lazy’ and ‘not all Malays’ (line 3). The latter implying that Samad positioned his self as not belonging to the lazy-Malay category.

Paradoxically, in line 4 of excerpt (4), Samad’s use of ‘we’ did not explicitly contest the way the Malay/Muslim stereotype was applied to his identity when he said: ‘you people think we lazy’. Further, his use of ‘you people’ and ‘we’ shows the dichotomous perceptions of others and self. In this regard, Samad had shifted his identity away from the periphery while still acknowledging and not dismissing the negative representations in the Malay/Muslim market.

Excerpts (1) - (3) reveal the discriminatory practices the key informants experienced in their habitus. The context of marginalisation creates space where these informants can contest ascribed national or ethnolinguistic identities applied to them as they became aware of the structuration in their Malay/Muslim market. In the analysis sections that follow, I examine informants’ investment in their Malay/Muslim-ness with references to self, others and within the national space.

4.2 Constructing the Singaporean identity

When asked to describe his identity along the State’s ascribed categories, Samad from the makan-makan collective simply identified himself as ‘Singaporean’. Samad showed ambivalence to the State’s multicultural policy that stipulated the notion of race as a signifier for defining his identity. He questioned: ‘I don’t get it. Why are we still identifying ourselves by race, when isn’t it if you are born in Singapore means you are Singaporean?’
Using the spatial ‘here’, Samad constructs an identity based on the location of his birth. Samad also related his identity in the national space to familial relations within the ‘here’ reference in excerpt (4) below:

**Excerpt (4)**

Why I call myself Singaporean, not Malay? because I come from Singapore mah. Singapore is where I was born, my family is here, friends, my grandparents and also their grandparents, was from here. I'm not from somewhere else. we use English at home, like English mix with Malay, with my grandparents not like proper English, but still English, aiyah don’t know how to explain.

In the excerpt above, Samad’s use of ‘here’ and ‘somewhere else’ creates a discourse sameness and difference. The ‘here’ affiliates his identity with the physical location he was brought up in and living in such a space. There are two locations that emerge from his description: Singapore as a birthplace and his home. Importantly, in excerpt (4), Samad articulated the dominant language that he used at home as having an effect on his identity, thus laying the groundwork to support location as a discursive space.

In excerpt (4), Samad made coherent his language use to his reference of self: ‘I think since young I can only remember that I only use English with my parents’. Samad showed frustration in his inability to describe the home variety: ‘aiyah, don’t know how to explain’.

In an earlier one-on-one interview, Samad rationalised his preference to use English and infrequent use of Bahasa Melayu when he explained: ‘English is the national language, that is why every Singaporean must speak, must know how to speak it’. The contradiction in Samad’s statement lies in the fact that though English
is one of Singapore’s four official languages and used in education, law and commerce, English is not Singapore’s national language. The revised 1999 Constitution of the Republic of Singapore stipulated that Bahasa Melayu is the national language (Part XII, Section 153A (2)) of the nation-state, in part recognising the ‘special position’ of the Malays as the indigenous people of the country (see Chapter Two). The State’s successful mobilisation exercise of English aimed at providing access for global and socio-economic mobility to Singaporeans, might be argued, has framed the status of the language as the language of the nation (Alsagoff 2010).

Excerpt (4.1) shows the connection of self to the social groups Samad was part of in describing his identity as ‘Singaporean’. In the excerpt, Samad shared that the majority of his friends were from other ethnic groups, especially the ones who were close to him:

**Excerpt (4.1)**

I can say ninety per cent of my friends are not Malays, I got some _loh_, but not close, the close ones from my secondary school, also I think only four. I’m not _mengada-ngada_ (arrogant) and not that I only want to make friend with other races only, since young like that already, cannot help it. I think also comes from my family, my parents have many friends who are not Malay, they come to our house to _makan_ (have meals), and [con’t] we go to their house for Chinese New Year _loh_, Christmas _loh_, also like, maybe like, my parents want me to know more about other people, how they live, like that.

In the field, Samad belonged to a group of six close friends who formed the _makan-makan collective_ (see group description in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.1(iv)). As Samad was the only Malay/Muslim in the group, the other members would have to
communicate with each other in English. The colloquial Singlish was the dominant variety used by the *makan-makan collective* in the field. In excerpt (5), Samad said that he was not ‘mengada-ada’ (arrogant) for not having more friends who were non-Malay/Muslims. He suggested that his upbringing informed his socialisation and social groups.

In our frequent discussions pertaining to his identity, Samad did not seem to invest much in his Malay/Muslim-ness. In the field, Samad downplayed his ethnic identity by stressing that he lacked knowledge when it came to the Malay cultural discourse. Samad seemed to be promoting the unifying capacity of the State’s ideology of multiculturalism. This was through his interactions with culturally and linguistically distinct social groups and the use of Singlish that denoted “group membership and the framing and positioning of community identity” (Alsagoff 2010:344). By positioning his identity with the State’s ideology of multiculturalism, Samad shifted the Malay/Muslim structuration in the dominant discourse to the periphery, making it less significant in his habitus.

However, in Singapore’s context where the person’s race is a repository of ethnic culture, language and religion, Samad’s language choice and his lack of alignment to his ethnolinguistic market may also contest the State’s logic of ethnicised and ascribed classification.

Further, by telling others that he was ‘Singaporean’, Samad foreclosed the avenues of interpretation and social-value allocation that may emerge from preconceived essentialist perceptions of Malay/Muslim-ness. In this case, Samad has afforded himself more freedom to construct who he wanted to be, while at the same time expressing his identity along nationalist lines.
4.3 Constructing the Malay Identity

In the Singaporean multicultural framework in which racial ascriptions inform every aspect of the individual and correspond to core characteristics such as culture, language and religion (for some groups), Ramlee from the chill threesome seemed to embody the Malay adage bahasa menunjukkan bangsa (one’s language is a reflection of his ethnicity) as he constructed his identity as: ‘I think and see myself as Malay’. Based on several observations made in the field and through individual interviews, it can be assumed that Ramlee would be the informant to be most invested in Malay/Muslim-ness compared to the other Malay/Muslim informants in the field. In particular, Ramlee had sound knowledge of Malay culture and traditions and was comfortable interacting in Bahasa Melayu. Excerpt (5) below explains this:

Excerpt (5)

If someone asks me what I am, I say Malay, my IC put Malay. I speak Malay at home and outside with Malay friends. not so much with Aziz and Sudin. but not many will ask me if I am Malay in Singapore, Singaporeans know I’m Malay, my skin, my face, when I speak, tak payah nak tanya, dia orang dah tahu (even without asking, others would know). only people not from Singapore will ask me what I am, which is not often loh.

According to Ramlee, Malay was his ascribed identity as stipulated in his identity card (IC), his physical appearance, and the language that he used at home and with others whom he positioned to belong to his ethnicity. In the extract, he highlighted that the local Singaporeans would be able to identify him as Malay based on distinct features of the ethnic group; ‘tak payah nak tanya, dia orang dah tahu’ (even without asking, others would know). Ramlee’s Malay/Muslim market is arguably in line with
Singapore’s discourse of institutionalised multiculturalism which rigidly defines an identity as determined by patriarchal descent.

In excerpt (5.1), Ramlee argued that the constant iteration of racial classifications in dominant discourse made it difficult for him to develop a national identity that would go beyond ethnic considerations:

**Excerpt (5.1)**

Every time when we fill up forms, we need to fill in our race. like Malay, Chinese, Indian, others, like that, we can’t just put Singaporean. there’s the choice to put Singaporean, PR [permanent resident] or foreigners and also after that, must put what race you are. the government sure have reasons for making us into groups, maybe so we know our history, to know who we are, or language or culture, maybe because of political, maybe, I don’t really know.

In our discussions on Malay culture, Ramlee saw the relevance of some cultural practices that emphasised respect for elders and others, and the maintenance of art forms. However, in excerpt (5.2), Ramlee drew the line when it came to customary practices and traditions that he considered were excessive and those that he deemed as unnecessary:

**Excerpt (5.2)**

*Bila orang kahwin, selalu nak lebih, tak perlu tu semua, ala-kadar dah bagus, lebih baik jimat for a rainy day. Kalau aku kawin nanti, aku nak buat kecil-kecil aja. I don’t want to be like them yang suka membazir. (When there is a wedding, there’s always those who want to outdo each other, that is not important, it is better to keep it simple, it is better to save for a rainy day. if I were*
to get married in future, I want to make it a small affair. I don’t want to be like those who indulge in excessiveness.)

Ramlee positioned his identity as Malay, in excerpt (5.1), he counterpointed stereotypical representations of those in his community ‘yang suka membazir’ (those who indulge in excessiveness). In excerpt (5.2), Ramlee excluded his identity from a Malay-stereotype of excess; planning his wedding by ‘buat kecil-kecil aja’ (make it a small affair) and ‘ala-kadar lebih bagus’ (it is better to keep it simple). Thus, he challenged the dominant discourse of Malay/Muslim representations. His affiliation with an ethnic identity was, above all else, concerned with the preservation, maintenance and use of Bahasa Melayu. In excerpt (5.3) he articulated:

Excerpt (5.3)

If you take the language away from Melayu, what do you have? Of course you have the traditions and customs but they come from many ways, Hindu customs, Arab culture, you know like that.

In the excerpt above, Ramlee articulated that Bahasa Melayu was the core in his habitus and illustrated the importance he placed on the language by comparing it with the customs and traditions practiced by his ethnic group. He seemed to suggest that Bahasa Melayu did not originate from a foreign origin unlike the Malay traditions and customs had originated from other racial/ethnic communities and/or religions. In a separate interview, although Ramlee considered himself as a speaker of standard Bahasa Melayu, he was aware that in his social interactions with peers, he used more English. He was unperturbed, however, as Bahasa Melayu was a constant in his family.
In the previous Chapter Three (Section 3.3.1(iii)), Ramlee extended his identity to include a non-ascribed ethnolinguistic identity, one that belonged to his forefathers. He described his identity belonging to the Javanese community. Ramlee’s alignment to the Javanese identity aligned to his knowledge of ‘Jawa (Javanese) that I use with my nenek (grandmother)’. Here, the term ‘Jawa’ describes the language of the Javanese, which Ramlee used with his grandmother. More significantly, Ramlee’s habitus that included the language he used with his grandmother indicated the salience of that language in making sense of his self. Like some elderly Malays in Singapore, Ramlee’s grandmother was able to speak both the ascribed language and her regional-mother tongue as she would have direct lineage to the Indonesian ethnic group through her parents. Though it is spoken in Central, East and West Java and Malaysia, there are not many in Singapore who can converse in the language. That Jawa is passed down orally through the generations, explains the language loss amongst its younger speakers in Singapore.

Ramlee’s identification with a regional-ethnolinguistic identity demonstrated the negotiability of identity using the spatial referent within the discursive spaces of place and familial relationships. Further, there may be a symbolic capital to be gained by adhering to the dominant discourse’s expectations of the Malay/Muslim home. That is, creating a space where Bahasa Melayu and/or regional dialects is used – at least when interacting with older family members). In Ramlee’s case, intergenerational conflict could possibly be minimised by his ability to speak Bahasa Melayu and Javanese. Nonetheless, Ramlee realised that his ability to converse in Javanese with his grandmother has its limitations due to his proficiency.

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43 The Javanese is an ethnic group from the islands of Java in Indonesia. The Javanese were one of the earliest Malay ethnic migrants who came during pre- and post-colonisation. Although ‘Jawa’ has been traditionally written in the Javanese script, it is today generally written in Arabic and Roman scripts.
Furthermore, the language was only used with this grandmother and not as a primary home language.

Ramlee did not see investing in two related ethnic identities as conflicting nor confusing. He situated his Malay/Muslim-ness within a much broader frame of reference as ‘Malay’, an ascribed identity he shared with the Malay community in Singapore. This identity was used as a means to categorise himself in opposition to others from different ethnicities. This clearly resonates with the State’s ethnic management policies that homogenise inter- and intra-ethnic variants in public-state discourses. Ramlee’s Javanese regional-ethnic identity was negotiated in private spaces between those with whom he had familial and more intimate relationships and emphasised the symbolic capital of regional dialects to negotiate public-private space and collective-intimate identities. Thus, within his private spaces with family and peer group (of the same ethnicity), language plays a defining role in the articulation of ethnicity.

4.4 Negotiations of hyphenated identities

In a different interview session, key informants described their identities in relation to the State’s ascribed identity classifications. Officially, these categories refer to the generic terms used by the State to categorise persons in Singapore (e.g. Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian and Others). These identity-classifications are based on the father’s descent. Post-2010, those who are from mixed race parentage can include both their parents’ descent on their identification card (e.g. Swedish-Indian, Chinese-
German, Malay-Chinese etc.). Excerpt (6) illustrates Aziz’s and Sudin’s exploration to describe their identity options outside the State’s rigid ascriptions:

Excerpt (6)

1. AZIZ: only choose Singaporean or Malay? cannot choose like Singaporean and Malay like that?
2. SUDIN: if we choose only Malay, then what if I feel like I don’t know my culture as much. so how can I identify myself as Malay, this is like an example. I know I’m Malay but somehow, I cannot relate to the Malay identity. but I know I’m not ang moh (literally means ‘red hair’ in Hokkien to indicate a Caucasian) also [laughter]. So very susah (colloquial: extremely difficult)
3. AZIZ: I think many people like us see ourselves like fifty fifty. many young people I mean. I cannot say for the older people maybe they see differently from us
4. SUDIN: some older people too
5. AZIZ: maybe. but the thing is young people now are different from young people, like 20 years ago. we think differently, they think differently

In excerpt (6), Sudin showed apprehension in wholly submitting to a single identifiable collective identity. In lines 3-6, he acknowledged the identity ascribed to him in official discourse, however, questioned its accuracy and appropriation in relation to his degree of affiliation to the group and its culture. He found it

44 The State has recently permitted the double-barrelled identification to be reflected in a person’s birth certificate only until recently (The Straits Times, 30 December 2010).
challenging in making his identity coherent but clearly stated that he did not aspire to be something he was not: ‘I know I’m not ang moh’ (line 7). Sudin negotiated a space of inclusion: ‘I know I’m Malay’ (line 5) and exclusion: ‘I cannot relate to the Malay identity’ (line 6) in describing his identity.

What is significant in excerpt (6), is the informants’ use of referents ‘we’ and ‘us’: ‘if we choose only Malay’ (line 3); ‘people like us see ourselves as fifty fifty’ (line 10); ‘maybe they see differently from us’ (line12); ‘we think differently’ (line 15). In using the references to self and other in the discourse of national space, Aziz and Sudin not only showed agency in contesting homogeneous classifications through the use of identity labels, they offered other ways to construct identities (Bhabha 2007). Excerpt (6) further shows that the construction of identity is a relational process that always involves dialogue with self and others (Bakhtin 1981) and through the researcher-collaborator dialogic, discursive identity work was apparent and constantly negotiated by informants.

It is noteworthy that at the time the interview in excerpt (6) was conducted, hyphenated classifications such as ‘Singaporean and Malay’ or ‘Malay and Singaporean as suggested by Aziz and Sudin are not used in official discourse. However, in the dominant discourse (and unofficially) Singaporeans often identify themselves outside the ascribed categories. Singaporeans may describe their identity with a doubled-barrelled national-ethnic or ethnic-national formulations. There are also other formulations such as Chinlay (Chinese and Malay) and Chindian (Chinese and Indian). The dissecting of self though appears to lead to non-essentialised understandings of identity, and possibly, hybridity could also be problematic in its coherence and stability (Farrell 2008).
4.4.1 Constructing the Malay-Singaporean identity

Growing up in a small family of four, Aziz used Bahasa Melayu and English with different parents; he uses his mother tongue with his father and converses mostly in English with his mother. Aziz was not able to recall the conditions that resulted in the linguistic arrangement in the home. Aziz observed that as he grew older, he faced some challenges in maintaining the arrangement: ‘I used to speak good Malay with my father, but now I mix a lot with English. With my mother, not that difficult’ (see Aziz’s biographical description in Section 3.3.1(ii)).

When asked to describe his identity, Aziz identified himself with ‘Malay-Singaporean’. Aziz’s placement of his ‘Malay’ in the hyphenated construction suggests a higher investment in his Malay/Muslim-ness compared to the ‘Singaporean’ constituent, thus reinforcing the State’s inclusiveness and accommodating nature of multiculturalism (Velayutham 2007). It can be argued that Aziz’s ‘Malay-Singaporean’ identity is a consequence of maintaining an institutionalised ethnic identity as the dominant aspect and that being Singaporean is secondary. In this regard, ethnicity and nationality are maintained as distinct and separate entities, although the identity is constructed in hyphenation.

Aziz made coherent his articulation of a hyphenated identity not only through his ethnicity and birthplace, but also his linguistic behaviour. In the following excerpt (7) on page 148, Aziz was aware that his linguistic and ethnic identities were mutually exclusive. However, at the same time he noted recognisable constraints in his code choice with selected and specific groups; he used one language with his father and older relatives and another with his peers:
Excerpt (7)

I don’t know how to explain this correctly, actually, I use, I use more English than Malay. I think I’m able to express myself better in English. what do you think? um, I can write well in Malay but I don’t speak it well. sometimes, like rojak. I don’t normally think when and why I use English. I do use Malay with my father and some of my relatives. the older ones. us cousins and my brother, we speak in English. ok lah, mix English and Malay most times.

In the field, I observed that Aziz constantly style switched between English and Bahasa Melayu. In excerpt (7), Aziz used the metaphor ‘rojak’ (an Malay dish equivalent to a salad folded in peanut sauce) to describe his linguistic behaviour of witching between the two languages. Almost by definition, Aziz’s code switching allowed him to belong to two types of identities simultaneously; an ethnic identity and a national identity.

However, in excerpt (7.1) below shows that Aziz has yet to make coherent the construction of his Malay-Singaporean identity:

Excerpt (7.1)

I am proud of my language. it is not that I am not. I am proud to be Malay because we are getting better and better. but as I said, I prefer to use English. I can’t explain it, um, I mean, Malay is my identity, so I have to be able to use Malay, right? how can you say that you are Malay but you can’t speak Malay, right?

Aziz’s response in the above extract is an example to show that ideologies of language are deeply implicated in the creation of a nationalist ideology. This ideology demands that his Malay/Muslim-ness is dependent on whether he can speak Bahasa
Melayu. In excerpt (7.2) below, Aziz explained further why he described his self as Malay-Singaporean:

**Excerpt (7.2)**

1. AZIZ: there are many Malays you know. I mean different kinds. Malaysia, Indonesia
2. SUDIN: Brunei
3. AZIZ: even in Singapore got different kinds of Malays. like boyan. [laughs] you boyan right?
4. RS: my father is
5. AZIZ: ya. got bugis *lah*, got jawa *lah*. like that. but even when we have different kinds of Malays in Singapore,
6. RS: when we have different kinds of Malays in Singapore,
7. SUDIN: ya
8. AZIZ: like. like they how they look like. also speak Malay differently and English differently
9. RAMLEE: *betul tu* (that’s right)
10. RS: are they really that different?
11. AZIZ: very obvious

It was interesting to observe in excerpt (7.2) Aziz’s varying levels of inclusionary/exclusionary strategies. In line 1, Aziz created a discourse of difference: ‘there are different kinds of Malays you know’ by using geographical reference to create differentiation between the Malays in Singapore from those who identify as Malays residing in Malaysia and Indonesia (lines 1 and 2). Sudin affirmed this difference by including the Malays residing in Brunei (line 3). Aziz presented three
conditions for this difference in lines 12 and 13. Two of the exclusions alluded to differences between the language features used by Malays who do not reside in Singapore: ‘also speak Malay differently and English differently’. This is an example of Aziz articulating ethnolinguistic rivalry based on divisions along essentialised markets (i.e. linguistic, political, economic, social etc.).

Aziz then acknowledged variations in the Malay identity in Singapore in line 8: ‘we have different kinds of Malays in Singapore’ by identifying regional-ethnic based classifications such as Bugis, Boyan and Jawa (lines 4 and 7). Yet at the same time, he homogenised these groups through the use of pronoun ‘we’ in line 9: ‘we are still the same’. In this case, Aziz has positioned regional-ethnolinguistic identities with ethnolinguistic solidary based on their habitus (i.e. similar experiences living in Singapore).

In the subsequent turns in excerpt (7.2) in response to Aziz’s exclusionary conditions, Sudin’s affirmation in line 11 and Ramlee’s ‘betul tu’ (that is right) in line 14, show that as individuals and collectively, the chill threesome members agreed that speakers of Bahasa Melayu can be differentiated based on the country of origin.

4.4.2 Constructing the Singapore-Malay identity

When Sudin was asked what his response would be if someone enquired about where he was from, his reply was: ‘I’ll tell them that I’m Singaporean-Malay’. By the hyphenated identity, Sudin constructed both a Singaporean identity and an ethnic one. Unlike Aziz who constructed a ‘Malay-Singaporean’ identity in Section 4.4.1, Sudin emphasised the national aspect of his hyphenated identity as more dominant. According to Sudin, it was neither important for him to be a Singaporean nor a Malay however, he acknowledged the usefulness in discussing the two constituents of
his identity. This duality of his identity further distinguished Sudin from other ethnicities, for example, Singaporean-Chinese, Singaporean-Indian etc. More significantly, Sudin contested and rejected the traditional diasporic nationalities of Singaporeans (Velayutham 2007).

Amongst all the key informants, Sudin was expressive and aware of his identity, perceptions of his ascribed ethnic identity in dominant discourse and the language attached to it. When asked to elaborate on his identity against the background of the State’s ethnic classification, he expressed concern that the ascribed categories are ‘labels to make sure that you know who you are in Singapore. Malay and Indians are minorities’.

As Sudin was growing up, his parents stressed the importance of English as a socio-economic resource. And though his parents might not have modelled standard English, it was the primary home language. Sudin did well in English Language in secondary school. Sudin hardly ever switched between English and Bahasa Melayu in the field unlike the other informants in the chill threesome group. In my observation of Sudin in the social space, he did use the colloquial Singlish – when co-participants used the variety extensively or when he wanted to animate his speech. Reflecting on his primary and secondary school experience, Sudin narrated:

Excerpt (8)

I didn’t really have many Malay friends in school. I think they avoided me because I’m different, I think I am different. The Malay friends that I have know that I prefer, always use English, so they have no problems with me, the newer friends and those who don’t know me well think I have issues with being a Malay, I don’t, and not my problem, I don’t need to explain to them, my parents kept stressing, over and over and over, it is important to speak proper English, so I can do well in school, so I can get a good job. I
think they knew that in Singapore, in order to go far, English is important. I think I agree with them.

From Sudin’s biographical description (in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.1(v)), as a consequence of his parents’ insistence on the importance of English, Sudin considered his English proficiency as a resource for future employment opportunities. This ideology assumes English as a form of capital that allows access and mobility. Conversely, Sudin seemed to have accepted the State’s policiespeak that discouraged Singlish as, presumably it interferes with the acquisition of the standard (Wee 2010). Though literature on Singlish has shown that it is an in-group solidarity register, it was interesting to observe that there was no tension between Sudin’s identity as a non-Singlish speaker in a friendship group whose other members constantly used the colloquial variety.

Consequently, Sudin’s lack of fluency in Bahasa Melayu functioned precisely as a tool of exclusion from other familial relationships like those of his extended family:

**Excerpt (8.1)**

If there are family gatherings, especially orang kahwin (weddings) or kenduri (religious feasts). I try to avoid them. I will come up with excuses not to follow my parents to the function. It’s so Melayu (Malay). if I go, I will usually keep to myself. I don’t normally talk to anyone. they say I’m anti-social.

Sudin’s use of ‘so Melayu’ hinted at criticism towards the Malay/Muslim community’s way of celebrating special events, specifically the familial gatherings such as weddings and religious feasts. He did not share in detail his aversion to Malay celebratory functions. It is noteworthy that a similar criticism in the form of ‘very Melayu’/‘very
Malay’ emerged in Chapter Six when it was used by different informants to distinguish their identity from a peer group of the same ethnicity. Conversely, from excerpt (8.2) below, it seemed that Sudin has reached some kind of awareness and acceptance that his lack of fluency in Bahasa Melayu has impacted on others’ perceptions of his Malay/Muslim-ness. However, he argued:

**Excerpt (8.2)**

This is who I am, but I also know that I don’t speak Malay well, um do not speak Malay much. but that does not mean I am not Malay. I know as Malay I need to use Malay, it is part of the Malay identity, but I’m not good at it and I can’t help it, I still feel that that does not exclude me to be Malay. I’m Muslim, so you see, this is what makes me Malay too.

As seen in the excerpt above, Sudin seemed to construct his identity in ways that challenged the dominant discourses of belonging to an ethnic group – an affiliation (and proficiency) to the mother tongue, culture and values. Sudin made a clear distinction between his ethnic and linguistic identities and that they were treated as mutually independent. In excerpt (8.2), Sudin connected his Malay/Muslim-ness to his religion, Islam: ‘I’m Muslim, so you see, this is what makes me Malay too’.

Nonetheless, for Sudin, his lack of proficiency in Bahasa Melayu was critical in the process of coherence to his ethnic identity. Thus, he frequently struggled with the issue of whether he should negotiate his conceived ethnic and linguistic identities. In excerpt (8.3) on page 154, Sudin showed some hesitations in negotiating his linguistic identity (RS is the researcher):
**Excerpt (8.3)**

1. RS: say if there is someone who insists on using Malay to speak to you, and although you replied in English, the person continues the conversation in Malay.
2. SUDIN: usually, even with my Malay friends, I will use English because they know me. I think. I don’t know. I think I will try to use Malay. it will make me feel uncomfortable. I don’t know. maybe I will try to use more Malay words, um. but maybe I don’t need to.

In excerpt (8.3), even though Sudin was aware of his limited proficiency in his mother tongue, he searched for a middle ground as he explored the possibility of using ‘more Malay words’ (line 7) to manage an interaction which saw the other co-participants’ insistence to use Bahasa Melayu in their interaction. However, by shifting his choice of code, he did not necessarily show a negotiation strategy or identity-marking. Excerpt (8.4) below is an example of how identities can be constructed, contested and/or even resisted in local conversations in discursive spaces:

**Excerpt (8.4)**

Sometimes I have to speak Malay to other Malays, like maybe when I order food at a Malay stall. if I don’t speak Malay, then they might think I am stupid or something, that I’m a Malay but cannot speak the language. or that I’m an arrogant arsehole and don’t want to use my own language. it is better to speak bad Malay to them then to not use Malay.
Sudin’s interaction in excerpt (8.4) was with an older Malay female whom he had no familial relations. Here, Sudin was caught in the tension of resisting negative representations of himself as ‘stupid’ and ‘an arrogant arsehole’ because of his linguistic identity. His comments resonate with the argument I have been made about actors’ agency, their capacity for social awareness and the need for contextualised understandings of their positioning of self.

4.5 Discussion and summary

There are many reasons why young people in Singapore choose to invest in particular identities in the national space. How do we then understand Malay/Muslim habitus in the national space? And, what do they tell us about how the discourses of Malay/Muslim-ness are constructed?

As the objective of this analysis is to gain an understanding of how positions to the nation are created discursively and what these positions are, where positioning is seen as meaning making and understanding of self and others, I have situated my informants in the context in which the dominant discourse expects them, as actors, to willingly and publicly affirm their Malay/Muslim-ness. This expectation is in order for the key informants to maintain its market and the positions of power that structure it. Subsequently, I have situated the key informants’ investment of their Malay/Muslim-ness within the context of competing discourses of unequal distribution of resources and social structuration.

The discussions in this chapter have also exposed some of the ideologies that make up the dominant discourses, the essentialising of ideologies related to multiculturalism, nationalism, of the English language and mother tongues and ideologies of class. These ideologies construct internal and external boundaries in
the Malay/Muslim market and the Malay/Muslim habitus.

The overarching theme in the informants’ reference of self is the impact of the State’s language ideology which emphasises linguistic differences and promotes linguistic instrumentalism. Where once all the mother tongues were primarily considered repositories of Asian values and relegated to the domains of tradition and culture, the shift to assign Mandarin with access to economic and technological resources and social mobility has affected the ideology that is multiculturalism. The State’s instrumentalism thus positions Mandarin, and English, with symbolic and instrumental power and pushes the other mother tongues to the periphery.

In this chapter, most of the informants’ agreed that the primordial essence for their ethnic identity is Bahasa Melayu, even though some of them were not particularly proficient in it. The varying treatments of Bahasa Melayu when compared to Mandarin have led Sudin from the chill threesome to question the socio-economic significance of Bahasa Melayu in the broader context of the Singapore society. Through the explanations shared by the informants, the discussions have shown an account of unequal distribution of linguistic, symbolic and material resources. This linguistic and cultural favouritism towards Mandarin has not only undermined the multiracial fabric of Singaporean society but also generated a level of “insecurity” and “defensiveness” within the ethnic minority communities (cited in Rahim 2009a). This insecurity in the discussion was reflected in Sudin’s concern that his inability to speak the mother tongue of the dominant majority in Singapore might affect his employment prospects. In Section 4.1, Sudin highlighted the biased use of the term ‘bilingual’ which privileged the competency in English and Mandarin. In the same section, Aziz’s response to a situation in which his ethnolinguistic identity was challenged reflected his defensiveness. Aziz’s use of Bahasa Melayu to indicate a kind
of resistance to Mandarin not only revealed that he had used the language to define (and amplify) his ethnicity but also the linguistic strategy to deal with situations where his ethnolinguistic identity was pushed to the periphery.

The State’s preferential treatment towards Mandarin and status given to English has subsequently influenced the informants’ attitudes towards and, assumptions and expectations of the socio-economic and political value attached to these languages when compared to Bahasa Melayu. Due to the commodification of these languages and the marginalisation of Bahasa Melayu and the Malay identity, the informants’ self-reference exercise showed their desires to position themselves and be positioned positively across and within the Singapore society by shifting (and negotiating) their ethnicised identity from the periphery to the centre.

By compartmentalising distinction between ethnicity as a politically disruptive loyalty, ethnicity as component of cultural basis for national identity, and ethnicity as a legitimate interest in association, the Singapore state has employed policies to change ethnic consciousness from an all-embracing racial affiliation of the type described by Brown (1994). The informants’ identity exercise in this chapter showed that the construction of identity when viewed on a personal, local level rather than from a more global, more abstract perspective, may be quite different, a point made by Shilling-Estes (2004) in her work on ethnic classifications in a rural tri-ethnic community in North Carolina. For example, Ramlee from the chill threesome self-identified as Malay, and salient to this identity was Bahasa Melayu. He stressed that the language was the core constituent of his identity and treated it with utmost significance when compared to the other constituents that made up his Malay/Muslim-ness such as tradition and festivities.
Ramlee, who viewed the official ethnic categories as symbolically political and that being labelled Malay means surrendering to an ascribed and ethnicised group, maintained the salience of Bahasa Melayu in his identity. In a linguistic environment where speakers of Bahasa Melayu are marginalised, Ramlee has positioned his ethnolinguistic identity and his ethnic identity as the centre. His strong affiliation to an ethnolinguistic identity corresponded with his positive attitude towards Bahasa Melayu: ‘if you take the language away from Melayu, what do you have?’ Ramlee was the only informant who consistently used Bahasa Melayu in our interactions and when he codeswitched between English and the mother tongue, Bahasa Melayu was the dominant.

Even though the State has homogenised the Malay identity by subsuming regional variations, Ramlee identified himself with a regional identity of his grandmother. In maintaining his habitus, Bahasa Melayu was the core constituent which was his home language and used with those whom he had familial relations with. Ramlee’s reference of self had articulated discourses of language (that a Malay/Muslim person should speak Bahasa Melayu). In line with the dominant discourse, investing in Malay/Muslim-ness means that parents are expected to affirm their Malay/Muslim-ness by passing on the learning of Islam to their children. Since all of my informants learned how to speak Bahasa Melayu at home with their family, it is not a surprise that the most common reason why they continue to speak it (at varying proficiencies) is for family solidarity (at varying levels). At the same time, Ramlee articulated a discourse of maintenance and protection in which he placed a high degree to the mother tongue and identity as intrinsic elements which deserve to be preserved.

Like Ramlee, Aziz articulated a discourse of maintenance towards Bahasa
Melayu: ‘I am proud of my language’. The contradiction was that although Bahasa Melayu is used to invest in his Malay/Muslim-ness, this does not apply to everyone and at all times. Aziz preferred to use English in his everyday interactions and questioned the quality of his mother tongue. More significantly, Aziz self-reference indicated no correlation between his attitude to the language and his preference to use English or his competency in the language. His positive attitude could possibly suggest the order of placement of Malay in his ‘Malay-Singaporean’ identity. Blommaert (1999) emphasises that an ideology does not imply total consensus or total homogeneity. On the contrary, ambiguity and contradiction may be key features of every ideology or dominant discourse, and an actor’s attachment to one depends on the specific interaction. The preservation of mother tongue in the local-global habitus can similarly be seen in the other informants’ choice of linguistic codes with the exception of Sudin, from the chill threesome.

Sudin’s habitus intersected with a number of contradictory discourses. One, he maintained a language discourse that Bahasa Melayu (or competency in the language) was an essential constituent in his ethnic identity: ‘I don’t speak Malay well…but that does not mean that I am not Malay’. At the same time, he challenged the dominant discourse that suggests there is an interdependent relationship between mother tongue and ethnic identity. Sudin’s has defined his habitus such that his ethnic identity did not require a mother tongue or competency in one. Due to his higher competency in English and shared ideology he had with his parents, Sudin’s market acknowledges the group of Malays who are competent in English, and with competency in this language, this group is seen as socially mobile.

Without a doubt, the most formative influence upon the processes of socialisation from a sociological perspective is social class. Although the informants
did not explicitly articulate the aspirations of social mobility in their self-references, there are some inferences that could be made from the discussions in this chapter. One of the strongest impressions I observed in data that could connect language attitude and aspirations of social mobility was the significance of the informants’ formative socialisation at home and the language ideology that emerged within their families. This attitude-aspiration correlation was most evident in Sudin’s habitus. The emphasis that Sudin’s parents placed on him to be proficient in English assumed the belief that English has socio-economic value and gives access to a more favourable social hierarchical position. This language ideology corresponds with the State’s notion of meritocracy as exemplified in Chapter Two, Section 2.2.1. However, Sudin has reorganised his habitus by including learning of Mandarin such that he could participate on a more equal standing in employment with other Mandarin speakers (excerpt 1).

With the exception of Ramlee and Samad, Aziz and Sudin self-referenced with hyphenated identities that acknowledged their multiple identities and privileged their agency. Sections 4.4 and 4.5 have shown that the reference to hyphenated identities did not necessarily or systematically indicate an assimilation of linguistic or cultural constituents, but may be one in which Malay/Muslim-ness and nationality are maintained as distinct and separate entities. The ethnic-national (Malay-Singaporean) and national-ethnic-national (Singaporean-Malay) identities articulated by Aziz and Sudin respectively seemed to use the two constituents as frames of reference.

In his ‘Malay-Singaporean’ identity, Aziz explained that the ‘Singaporean’ constituent in his identity referred to his locality in relation to the other Malays in the region thus, this excluded him from other groups of Bahasa Melayu speakers. It is noteworthy that Aziz’s self-referent would normally be understood in the opposite
way, that is, ‘Singaporean-Malay’ refers to a type of Malay while ‘Malay-Singaporean’ refers to a type of Singaporean. While Aziz acknowledged ‘Malay’ in his identity, he did not view Bahasa Melayu as exclusive to this identity. For this reason, it was clear that he had defined Malay/Muslim-ness that was not an assimilation of constituents, linguistically or otherwise. In Sudin’s case, his ‘Singaporean-Malay’ identity seemed to privilege his Singaporean-ness, and possibly attending to the State’s notion of multiculturalism. The order in which the ethnic and national constituent in the informants’ hyphenated identity indicated which was more significant/relevant in the discourse of maintenance, that is, which language has more symbolic value to their reference of self. The hyphenated identity thus indicated the possibility of arranging multiple identities according to a hierarchy of salience.

Establishing national-ethnic or ethnic-national hyphenated identities shows the extent to which nation-state identities have become entrenched in the rhetoric of many young Singaporeans who do not conform or want to conform to the management of their identities ascribed by the State. And, provide specification to the identity that can further be negotiated in social contexts for greater identity options. In this chapter, Aziz, Sudin and Samad were motivated to reorganise their habitus as belonging to broader and more inclusive classifications rather than simply as a member of a specific ethnolinguistic group.

From the discussions, I observed that what the informants valued was the negotiability of code choice in their self-references. As most of them used more English in socialisation, this negotiability is tied strongly to their use of Bahasa Melayu according to the situation or interactions they found themselves in. The negotiability in choosing between English and Bahasa Melayu interactions could be seen when Ramlee and Samad used their dominant language when interacting with different
groups of friends, Aziz’s selective use of the mother tongue when interacting with different family members, and Sudin’s use of Bahasa Melayu when ordering food from a Malay seller. The negotiation of code choice supports the argument that a person’s identity is multifaceted and the construction and negotiation involve some kind of performativity.

I have exercised much caution in interpreting the informants’ references of self. The understanding of the key informants’ selves can be understood as being affected by their personal lived experiences and socialisation. What I observed though, the self-references using the terms ‘Singaporean’, ‘Malay-Singaporean’ and ‘Singaporean-Malay’ not only moved away from the State-ascribed CMIO model, revealed complexities and challenges in the Malay/Muslim market. In particular, these informants were aware of their inherited ethnolinguistic market, one of which has been impacted by the State’s linguistic instrumentalism. These hegemonic practices have had a strong emotional resonance on the informants’ sense of self and being. Against the backdrop of inherited market, it is not surprising that the informants constantly reorganised their habitus such that it is more favourable in the competing markets.

As this chapter has argued, ideologies of language are deeply implicated in the creation of nationalist ideologies. The historical, political, economic, social and linguistic conditions behind the prevailing national identity form the basis of dominant discourses in key informants investing or not investing in the Malay/Muslim-ness. The nationalist logic dictates that Malay/Muslims speak Bahasa Melayu and that the same fixed and stable variety of the language.

In all its centrality of issues of personal identity as a site of language behaviour, some readers might have considered the discussions in this chapter banal and
mundane. I argue that among the banality and mundaneness, the language-self link revealed through the informants’ reference of self show the complexity and positionality of their identity experience that are further subjected to the mechanics of human agency. This chapter has foregrounded the discourses of the youth of an inherited market.

What I found peculiar in analysing the references of self in this chapter was that three of the informants did not produce declarative statements about being Muslim. Could this suggest non-contestation to the Malay/Muslim ascription that is projected onto them by the State in the dominant discourse? Indeed, literature in the study of the Malay identity shows the pervasiveness of Islamic affiliation in the lives of the Malay community in Singapore (e.g. Hussin 2005, 2008; Kadir 2006; Nasir et al. 2009). Is the religious identity really non-negotiable? Discussions on the informants’ investment in their Malay/Muslim-ness, specifically in articulating the religious constituent of their identity, will be explored in the subsequent Chapter Five.
CHAPTER FIVE

Affirmation of the Religious Identity

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four has examined how the four Malay/Muslim male youths constructed their national identities in contemporary Singapore. In Chapter Four, the informants and I jointly sought their negotiations of identity within the State's ascribed categorisations of national and/or ethnic identifications. I have suggested, based on the informants' perspectives, that they have interpreted and contested the conceptions of identity ascribed by the State within national-ethnic dichotomies. The informants' reference of self suggested that the constructions of their identities were a consequence of the Singapore state's adoption of multiculturalism as the national ideology. At the core of the discussion in the previous chapter is the claim that the idea of language can be mobilised to inform the complex processes of exclusion and the reorganisation of habitus.

Extending the discussion of the informants' socialisation in Singapore and the salience of language in investing in their Malay/Muslim-ness, Chapter Five specifically explores the informants' construction of their religious identity within the discourse of the State's policies governing belief and a shared linguistic ideology. The pervasiveness of religion in the informants' lives and as seen from the State's ethnicisation significantly warrants the exploration of the belonging and construction of being Muslim.
Just as there are myriad ways of being Malay/Muslim-ness, there are similarly many ways to construct belonging in Islam and asserting identification with the Islamic faith. Based on their interpretation and understanding of the religion, Section 5.3 explores how the informants have developed a rigid language ideology that informs their religious identity. I acknowledge the potentially controversial discussions in this section, however, I argue that the informants’ assumptions and expectations of the relationship between language and identity strongly influence their actions and their perceptions of being a Muslim. Section 5.4 extends my argument in the previous Chapter Four which asserts that it is often possible to arrange multiple identity according to a hierarchy of salience based on language. Aljunied (2010) observes the tendency that commitment to the Muslim identity implies an affective commitment to the ideology of the language symbolically attached to it. This Section situates the ideology within the larger debate regarding the integration of the Singapore Muslims into the Singapore society. In the concluding Section 5.5, I will raise some discrepancies in the informants’ linguistic ideology which bear similarities to the rhetoric of standardisation in questions involving what is appropriate and correct usage.

5.1 Investing in Muslim-ness

Then the discussion in this section explores to the informants’ descriptions of their religious identity. The informants’ reflexive process in describing their Muslim-ness commitment was integral in discussions toward an understanding of possible relationships between their religious commitments and religious identification.

As evident in Chapter Four, through the key informants’ self reference, only Sudin had explicitly articulated Islam as a constituent of his Malay/Muslim-ness. What
I thought to be a salient feature in all the informants’ habitus did not emerge in their self references. This is not to say that these informants did not have any attachment to Islam. On the contrary, there may be two possible explanations. Firstly, due to the State’s rigid and simplistic categorisation of ethnicity, the informants have embraced the Malay/Muslim ascription placed upon them. The State’s ethnicisation of the religion is informed by the fact that the Malays are the majority of those in Singapore who practise the belief.

Secondly, as suggested by Lapidus (2002), often the Muslim identity is rarely disparate from the other identities. This seems to be the feature of many Islamic societies such as the neighbouring countries Malaysia and most parts of Indonesia. In other words, the Islamic religion gives access to universal affiliation for those who practice the religion, whereas the secular identity provides the root for them to base themselves in their respective communities. Based on these explanations and relevant to the location of this study, Malay-ness and Muslim-ness are internally coherent. However, this chapter will argue that the two constituents do not share nor manifest the same attributes and characteristics. By focusing on the religious constituent in the Malay/Muslim identity could possibly elucidate discussions that may disrupt the ethnicised views of the Malay/Muslim habitus.

It is important in the subsequent discussions to attempt an analysis from a non-essentialist point of reference. In order to understand the behaviour and motivations of the chill threesome and Samad (from the makan-makan collective), it was necessary to divorce ethnicity from religion in the State’s Malay/Muslim ascription. In the initial stages of writing this chapter, it was challenging to separate issues of being a member of Islam from the issues of a marginalised group because of my deep-set thinking that understanding the Singapore Malay identity involves simultaneously examining the
core constituent of that identity such as Malay culture, language and religion. Furthermore, the conflation of ethnic and religious identity has long been a consequence of Singapore’s historical and political belonging (see Kadir 2006).

Significant to the discussions in this dissertation is the informants’ self reference of their religious commitment in relation to their Malay/Muslim habitus. Religious commitment is part of a genre of concepts that appear to almost defy definition, at least one to which everyone will agree. However, they are useful in connection to the specific aspects of the key informants’ identity that this dissertation sought to explore. It is noteworthy that there are varying degrees of religious commitment among the informants.

5.1.1 Self referent Labelling of Muslim-ness

When I asked about their level of religious commitment, two of the informants, Sudin and Samad described their religious selves as ‘moderate’ Muslims. In excerpt (1) below, by Sudin’s own definition, a ‘moderate’ is someone who does not live a life consistent with the teachings of Islam:

Excerpt (1)

How would I describe myself as a Muslim? [pause] like I sometimes do what I’m not supposed to do. you know? [pause] I know it’s wrong. and against religion and all, but sometimes cannot help it, you know? So difficult not to do it. When I think back, I shouldn’t do those things but I’m sure I’ll do them again.

Sudin, who I observed was the most articulate among the chill threesome, showed hesitations in responding to my question about his religious commitment. Often, he paused and seemed to be collecting his thoughts before speaking. As the interaction
was conducted in the presence of Aziz and Ramlee, Sudin seemed to seek some kind of affirmation or empathy from his peers in relation to his position. Sudin was also not forthcoming in elaborating on his response.

Unlike Sudin, in excerpt (2), Samad’s version of being ‘moderate’ is exemplified by his non-adherence to performing the prescribed daily and Friday prayers:

**Excerpt (2)**

I think last week I only pray five times. That one also my mother reminded me to *sembahyang magrib* (dusk prayers). Or else I don’t do. Then, *sembahyang Jumaat* (Friday prayers) I think last month I missed two times ‘cos got urgent project work have to finish. I try not to *cabut* (literal: pull out; in context: to avoid) the Friday one.

Despite the fact that Sudin’s and Samad’s habitus indicated a lack of religious commitment, I observed that they wear their religious badge with pride. They talked in general terms about how poignant the holy month of Ramadhan was to them and that their religious identity took precedence over their ethnolinguistic identity, as evidenced in the discussions in Section 5.4. Interpreting this form of perspective put forward by Jacobson (1998), I suggest that Sudin’s and Samad’s behaviour is a male phenomenon as “men are able to take advantage of the relative laxity of parents to be largely irreligious in behaviour but Muslim in name”. The informants’ behaviour can further indicate where they position their perceived status in the broader Malay/Muslim market and in other ways, articulate a degree of attachment to the religion.

What was significant with Sudin’s and Samad’s descriptions is that they resonate with the moderate label that emerged in the State’s political discourse in
light of the September 11 and Jemaah Islamiah (JI) incidents. Like any relative construct, the informants’ interpretations of ‘moderate’ differ from that of the State. Moderation, as seen through the lens of the State and non-Muslims in Singapore, refers to the antithesis of extremism and fanaticism in Islam so as not to disturb the social fabric (Zuber 2010:204). The State’s call for moderation in the Malay/Muslim community is evidenced in the speech made by the then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong:

But Singapore Muslims, like other Muslims around the world, are caught up with the global resurgence of Islamic fervour. Within the Islamic world, some religious leaders are pushing down extreme path, while others urge a moderate path. Which path Singapore Muslim choose will have an impact on the cohesion of our country. It will also decide the community's future developments – whether the community continues to progress or stagnates.

While the moderate Muslim identity has been articulated for the Malay/Muslim community by the State and the use of the label in official discourse is prevalent in speeches to highlight the ideological tension between the extremists (comprising of Muslims who are supportive of the agendas of Al-Qaeda and JI) and those who do not share the same ideology as the former (Tan 2008), its meaning remains ambiguous. PERDAUS (Association of Adult Religious Class Student Singapore) and a local mosque board reconciled these tensions with a consensus to provide a working definition of ‘moderate’ Muslims from the viewpoint of an Islamic organisation in Singapore, albeit stating that the definition is not conclusive. In their expression of a

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45 Jemaah Islamiah (JI) is Southeast-asia’s militant Islamic branch of the Al-Qaeda. The operative’s plan to set off several bombs on foreign embassies and key points in Singapore in 2001 and 2002 was foiled by the authorities.

46 Excerpt from speech reproduced in PEGAS (2002:45).

47 For more details, see Hassan (2003).
moderate Muslim, P ERGAS (2002) claims that a moderate Muslim should be guided by both the Islamic principles and the realities of Singapore, living harmoniously with and respecting the opinions of non-Muslims. Additionally, and most importantly, moderate Muslims in Singapore need to support the democratic and secular nature of the society and reject the political agenda of the religion. Despite the State’s concerns, many commentators observed that Malay/Muslims in Singapore have remained politically and socially moderate as compared to others who practise the faith in Southeast Asia, even after the advent of a resurgence of Islamic revivalism in the 1980s, which marked an increase in religiosity among Muslims in the region (Ramakrishna 2009).

Unlike Sudin and Samad, the other two informants Aziz and Ramlee did not explicitly articulate labels or categorisations that may be attached to their religious identification. They talked about Islam in forms of behaviour and statements that illustrate the many ways in which the religion is important to them.

**Excerpt (3)**

*As orang Islam (Muslims) we cannot *anyhow anyhow* (without care) eat food without checking. I always check what is in the ingredient. Thankfully McDonald’s already *halal* (meat slaughtered as prescribed in Islam). But other fast food have to be careful, like MOS Burger. That one is not *halal*, I think, but I see many Malays there.*

In excerpt (3) above, Ramlee talked about the importance of consuming food that has been prepared as prescribed by Islam and dining at fast food outlets that have

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48 Persatuan Guru-Guru Agama Singapura (PERGAS) or the Association of Islamic Religious Teachers in Singapore hosted a convention, *Kesederhanaan Dari Perspektif Islam* (Moderation from the Islamic Perspective) in 2003. The papers from the proceedings were published and became the platform for the organisation’s official stand towards the issue of moderate Muslims in Singapore (Zuber 2010:209).
been issued halal certification by MUIS. He expressed quite clearly his identity as a Muslim in relation to his dietary choices. In addition, he distinguished himself from other Malay/Muslims by suggesting their lack of religious commitment by patronising a non-halal fast food outlet.

**Excerpt (4)**

She masuk Islam (in context: to convert into Islam) or not?

In excerpt (4) Aziz’s inquiry highlighted the boundary construction that stipulated Muslims should not enter into marriage with non-Muslims. His response further showed his assertion that non-Muslims have to ‘masuk’ Islam in order for the union to be recognised in the eyes of the religion. Both Ramlee’s and Aziz’s explained their values and mode of behaviour in relation to the religion, and the underlying ways in which these are important to them.

I ought to make clear at this juncture that the interactions reported in this chapter were religious in context if the informant defined them as such. Thus, I have limited discussions to those interactions where the informants isolated and articulated relatively homogenous collection of behaviour, specifically in relation to their religious identification, Islamic teaching and lifestyle, and specific religious events such as the Eid Ul-Fitr celebration. For meaningful conceptualisation and analysis, I have included interactions and observations that included emotions, feelings and sentiments, which the informants linked to religion and the religious commitment that informed their language ideology and Malay/Muslim-ness.
5.2 Internalising the language of the Arabs

In excerpt (5) below, Aziz, Ramlee and I were having a conversation about the on-goings during Ramadhan (Islamic holy month). The conversation took place after the informants’ tarawih (obligatory congregational evening prayers performed during Ramadhan) at a mosque. The informants consistently performed the prayers throughout the month which culminated in the Eid Ul-Fitr celebrations. As Aziz and Ramlee were walking away from the mosque and closer towards where I was, they extended their hands and uttered: ‘assalamu alaikum warah matullahi wabarakatuh’ (may peace and blessings of Allah be with you). The informants had given me a salam (greeting) in Arabic.

Recognising the gesture and utterance, I responded with ‘mualaikum salam’ (and upon you be peace), a condensed version of ‘mualaikum salam warah matullahi wabarakatuh’ (and upon you be peace and blessings from Allah) and reciprocated with a handshake. As this is a common reciprocal act among Muslims of the same gender, I was able to react accordingly. At that point in time, I questioned Aziz’s and Ramlee’s behaviour, the giving of salam, which I thought was not a feature in our past interactions. I suspected then that the salam and the use of Arabic had emerged because it was the holy month of Ramadhan.

In excerpt (5) on pages 173-175, I decided to explore possible identity performance that might be imbedded in the use of this form of salutation in Arabic-symbolic capital (RS is the researcher):

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49 Muslims are encouraged to perform the evening obligatory prayer throughout the month of Ramadhan as an exercise of worship and discipline. It is performed in large congregations in mosques and designated open spaces.

50 The act of giving ‘salam’ has different meanings depending on the context and communities. Here, I am referring to greetings as a conversational starter and closure. However, the use of ‘salam’ as a conversational closure is not as apparent in data as it is not a constant in our interactions.
AZIZ: eh, you did not go *tarawih* (Arabic origin: extra obligatory congregational evening prayers performed during Ramadhan) is it?

RS: I was from somewhere *lah* [laughs]

AZIZ: [laughs] excuses *lah* you but celebrate *hari raya* (literal translation: day of celebration; context: Eid Ul-Fitr celebration) you want [laughs] and don’t forget our *duit raya* (literal translation: celebration money, contextual meaning: alms for those who are younger/unemployed/less fortunate) ok

RAMLEE: ya

RS: [laughs] I won’t. so tell me, why did you give *salam* (Arabic origin: greeting) just now? *macam lain* (seems different) only?

RAMLEE: what you mean? like just now we say *assalamu alaikum* (Arabic origin: peace be upon you) is it? *where got?*

AZIZ: but we say it all the time *what* ok *lah* not all the time. But most times.

RS: to me?

AZIZ: ya. sometimes. maybe you forgot. you thought we gave *salam* because we went to prayers, is it? [laughs] *macam pakcik-pakcik* (like old/elder men)?

RS: what does giving *salam* mean to you?

RAMLEE: I think giving *salam* is something that Muslims should do with other Muslims. I don’t think other religions do it.

AZIZ: I don’t think we can say that in Malay. to say it in Arab is more natural than to translate into Malay.

RS: what about *apa khabar* (how are you)?

RAMLEE: that’s different. different meaning different feel. *Cakap Arab* (speak in Arabic) makes it more Muslim [laughs]
AZIZ: [laughs] but not all Arabs are Muslims what. but I agree with him. I think as Muslim person, I need to know some Arab words. we use Arab words in our prayers, right? And baca (read/recite) the Qur’an. and the Yasin (Arabic: chapter from the Qur’an) so macam (like) he said, it makes me feel more Muslim.

RAMLEE: it means, how to put it huh? Arab language is the language of Islam, and Muslims must know the words. important like the words or ustazah (Arabic origin: female religious teacher) taught in kelas ugama (Arabic and Anglicised Bahasa Melayu: religious class) [laughs]

AZIZ: ya. you don’t have to know everything about the language but you must know how to give salam and say prayers in Arab. I remember when I masih kecik (when I was small/young) I recite the wudhu (Arabic origin: ablution) and niat puasa (Arabic origin: intent to fast) in Malay because I cannot memorise the Arab one. so susah (difficult) but once I learn them by heart, I remember like no problem [laughs]. feels different if I say the wudhu and when I niat for puasa in Malay now.

RS: so are you saying that it is important for Malays to know Arabic?

RAMLEE: I think it’s a big part of being a Muslim. not only Malay lah. whoever is Muslim must know Arab. at least important ones we use everyday. even orang cina (Chinese), orang putih (Whites), orang hitam (Blacks) yang Islam (those who are in Islam), must know how to say prayers in Arab.

AZIZ: ya I think also

RAMLEE: when solat (Arabic origin: pray), we use Arab. when doa (or ‘dua’, Arabic origin: supplications), we use Arab. when we go haji (or ‘haj’ Arab origin: pilgrimage) we use Arab too. I think. so as Muslims we use Arab language for many religion. religious things.
AZIZ: so how many times you qatam (Arabic origin, literal meaning: to seal; contextual: to have completed reading the Qur’an) ah?

RS: three

AZIZ: WOAH. can become ustaz (Arabic origin: male religious teacher) already. [laughs]

In the beginning of excerpt (5), I was teased by Aziz for giving excuses in not performing ‘tarawih’. He implied that I would be celebrating ‘hari raya’ (day of celebration, which marks the end of Ramadhan and, in reference to the Eid Ul-Fitr) without wholly embracing the practices encouraged during the holy month (lines 4-5), that is, performing the obligatory prayers. In the same interaction (lines 6-7), he playfully reminded me of my obligations as an adult to give alms in the form of small amounts of cash known as ‘duit raya’ (celebration money) to those who are younger, unemployed, still in school or in need.

In line 11, my comment ‘macam lain’ (seems different) suggested that there was something amiss in the way the informants initiated our interaction and questioned a discrepancy in their linguistic behaviour. In response, Ramlee rejected my observation with his colloquial ‘where got?’ (line 13) to mean ‘are you sure?’ Similarly, Aziz claimed that it was a normal occurrence in our interactions to give ‘salam’ (lines 17) and suggested that I may have missed the Arabic expression in our earlier interactions. In line 18, he teased that I have implied that the salutation is characteristically a linguistic feature of ‘pakcik-pakcik’ (male elders or old men), unbecoming for persons of his age. I suspect that the informants might have asserted that the salam was a normal occurrence in our interactions because I had unceremoniously questioned their religious habitus with my comment in line 11.
I argue that their assertion could be a reaction to express that their linguistic behaviour was not-out-of-the-ordinary nor were they hyper-religious, given that they had just completed a religious obligation and we were within close proximity to the mosque. Aziz’s response in lines 17-18: ‘you thought we gave salam because we went to prayers, is it?’ shows his awareness of non-normative talk and sophistication as a social actor. In this instance, Aziz anticipated that I might infer his use of ‘assalamu alaikum’ based on a religious decision. However, before I could articulate my inference, his question in lines 17-18 implied that it was not the case. His response foreclosed any further discussions on if or why the key informants had given salam in the past.

As I thought through Aziz’s responses (lines 17-18), I recalled that the *chill threesome* had given salam in some of our interactions prior to excerpt (5) however, the use of Arabic as an initial greeting was only apparent to me at that instance. Notwithstanding, there was a difference in the informants’ use of the extended forms ‘assalamu alaikum warah matuallah wabarakaatuh’ or ‘assalamu alaikum warah matuallah’ (may peace and blessings of Allah be with you) and the condensed ‘assalamu alaikum’ (may peace be with you). At times when they had given salam, it was the shortened form. I suspect that the clipped version of the salam is used in casual and social settings. The fact that this particular interaction took place outside a place of worship, where they had briefly performed prayers, possibly explains the appropriation for the extended version.

What is significant in excerpt (5) are the social and ideological meanings which suggest indexicality between the language the informants’ use in their religious identity and what it meaningfully stood for (see Milroy 2004). The significance of Arabic as an in-group language is exemplified as Ramlee identified the people who
use the salam: ‘is something that Muslims should do with other Muslims’ (lines 21-22) and ‘I don’t think other religions do it’ (line 22). Aziz’s affirmation in line 23: ‘I don’t think we can say it in Malay’ in reference to the greeting in Arabic, legitimises the conception of their ideology of the language.

The ideology is based on the assumption that Muslims use or should use Arabic and the expectation that other Muslims use and should use the language with other Muslims. Thus, being able to use Arabic is central to the Malay/Muslim habitus. Ramlee further addressed two aspects of this habitus. First, the internalisation of Arabic as the language of Islam has a hegemonising effect on Malay/Muslim habitus. The hegemony of Arabic conversely homogenises the Malay/Muslim market and constructs boundaries that are based on linguistic contrast and difference.

As the objective of a salam is to express some kind of initial salutation, I attempted to contest the legitimacy of the proposed ideology by suggesting to Aziz and Ramlee that salam could be replaced synonymously with ‘apa kabar’, which means ‘how are you’ in Bahasa Melayu (line 25). I thought that the informants would be able to see the relative similarity and arbitrariness. In response and to strengthen their ideology that Arabic is an in-group language, Ramlee distinguished the function between the two expressions (line 26). According to him, the salam and the greeting ‘apa kabar’ convey different symbolic meanings and the two phrases are not synonymous. More significantly, Ramlee associated the meaning of salam by ‘cakap Arab’ (line 26: speak in Arabic) to be ‘more Muslim’ (line 26). Thus, Ramlee hegemonised the language used by a group that is ethnically different from him to his religious habitus.

The language-religious-identity ideology is further reinforced when Ramlee emphasised that: ‘Arab language is the language of Islam’ (line 34-35) and suggesting
some indication of internalised knowledge between those who practise the religion. In line 48, he reiterated that ‘whoever is Muslim must know Arab’, thus establishing in-group parameters. According to Ramlee, regardless of the ethnic/racial backgrounds, ‘orang cina’ (the Chinese), ‘orang putih’ (the Whites/Caucasians) and ‘orang hitam’ (the Blacks/dark-skinned), as long as they are ‘yang Islam’ (line 50: Muslims), they must be able to recite their prayers in Arabic (line 49-51) to which Aziz agrees (line 58). From Ramlee’s responses to my question, it was apparent that Arabic was a salient feature of his religious identity that was based on an essentialist ideology that did not waver when challenged.

More significantly, this expectation in relation to one’s religious habitus in Islam was apparent in my interactions with all the Malay/Muslim informants. For example, a salam would be reciprocated accordingly and depending on the piece of news, different invocations would be expressed in effect. Conversely, in this extract, both Ramlee and Aziz have exemplified the overarching evidence found in subsequent discussions of the inclusiveness of Arabic in social interactions among Muslims. In extract (5), my question in the use of salam in our everyday interactions could have indicated to the informants my self-exclusion from a shared group/religious identity. However, Aziz and Ramlee were fast to dismiss that the use of salam was not out of the ordinary in our interactions. Their reaction simultaneously brought me back into a shared habitus.

As excerpt (5) develops, Aziz expressed that he ‘feel(s) more Muslim’ (line 33) with the knowledge that he knew how to use Arabic in prayers and when reading of the Qur’an and the Muqadd’dam (lines 30-32; Arabic: a learner’s version of the holy book). Aziz recalled in lines 39-41, when he was ‘masih kecik’ (still young), he would recite the ‘wudhu’ (Arabic: prayer ablution) and ‘niat puasa’ (Arabic: intent to fast) in
Bahasa Melayu as it was ‘so susah’ (very difficult). He added that once he mastered these utterances in Arabic, they became second nature. All the informants in this study, including Samad and Sudin, would have learnt Arabic in religious classes as part of growing up Muslim, at a local mosque or a ‘kelas uagama’ (Anglicised Malay and Arabic loan: religious class) and outside secular school hours. Generally, Bahasa Melayu is the medium of instruction for these classes and the prayers are taught in Arabic.51

In lines 53-55, Ramlee added other Arabic expressions that further account for constructing the Muslim identity: ‘solat’ (prayers), ‘doa’ (supplications) and performing ‘haji’ or ‘haj’ (pilgrimage). It is noteworthy that although the informants index being a Muslim through the use of Arabic in social and religious domains, Bahasa Melayu is still used as a language to transfer these religious values at home and in the religious schools, since as Kassim (2008:51) argues, “to a large degree, religious instruction helps to perpetuate the use of Malay Language”.

Aziz ended the conversation by suggesting that I can be an ‘ustaz’ (Arabic loan: a male religious teacher) as I have ‘qatam’ (Arabic loan; in context: completed) the Qur’an three times (line 60). It is recognised that the experiential dimension of Malay/Muslim market is inextricably bound up with the ability to read (or complete) the Qu’ran. Time is spent in reading the scripture is also one indicator of an interest in acquiring the knowledge. Though it was meant to humour, Aziz suggested that knowledge of Arabic (translated to the reading of the Qu’ran) significantly indicate a

51 Islam is also taught in Tamil for Muslims in the Indian community who do not speak Bahasa Melayu. Tamil-speaking Muslims consists of 21.5 per cent of the general Muslim population in Singapore and are categorised as Indians (Source: Census of Population 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore). English is also used to teach the religion in mosques and madrasahs (religious schools). Similar to the informants in this study, I attended weekend religious classes as a child where religious teachers used both Bahasa Melayu and Arabic.
actor’s position within the Malay/Muslim. According to Joseph (2004), in-group membership positionality can take on many forms and as exemplified in this excerpt, my position as an in-group member was measured by my knowledge of Qu’ranic Arabic. Here, Aziz made an assessment that I had the necessary knowledge of the holy script as he placed the expectation that I would be able to transfer this knowledge to others. Aziz’s response in lines 60-61 clearly articulated his evaluation of my Arabic knowledge and forged links between competency to a perceived role, that was, to pass on the teachings of Allah to other members who share the same identity. By articulating my positionality in the Malay/Muslim market based on a language ideology that hegemonises Arabic in the Malay/Muslim habitus, Aziz had created a process of “recursion” (Gal and Irvine 1995) as he expanded the meaning relation of the ideology by attaching a supercategorical role of a religious teacher to a member whom he perceived to have a higher knowledge of the language. Conversely, Aziz created subcategories where those who do not have the same knowledge reside.

In subsequent interactions, I became more aware of my informants’ use of Arabic invocations and expressions. Each time I heard an Arabic loan word, I made a note of who used it and, where and how it was used. Joseph (2004) suggests that a member’s position(ality) in the Malay/Muslim market can be measured by the intensity of a person’s religious piety and reflected through repetitions of formulaic invocations. In other words, the frequency of Arabic-use in my informants’ speech may indicate their level of religious commitment. Among the informants in the chill threesome, Ramlee used the most Arabic in his interactions and Sudin, the least. The

52 The learning/reading of the Qu’ran to fruition can be considered an accomplishment for Muslims. The irony of this language-identity discussion is that I can only read the Qu’ran and my knowledge of interpreting and translating the Arabic texts is questionable. Similar to my informants’ ability to understand and use formulaic invocations and Arabic expressions, and memorise chapters from the holy book, I cannot claim to be able to use the language in conversations nor in writing.
most commonly used Arabic invocations, other than the ones discussed extensively in this section, is ‘alham dullilah’ (praise to Allah), ‘masya allah’ (whatever Allah wills) and ‘astarg firullah’ (I seek forgiveness from Allah). Thus it appears, and based on the empirical evidence put forward by Joseph (2004), there is a relationship between stance and language use and/or proficiency in religious identity. However, I argue that to say Ramlee was the most religious as he used or knew more Arabic than his two peers in the chill threesome, overlook the fact that there are considerable variations in the kind of knowledge valued by the religion and different individuals.

In this dissertation, a related and relevant discussion is Sudin’s religious habitus. By his own admission, he did not follow stringently the lifestyle as prescribed by Islam. And as indicated in data, Sudin used Arabic less frequently compared to Aziz and Ramlee. Conversely, Sudin’s infrequent use of Arabic could inform his stance in relation to his religious commitment and membership in the religious system (Joseph 2004). However, correlations between language, religious commitment and religious identity are only relative and thus problematic. Generalisations about the conception of language and religious habitus have to engage with the complexities and dynamism of numerous factors, in order not to perpetuate essentialist views of young Malay/Muslim males. Both language and religious commitment can manifest themselves in varying degrees of salience, or they might have little or no relationship whatsoever. Notwithstanding, the relationship between language and religious commitment can be intricate and sensitive. Bearing this in mind, I suggest that the attitude towards the language can nevertheless add interpretive knowledge to the conception of language and religious commitment.
5.3 The Ideology: Arabic is the language for all Muslims

On one of the weekends during Ramadhan when the chill threesome and I had planned to meet to break our fast together, Sudin was the first to arrive at the meeting place. Since he was not part of the interaction in excerpt (5), I wanted to take the opportunity to further explore if there was a connection between the use of Arabic, a person’s religious commitment and the ideology that Arabic is the language for all Muslims. I greeted Sudin with ‘assalamu alaikum’ (peace be upon you) and almost instantaneously he responded with ‘muaalaikum salam’ (and upon you be peace). Although it was deliberate on my part, I did not sense that Sudin was unfamiliar, unprepared nor uncomfortable with my greeting as evidenced from his immediate and casual response. I had assumed, and based on Sudin’s earlier admission that he did not consistently perform the obligations prescribed in Islam, he would have shown less of an automatic response to my salam.

Sensitive to the nature of questioning that I had sought to conduct, I asked if I could interview him prior to the arrival of Aziz and Ramlee. In the interview, we started by sharing our thoughts about Ramadhan. Sudin was forthcoming about his religious commitment and readily admitted: ‘I skipped a few days of puasa (fasting)’. All able-bodied Muslims are encouraged to fast from dawn to dusk for this thirty-day period. He shared that he often missed performing the obligatory prayers, with ‘reasons’ he added. In excerpt (6) below, Sudin and I discussed the salience of Arabic in his religious habitus (RS is the researcher):

Excerpt (6)

1 RS: is it important to know and use Arabic if someone is a Muslim?
2 SUDIN: yes. how can you say that you are a Muslim but you do not know how to recite doa and prayers in Arabic? specially the ones you learn
in the Muqad’dam?

RS: so let’s say that I’m a Muslim but I can’t pray in Arabic, does that question my faith?

SUDIN: not like that. I think, your faith is between you and Allah. you can use whatever language when you pray but we are taught prayers in Arabic since very small. and also the Muqad’dam and Qur’an are written in Arabic. got translations in some but that is for you to know what they mean. I don’t pray but if you ask me to remember some parts of the Qur’an or Muqad’dam, I can do it, no problem. but I cannot remember word for word what they mean. but surely can tell you the some of the meanings.

RS: so, to be a Muslim, I have to be able to use Arabic?

SUDIN: ya

In lines 2-3, Sudin’s response in the affirmative to my questions about the importance for a Muslim to know and use Arabic clearly indexes the language as a linguistic feature of his Muslim identity. He said: ‘how can you say that you are a Muslim when you do not know how to recite the doa and prayers in Arabic?’ His response suggested that Arabic plays an essential and functional role in Islam, which other languages cannot match, and thus the pervasive role the language plays in authenticating the Muslim identity. This contrasts with his response to a similar question discussed in Chapter Four. When asked if Bahasa Melayu indexes his ethnic identity, Sudin’s response showed that his mother tongue was irrelevant in his Malay/Muslim-ness. As a Malay/Muslim who chose to use English in social interactions and did not see his inability to use Bahasa Melayu as affecting his ethnolinguistic identity, Sudin shared the same ideology with Aziz and Ramlee that, Arabic is core to
Islam and Muslims. In a related one-on-one interview conducted later in the fieldwork, Sudin emphasised:

No matter how frequently I use English and how good I am in the language, I can never be westernised as I’m a Muslim first, and Malay, second.

It the excerpt (6) on pages 182-183, Aziz positioned his religious identity higher than his ethnic identity as he perceived that Arabic has symbolic and indexical-type meanings. However, when asked if the inability to use Arabic would affect a person’s religious commitment and consequently, their religious identity, the arbitrariness of the ideology he shared with Aziz and Ramlee comes into question. His response was: ‘not like that…you can use whatever language when you pray…’ (lines 7-8). Sudin’s response shows that the referent (i.e. Arabic) that links the ideology to the identification, is amenable and can be reshaped (Gal and Irvine 1995). I further argue that by creating exceptions to the linguistic ideology, his non-affirmative response could illustrate some sense of struggle in his self-description with his religious identity.

Further, excerpt (6) shows no congruence between the relationship of his linguistic ideology, religious commitment and competency in the language which Sudin perceived to be essential in carrying out the ritualistic aspects of the religion. In line 11, he admitted that ‘I don’t pray’ and while he claimed that he could ‘remember some parts of the Qu’ran and Muqad’dam’ (line 12), he ‘cannot remember word for word what they mean’ (line 13). Yet in the same excerpt, Sudin emphasised a homogenised view that Muslims have to be able to use Arabic (line 18). This view of Muslim-ness describes a person who strongly indexes a unique language as core to that identification, however (i) may simply be competent in using
formulaic religious expressions and terms and thus, (ii) may not necessarily be competent in the language. Due to these limitations, the person (iii) may be unable to effectively transfer knowledge of the language into more sophisticated interactional uses. Sudin’s linguistic ideology that authenticates and legitimises his Muslim identity is thus translated into knowledge of the language that has been naturalised in his every day speech. This is primarily measured in his competency in using formulaic religious expressions and terms appropriately in local and situated interactions.

On a different occasion, as I approached Samad from the *makan-makan collective*, greeted him with ‘assalamu alaikum’ (peace be upon you). Similar to Sudin in the above discussion, Samad responded accordingly with ‘mualaikum salam’. Prior to this occasion, Samad and I have never initiated our meetings with a *salam* as most times our interactions involved the *makan-makan collective* that consisted of his peers from other ethnicities and religious beliefs. Using a shared language with a religious attachment would seem out of place in those interactions. In excerpt (7) below, Samad’s use of Arabic in social contexts and his identity as a Muslim (RS is the researcher):

**Excerpt (7)**

1. RS: do you use Arabic in your conversations with friends?
2. SAMAD: depends who I talk to *lah*. like with poly (polytechnic) friends, I
3. don’t cos they won’t understand one. but with Malay friends, ya
4. I do sometimes. also depends on what we talking about or also
5. where. but only *simple simple only*. not full sentences. full sentences must learn. and also we not Arabs. but I think the Arab words only
6. come out when got meaning in what we are talking about.
RS: only come out when it has meaning? what do you mean?

SAMAD: how huh? like. like when a Muslim person die right. so you say like *inna illahi wa inna rajuun* (Arabic origin: surely we belong to Allah and to Him shall we return). you don’t say this when someone is not Muslim, or if your cat dies [laughs]. and when you say this to a friend who is not Muslim, they won’t understand you. so you use it only with other Muslims. and you use Arab when you pray and when you have *kenduri* (religious feast) like baca *Yasin* (reading/reciting the Ya Seen). I think all Muslims know some Arab. it’s like our Malay. You use it without thinking. but you don’t use it with people who are not Muslims.

RS: so, is it important for someone who is a Muslim to know and use Arab words?

SAMAD: yes. with other Muslims *lah* of course.

Like Sudin, Ramlee and Aziz, Samad shared the essentialist view that Muslims need to know and use Arabic (see lines 16 and 21) and thus, placed a high degree of importance on the competency and knowledge of Arabic in the religious identity. Like Sudin’s example in excerpt (7), Samad recognised his limited ability to use Arabic beyond the formulaic expressions. This lack of proficiency is articulated in line 5: ‘but simple simple only. not full sentences. full sentences must learn.’ However, again, these limitations do not make him less identifiable as Muslim.

In line 11, Samad used the Arabic expression ‘*inna illahi wa inna rajuun*’ (surely we belong to Allah and to Him shall we return) to illustrate an inclusion/exclusion strategy. The invocation was expressed upon hearing the news of someone’s death. In lines 9-10, using such an expression in Arabic, Samad positioned himself with an
insider status: ‘but you don’t use it with people who are not Muslims’. In this statement, he negotiated the terms of exclusion within his larger social-cultural milieu as he established that the language is not (or should not be) used with those who are not Muslims. He reiterated this in line 21 when asked if it is pertinent for a Muslim to have knowledge and use Arabic. His response was: ‘with other Muslims lah of course’ seems to suggest that Samad has created a boundary that is integral to the process of maintaining his religious identity. He delineated the parameters particularly among other religious groups by suggesting the absolute and essential need for a unique language that expresses his membership to Islam and the authenticity of his religious identity.

In Singapore, there is already a sense of a social boundary existing between Muslims and non-Muslims, arising from (perceived) differences in social class and a strong state-sanctioned ideology. Thus, Samad’s boundary creation seems to paint a picture of socialisation that does not necessarily lend itself to secularism and cosmopolitanism. Consider for instance how in excerpt (7), Samad articulated other linguistic indexes of his religious identity: the ‘kenduri’ (religious feast, line 16), ‘baca Yasin’ (reading/reciting Ya Seen, line 17) and the language ‘you use Arab when you pray’ (line 16). More significantly, in these symbolic religious activities, Samad illustrated the necessity for him (and Muslims in general) to use Arabic to partake in and perform them. However, although Samad emphasised the inclusiveness of Arabic for Muslims, it does not necessarily exclude socialisation with non-Muslims, as accordingly, he would use Arabic ‘with other Muslims lah of course’ (line 21). Khan (2000) claims that the Muslim-group boundary can be seen through various symbolic religious activities, such as performing the ‘solat’ (prayers), celebrating festivals, wearing traditional clothing and frequenting community places, like the mosque and
Thus, it can be suggested as an inclusive social language, Arabic is exclusive to Muslims and it is a salient constituent of in-group identification. This is important as commitment to a particular identification implies interactional commitment in addition to affective commitment (Stryker 1994).

Apart from illustrating the high level of importance Sudin and Samad placed on the use of Arabic to index their religious identity, excerpts (2) and (3) show that the informants were more committed to their religious identity than to their other identifications, although their religious commitments may not necessarily be as strong. In Jacobson’s (1998) study of British Pakistani Muslim youths, her informants see their religious identification as an “anchor” compared to their other identities, such as ethnicity and nationality. She concludes that self-identifying as a Muslim connotes faith and fervour, thus it is perceived as an identity that is assertive and meaningful (1998:108). Like Aziz and Ramlee, it seemed that Sudin and Samad has found stability and security in their religious identity.

Additionally, and similar to Aziz’s experience in Section 5.2, Samad’s use of Arabic presumably occurs unintentionally and unconsciously. This reinforces the argument that the informants have internalised Arabic as a language to index their Muslim identity. In my interactions with all the informants who were Muslims, I observed that Arabic loan words, expressions and invocations have been naturalised into their everyday speech. Arabic could be heard where an English or Bahasa Melayu synonym would not do justice to the meaning in context. These include Islamic concepts that are transferred into daily social interactions among Muslims and in everyday vocabulary to express thankfulness, disgust, intrigue and disbelief. All

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53 In the Singapore context, this means frequenting halal-certified establishments. MUIS, the authority in-charge of Muslim affairs, acts as the sole body to issue and regulate halal certification to eating establishments based on ‘a set of system-focused requirements’ that include slaughtering and storage of fresh/processed produce and food preparation.
the same, the use of Arabic is essentially about (unconsciously) indexing their Muslim identification. Samad explains the Arabic in his speech as: ‘you use it without thinking’ (line 17). The inclusion of Arabic into the informants’ speech seemed effortlessly natural as the dominant language that they were using at the time of interaction and as though the loan words and expressions were part of their English Language or Bahasa Melayu vocabulary. What these observations suggest is that the use of Arabic was something that the informants were not aware of, rarely explicitly formulated and often not questioned (except for evidences in Section 5.4). More importantly, the informants’ use of Arabic made apparent the relationship between naturalisation and homogenisation of the language in their religious identity.

5.4 Stretching the word

Regardless of their religious commitment, my informant identity performance showed high convergence between Arabic and their identity to the Islamic faith. Their Malay/Muslim market suggest loyalty to Arabic and assimilation of that language with Bahasa Melayu and the English Language. Peculiar to data, and possibly due to the informants’ language preference, Arabic-English code mixing was more apparent than Arabic-Bahasa Melayu examples. Accordingly, as observed in data, Arabic was a feature in their everyday speech that came naturally in their interactions with other Muslims, including those who are not ethnic Malay, for example Indian-Muslims and Caucasians. Further, the informants articulated difficulty in explicating the motivations for using the language, other that it being the internalised language for Islam.

As I was familiar with the same belief system as my informants, often our interactions were peppered with Arabic expressions such as ‘insya allah’ (if Allah
permits) and ‘masya allah’ (as Allah has willed). Despite the informants’ insistence that Arabic indexes their religious identification as evidenced in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, it was interesting to find some discrepancies in their linguistic ideology. In the following excerpt (8), the chill threesome deliberated on the appropriate use of two commonly used Arabic expressions ‘alham dulillah’ (praise to Allah) and ‘astag firullah’ (Allah forgive me). The deliberations came about when Aziz gave off a rather loud belch and instantaneously countered it with ‘alham dulillah’ (praise to Allah):

Excerpt (8)

1  RAMLEE: eh? why you say alham dulillah (praise to Allah)?
2  AZIZ: cannot huh?
3  SUDIN: ya. why cannot?
4  AZIZ: when I’m full I’m supposed to say alham dulillah what. then,
5       I have to say what? [laughs]
6  RAMLEE: you say astag firullah (Allah forgive me) because you dah
7       (have) over-makan (colloquial: eaten in excess) [laughs]
8  AZIZ: no lah. I sedawa (to belch) ‘cos I am thankful for the food what
9  RAMLEE: but you sedawa also because you have eaten more
10     than you should. so how can you be thankful for over-eating?
11  AZIZ: you sure or not? [laughs]
12  RAMLEE: yes lah. I used to say alham dulillah too until my mak (mother)
13     said it’s not correct
14  SUDIN: but I’ve always used alham dulillah when I sedawa (belch)
15  RAMLEE: maybe the difference is when you have big sedawa (belch) or
16     small sedawa. big sedawa means you makan macam (eat like)

Historically, the Malays in the Malay Archipelago, including those from Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, share a culture that is loaded with ritualistic Hindu practices. This is especially dominant and well-preserved in the wedding ceremonies and performing arts.
hungry ghost [laughs]

AZIZ: tak kisahlah (it does not matter) so long ingat tuhan
(acknowledge/remember god).

The informants’ deliberation in excerpt (8) in which the expression ‘alham dulillah’ (praise to Allah) was supposedly inappropriately used was insightful. In line 4, Aziz rationalised his use of the expression as an indication that he has had enough food. At the end of line 4, the function of ‘what’ adds emphasis to his statement. This use of ‘what’ is prominent in Singlish and usually articulated at the end of the utterance (as also seen in line 8). In line 8, Aziz explained that the expression was appropriate as he was thankful for the food he consumed. In the excerpt, Ramlee then informed Aziz and Sudin (lines 12-13) that it was his mother who corrected his use of the two expressions: ‘alham dulilah’ and ‘astag firullah’. In lines 15-17, Ramlee attempted to make the distinction based on the intensity of the belch, that is, when the belch is clearly the result of having consumed excessive food and results in a ‘big sedawa’, then the appropriate expression would be ‘astag firullah’. In lines 16-17, Ramlee likened the ‘big sedawa’ to having consumed food like a ‘hungry ghost’, in reference to the Chinese-Taoist tradition of offering bountiful spread to spirits of dead ancestors. Interestingly, Sudin’s affirmation in line 14 shows that he used ‘alham dulilah’ when he belches, however, he did not articulate how the expression should be used. To conclude, Aziz reckoned that it does not matter whether he used ‘alham dulilah’ or ‘astag firullah’ (line 18). According to him, the fact that he used any of the two expressions, showed that he has acknowledged the presence of God, and indexed his religious identity.

In excerpt (8), the “avoidance of ‘vain’ invocations of the divine name” (Joseph 2004:174) is exemplified in the manner Ramlee corrected Aziz’s use of ‘alham
dulillah’ (praise to Allah) in lines 9-10, which seems to also suggest that there was a level of difference in positionality between the two informants in the religious system. In line with the discussion in Section 5.2, Ramlee showed evidence of a higher religious knowledge compared to Aziz, and thus, he could claim a higher position of membership in the group than his peer.

In excerpt (9) below, the *chill threesome* were caught in a similar terminology issue. Ramlee recalled a course-mate, Yan, who verbalised ‘masya allah’ (as Allah has willed) after receiving unfavourable results. According to Ramlee, Yan’s use of ‘masya allah’ was inappropriate for the purpose and context. The interaction below illustrates how Aziz, Ramlee and Sudin attempted to resolve the appropriate use of ‘masya allah’:

Excerpt (9)

1   RAMLEE: you know, just now, think I heard Yan use *masya allah* (as Allah has
2       willed) wrongly
3   AZIZ: who?
4   RAMLEE: Yan Yan
5   AZIZ: how? like *tak percaya* (disbelieve) *is it*?
6   RAMLEE: yea. but more like *tak percaya* in a bad way. he got twenty for the
7       test. so it’s actually bad news *lah*
8   SUDIN: like saying Allah’s name in vain, like that
9   RAMLEE: ya. something like that. coz I think *masya allah* is for good things
10  only *right*, not bad
11  AZIZ: but can’t we use *masya allah* when we are surprised huh? like
12   *terperanjat badak* (literal: shocked like a hippopotamus, contextual
13   meaning (humour): extreme shock)? [laughs]
In excerpt (8), Aziz explored two probable uses of ‘masya allah’ (as Allah has willed) in which one of its functions is to show disbelief (line 5) and the other, to show surprise (line 12). However, in line 6 Ramlee suggested a restriction on the contexts in which ‘masya allah’ could be used. He reckoned that the expression should be indicative of something positive, contrary to Yan’s usage on discovering news that he did not do well for a test. Sudin expanded on Ramlee’s suggestion: ‘like saying Allah’s name in vain, like that’ (line 8). Sudin’s ‘like that’ at the end of his utterance suggests an affirmation that the expression should be used positively. As the interaction developed, the informants still showed uncertainty about the appropriate use for the expression.

Excerpts (8) and (9) illustrate ways in which the use of Arabic is socially shaped, and that the meanings of the expressions/loan words are relativised to each informant. Though I was part of the interactions, I did not participate in the debates due to the potential for my (perceived) position of power to unduely influence the interaction. First, I did not want my input to influence their rationalisation of what was appropriate and what was not in relation to the expressions. Secondly, I do not have the relevant knowledge to assist in resolving the terminology issues. A more in-depth exploration of these Arabic expressions may assist to clarify some of the various conceptions of language that are conditioned by how the informants have grown up interpreting the use of the loan words. It can be observed that among the *chill threesome*, Ramlee was the most observant in identifying the subjective appropriateness of using these expressions.55

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55 There is no data on the use of Arabic in Samad’s utterances in his interactions with the *makan-makan collective* due to the composition of his peer group which consisted of non-Muslims.
5.5 Discussion and Summary

It has become commonplace in sociolinguistics that linguistic features can be analysed as marking of social groups and that marking processes can also include whole languages (other than accents and dialects). In Chapter Five, I have presented some current understandings to the body of theory in language and identity through the informants’ conceptualisation of the Malay/Muslim-ness in marking their group-identity.

Due to the management of religion and ethnicity in Singapore, the state has homogenised the ethnic and religious identities of the Malay/Muslim community such that the issues of the Malays are inseparable from those of the Muslims. More significantly, this homogenising of the ethno-religious identity has been internalised by the Malay/Muslims and has become part of their habitus. Discussions in this chapter has shown that the State’s alignment of Malay-ness and Muslim-ness as a single hyphenated entity has limited significance for the informants and that it was possible to separate religion from ethnicity in my analysis. Without exception, Islam is a particularly significant aspect in the Singapore Malay identity and the informants’ speak powerfully and poignantly of the ways in which the religion is salient in selves.

The fact that the practice of Islam by any community is shaped by its historical, cultural and social-political economic forces, has produced a localised identity of Muslims in Singapore, which is evident in the informants’ discussions. Relevant to this dissertation is the informants’ strong association of a language as psychologically and symbolically relative to their Muslim-ness. The Arabic language, which the informants could draw from their linguistic repertoire used in local and situated interactions, further represents the linguistic capital required to be a Muslim.

The informants showed that they have adopted of a shared essentialist
idea in establishing their religion, authenticating their religious commitment and legitimising their Muslim identity. Their ideology clearly stated that Arabic is the language of Islam and that all Muslims should know the language. As language is the commonest form of social behaviour, ideologies are closely connected to language and rely on internalised assumptions and expectations. The informants based this internalisation of the language on two key factors. First, the language is essential for Muslims to be able to effectively and successfully perform the ritualistic aspects of Islam as exemplified through prayers, supplications and other religious-related activities. Secondly, it is the language that all Muslims should use or be able to use.

The discussions in this chapter have shown that the language is used beyond the mere being of a Muslim. In fact, the language (and here I refer to the informants’ use of Arabic loan words, expressions and formulaic invocations) functions in ways not matched by the other languages present in the informants’ repertoire. Thus, in Singapore’s Malay/Muslim market, Arabic is fixed and not resisted nor transformed for the purpose of identity-expansion or negotiation. This is unlike Jacobson’s (1998) informants whose relationship between religion and identity would change as the social, political and economic and religious context changes. Islam is likely to continue to have strong appeal for my informants and thus, would be unaffected by the secularising trends within the Singapore society.

What is apparent in analysing Muslim-ness in Singapore is that the informants have formulated an ideology based on an ethno-religious identity and the essentialisation of Arabic to this identity. The informants’ linguistic ideology in locates linguistic phenomena as part of and evidence for what they perceive to be systematic behavioural, aesthetic, affective and moral contrasts among different groups of people (Gal and Irvine 1995). In hegemonising and homogenising the
language for their religious identity, I have suggested that the naturalisation of the linguistic features of the Arabs and its use in Islamic practices are perceived by the informants as functional and that all Muslims use it in their interactions with other Muslims. The naturalisation of Arabic in the informants’ repertoire not only legitimised their religious identification, it rationalised the linguistic ideology by placing it within the larger ideological frames that linked Arabic to characteristics of ideal/typical Muslims and the ritualistic practices in Islam.

What was also articulated in the informants’ ideology was that it is similar to some of the rhetoric of standardisation. The informants sought a degree of uniformity in the appropriate use of Arabic vocabulary and measured achievement in the language on the knowledge acquired or time spent learning it. The informants’ homogenising ideology further suggests the relationship between the positionality (real and perceived) in the religious system and competency in Arabic. The discourse explicitly supports the notion that while it may be possible to be a Malay/Muslim without speaking Arabic fluently, knowledge and fluency in the language will enhance an person’s Malay/Muslim-ness. Examples of investments done out of ethnolinguistic solidarity or for symbolic capital can mark the actor as a kind of Malay/Muslim role-model who is able to use their linguistic or cultural capital to help others to position themselves favourably in different markets.

In the discussions, I have raised questions in relation to the strength of conviction in the informants’ homogenising ideology. The informants were not claiming to be competent in Arabic as such but simply to be competent in using formulaic religious expressions and religious terms. These expressions/words included, but was not exclusive to the regurgitation of lengthy Qu’ranic passages and prayer verses that the informants would have rote-learnt while growing up a Muslim.
Neither had they expected themselves nor their peers to be able to speak or read Arabic fluently. From the perspective of the Malay/Muslim males in this dissertation, being able to use formulaic expressions and words appropriately in local and situated interactions is arguably what is expected in investing in Muslim-ness. However, in order to avoid the potential for overly-deterministic results, a more socially-situated analysis is needed, one that identifies the actors, discourses, practices and contextual factors involved in specific processes.

It is not uncommon in the discourse of loaned formulaic expressions and vocabulary that the informants might use the language more or less in different ways from their other Muslims. In occurrences where disputes and disagreements arose, the perception of self or others was not necessarily affected. In resolving terminology issues there was a tendency for the informants to use knowledge that has been passed on from others. This knowledge was (usually) from an elder and so can be constituted as hearsay. Furthermore, an agreement on the appropriate use of a loan word/expression would not assure consensus, for the same word/expression could be interpreted in different ways, given different contexts. Subsequently, the informants’ acknowledgement and recognition of their limited Arabic however, did not make them any less identifiable as Muslim.

Chapter Five has shown that identifying with a religious membership is not a suitable indicator of religious commitment. It is possible that a person might claim to be a member of the religion but not undertake any religious practices or fulfil all the religious obligations required. Some of the informants acknowledged that they did not have a high level of religious observance and practice. Yet, these were the same informants who positioned powerfully the language that they used to establish, authenticate and legitimise the Malay/Muslim habitus. Thus, it is important to
recognise that a strong affiliation to Arabic as the language of religious identity need not necessarily be allied to a strong sense of religious commitment.

Although the discussions in this chapter have been reported in two separate groupings: Aziz and Ramlee, and Sudin and Samad, the groups did not show divergence nor conflict in their shared language ideology. The use of Arabic was not only relevant to the informants in religious contexts. In fact their experiences show that the language was used in daily social interactions in secular Singapore, even with non-Muslims. The informants’ ideology further assumes that Arabic is the internalised language for and among all Muslims and thus plays a significant dual role in Singapore’s dominant discourse. It connects Muslims of all ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds, but also excludes those who do not practise Islam. By constructing a strong social exclusion between Muslims and non-Muslims, the use of Arabic assists to enforce boundaries of religious segregation in Singapore. Potentially, this lends support to the State’s concerns that the Malay/Muslims in Singapore are not integrating well into the mainstream society. I suggest that more sophisticated data are required to understand how social processes of exclusion are carried out among and by Malay/Muslims, as suggested by the State. It would be significant to see the interplay of social interaction and social distance, if and when Malay/Muslims use Arabic in the presence of or with non-Muslims.

In the next Chapter Six, I explore my informants’ construction of discursive reproduction of power and social inequality through the processes of identity construction of self and other groups from the same ethnicity.
CHAPTER SIX

Bahasa Melayu: A Divided Front?

INTRODUCTION

The Malay/Muslim market in Singapore reveals several interesting dimensions of inclusionary and exclusionary practices. In the previous Chapter Five, the dominant discourse in the construction of the Malay/Muslim identity is articulated through the essentialist notions of naturalising and internalising the language of an ‘other’. The ideology that Arabic is the language for all Muslims reinforced the strong social exclusion between those who practice the religion from those who do not. The previous chapter and the sections that in this chapter continue to consider differential locations of power by contextualising the local Malay/Muslim market through the experiences of the Malay/Muslim informants and the use of Bahasa Melayu.

From a critical political and economic lens, Chapter Six focuses on the informants’ social awareness in investing or non-investing in Malay/Muslim-ness and on the internal differentiation which reveal the stratification of the Malay/Muslim market. If the dominant discourse of Malay/Muslim-ness is based on the nationalistic logic that Bahasa Melayu is the symbolic capital and affirms ethnolinguistic solidary for the ethnic group, it would be relevant to question if, and how, Bahasa Melayu can be used to mobilise a capital of distinction. Specifically, how is power produced or maintained through the use of Bahasa Melayu? Or, how do Malay/Muslims with
knowledge of unequal access to resources place themselves in a privileged habitus and social hierarchy? In this chapter, ideologies of language are explored critically through discourses of what counts as a legitimate Malay/Muslim and who counts as a legitimate speaker of Bahasa Melayu.

Chapter Six is divided into two major areas of analysis. Section 6.2 focuses on ways of ‘othering’ in constructing self and group identity. In this section, representations and outward expressions such as language, clothing and appearance, which Bourdieu (1991a) describes as “the embodiments of identity” function are referents employed by the informants to position the other in the periphery. Section 6.2 extends the discussion to include the strategic use of linguistic behaviour and language features of a peer group to affirm social structures within the Malay/Muslim market.

Section 6.3 discusses the conscious and deliberate manipulations of key informants’ national and transnational identities while in Malaysia. In this section, I draw on the their construction of Malay/Muslim-ness in the national space (Chapter Four) to show congruence and contradictions in constructing specific identities in discourse.

Although the oral data that I have selected for this chapter primarily focused on interviews that relate to ways the key informants positioned or were positioned through the use of Bahasa Melayu, there were identity work related to the use of English in the discursive space (e.g. in Section 6.4). The use of English in multilingual markets often involve debates around language ideologies which concern historical, socio-economic and political issues, thus, I felt it would be relevant to include is these discussions to further illustrate the overarching process of othering. In this chapter, the Bahasa Melayu spoken by the key informants and I was the dominant
variety in the field, other variants have been introduced accordingly in the discussions. The variants included a sociolect used by a group of Malay/Muslim youths, Mat-speak, and Bahasa Malaysia.

The key concepts that permeate this analysis in this chapter are self and group-identification and the perceptions of and attitudes towards others who may also identify or embody Malay/Muslim-ness. And, the potential of reflexivity of social representations can be seen in the informants’ awareness of the impact and effect of their own representations of others and the perceptions of others upon them.

Prior to the analysis sections, Section 6.1 below provides an overview of representations of Malay/Muslim youth market.

6.1 The Malay/Muslim Youth Market

The Singapore Malay/Muslim community has progressively undergone positive changes over time according to certain social indicators such as education and literacy, household and housing and employment. Malay youths aged 15-24 make up approximately 34 per cent of the community’s total population of 495,000. When compared to the other two major ethnic communities i.e. the Chinese and Indians, Malay youths can be considered the largest youth-based group. As suggested in the Yayasan MENDAKI Policy Digest 2008, “we have a large pool of potential that we can leverage on for the future” (Johari 2008:38) which implies that the Malay/Muslim young people carry the burden of elevating the community’s stature.

56 Source: Census of Population 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore
57 The Sunday Times, 6 May 2011, Can Malays bridge the gap?
58 Based on the State’s ethnic self-help paradigm, Yayasan MENDAKI propagates the logic of ‘change from within’. Its publication creates a platform for Malay/Muslims to discuss and reflect on issues affecting the community.
Although Malay/Muslim youths may have inherited the ethnolinguistic marginality from elders, contemporary Malay/Muslim youths do not experience the same degree of marginality experienced by their elders (Rahim 2001). The gradual and positive developments across many social indicators that were not experienced by their parents and grandparents, such as employment and housing, has shifted the construction and expression of Malay/Muslim-ness across generations. An upward trend in Malay/Muslim youths’ academic attainment through better general performance and lesser pelajar keciran (school attrition) for both the primary and secondary levels and progression to post-secondary and tertiary institutions have partly contributed to this shift in representations and perceptions.59

Within the ethnic market, progress in these indicators suggests some degree of access to social mobility for younger Malay/Muslims. Thus, in reflecting the current socio-economic landscape, Malay/Muslim youths have gained some respect and status within the Singapore society as one of its minority communities. Nevertheless, when compared to progress made at the national level, the post-separation gap still exists (Kassim 2008; Rahim 2001).60

In the dominant discourse, though figures on social issues indicate an upward trend, it still speaks of overrepresentation in the media in areas such as juvenile delinquency, specifically samseng remaja (teenage gangsterism), repeat substance abuse from those below the age of 20 and teenage pregnancies from ages 15 to 19. These figures further suggest that such young people come from keluarga pincang

59 The Straits Times, 17 November 1990, Lee Kuan Yew attributes the Malay underachievement in education to lack of parental discipline.
60 Table 6(a) in the Tables section shows figures on the Malay students’ performance in the GCE ‘O’ level examinations over a period of 10 years in comparison to the other ethnic communities. Table 6(b) shows figures of Malay students who made it to post-secondary education based on Primary One enrolments.
(dysfunctional families), and from the low socio-economic bracket. These ethnicised representations of the Malay/Muslim youths are indeed concerning and problematic. Across their multiple worlds, Malay/Muslim youths struggle with the varied representations of Malay/Muslim-ness.

In my interactions in the field, the informants often indicated their aspirations of higher education and as a consequence, the prospects of securing well-paying jobs. For example, Samad wanted to become a pilot for a commercial flight carrier and Aziz was thinking of a career in teaching. Sudin felt that learning Mandarin could mean better employment opportunities. It seemed that by distinguishing themselves as upwardly and socially mobile social actors, the key informants could overcome ethnicised representations in dominant discourses. The informants also expressed concerns with the precedents set by earlier generations and hinted at contributing to the gradual continuance of growth in the Malay/Muslim market.

6.1.1 The Matrep peer group

To provide some context to the discussions that follow, it is relevant to first unpack the ‘Matrep’ group identity which the informants perceived as an ‘other’ within the Malay/Muslim market. I suggest that Matrep, as an out-group referent, is a relatively recent coinage, arising from the Malay/Muslim middle-class seeking social distance from a group which is stereotypically represented as a young Malay/Muslim male delinquent who is typically from a low socio-economic standing, and a family where parental supervision is lax. The proliferation of blogs and online discussions about Matrep (or Mat) suggest substantial negative perceptions of the group and perpetuate pejorative representations within the Malay/Muslim market and the

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broader Singapore society. This unfavourable identity has roots in a youth sub-culture of the 70s and early 80s, when heavy metal and rock music was its cornerstone. Then, infamously known as ‘Mat Rockers’ or plain ‘Mat’, members were routinely type-casted as deviants who propagated anti-establishment sentiments. Since the 90s, the Mat representation has been reconfigured and its members are no longer poster-boys for a distinctive music genre. According to the informants, the Matrep are now more recognisable for their fashion faux pas and use of a Bahasa Melayu sociolect.

For the purpose of discussion in this chapter, I have adopted the term ‘Mat-speak’ to describe the sociolect’s distinctive phonology and lexicography.\(^{62}\) I must, however, stress that my understanding of this group is informed primarily by the sociolinguistic contexts of the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore. Further, I suggest that the features of the Bahasa Melayu variety that the informants and I used in the field and Mat-speak cannot clearly be distinguished as fully separate codes. Nevertheless, according to the informants, the differences between their Bahasa Melayu and Mat-speak lay in the exaggerated articulation of end-sounds, clipping of syllables and creative vocabulary.

Apart from their perceived linguistic features, what the contemporary Matrep and their predecessors share is their peripheral status both in mainstream Singapore and within their own ethnic community. The Matrep can be considered displaced as they are said to reflect certain anti-establishment characteristics, such as showing no interest in education, having closed mindsets, and lacking in ambition and drive. In the field, all my informants were very clear on identifying themselves as antitheses of Matrep-isms in varying degrees. The Matrep identity is also

\(^{62}\) This folk linguistic term is not my own. It was first made known to me by Ramlee from the chill threesome.
synonymous with anti-social behaviours such as delinquency and aggression. This is widely documented in Singapore’s social discourse and functions as a means of social differentiation and distance between them and the informants in this dissertation.

6.2 (Dis)Claiming sameness: We are Malay/Muslims but we are not Matrep

I observed that the social differentiation in the field was evident in the informants’ perceptions of the Matrep through the discourses of othering. Coupland (2010:247) argues that “our representations of ourselves, even to ourselves, require a form of social comparison” and is dependent on “the social position from which a speaker’s outgroup reference or the description is made, on the social relations between the speakers, and on the ideological set or frame taken to be obtaining”. For the sake of simplicity, in subsequent discussions in this chapter, the term ‘Matrep’ is used to indicate a male person or a group of males that embody the representations of the peer group as suggested by the informants. As indicated in data and in conversations with the informants, the use of Mat is synonymous to Matrep.

Excerpt (1) on page 207, is an interaction between the chill threesome and I that had taken place at a Subway sandwich restaurant. By this time, the chill threesome was already comfortable with the presence of a recording device in our interactions. After about five minutes of small talk, a group of four Malay males of similar age to the informants walked past our table. Almost immediately, Aziz, Ramlee and Sudin sniggered at one another, indicating some shared understanding or knowledge about the four other males. When the group in question was a short distance away, the chill threesome burst into laughter (RS is the researcher):

63 Emphasis added.
Excerpt (1)

1 RS: what was that all about?
2 SUDIN: [laughs] floating caps. [laughs]
3 AZIZ: you didn’t see them? the Matreps…
4 RS: floating caps? [laughs]
5 AZIZ: yeah see how they wear the caps …
6 SUDIN: and the tight jeans. how they get into them, man? [laughs]
7 AZIZ: then they COLOUR their hair themselves. want blonde but
8 become GOLDEN! [laughs]
9 SUDIN: orange like golden MONKEYS! [laughs]
10 RAMLEE: so bad you all.

Excerpt (1) starts with Sudin critiquing the emblems relevant to the contemporary Matrep peer group. He listed: ‘floating caps’ (line 2), ‘tight jeans’ (line 6) and bad hair-dye work (line 9). Sudin’s criticisms set the trajectory for the chill threesome in labelling the Matrep and significantly intensifying this process of othering (see Coupland 2010). In excerpt (1), the informants delineated quite explicitly their perceptions of the characteristics of the group that passed them earlier and correspondingly affirmed that the chill threesome was not part of that identity. More specifically, the informants’ objective in this interaction was to indicate that they do not wear nor embody the emblems of Matrep, suggesting some kind of social stigma attached to that peer group. Aziz, Ramlee and Sudin revealed their management and maintenance of group identity in relation to their Matrep peers. Negotiating conflicting group identities required the chill threesome to make some fine distinctions between what were acceptable and unacceptable group practices.

In another interaction, Sudin and Aziz further dissected the Matrep as a male Malay who wears t-shirts that are too tight, and has ‘self-made’ tattoos and body piercings.
In this interaction and in subsequent excerpts, the data points to convergence of perspectives between Aziz and Sudin about Matrep. Ramlee showed empathy with the Matrep categorisation with his response: ‘so bad you all’ (line 10). What is important to note in excerpt (1) is the use of humour in the processes of exclusion undertaken by Aziz and Sudin. They used humour to conceal utterances that were discriminatory and which may be considered socially unacceptable behaviour. Simultaneously, Aziz’s and Sudin’s humour enabled them to maintain their hierarchical positioning within Malay/Muslim young males’ socialscape and indirectly exert power inherent in this positioning (Holmes 2000).

6.2.1 Claiming ethnolinguistic solidarity

In excerpt (2), Ramlee’s admission that ‘I have Mat friends’ (line 3) positioned his in-group identity as belonging to the Matrep. This excerpt shows divergence from the previously established group consensus established by Aziz and Sudin:

**Excerpt (2)**

1. RS: do you have Matrep friends?
2. AZIZ: no.
3. RAMLEE: I have Mat friends
4. AZIZ: Ramlee got [laughs]
5. SUDIN: I don’t like them. they are so so annoying!
6. RS: annoying in what way?
7. SUDIN: I mean. they make Malays look bad.
8. AZIZ: yeah.
9. RAMLEE: not all what ...
10. AZIZ: but you not Mat what, we don’t talk like them.
In excerpt (2), Aziz used humour to refer to Ramlee’s inclusion into the Matrep membership and simultaneously (but temporarily) positioned Ramlee’s identity outside the *chill threesome*’s group boundary when he said ‘Ramlee got’ (line 4). Sudin seemed to have no patience for the Matrep and used ‘they’ in ‘they make Malays look bad’ (line 7) to position his identity outside the Matrep boundary. It was clear what Aziz’s perceptions were about the Matrep from his affirmative ‘yeah’ (line 8) to support Sudin’s exclusionary statement. Almost instantaneously, Ramlee contested Sudin’s statement by saying ‘not all what’ (line 9).

Aziz perceived Ramlee’s response as a potential conflict in the *chill threesome*’s group identity and renegotiated the latter’s identity between the two distinct peer groups. Aziz rejected Ramlee’s attempt at affiliating with the Matrep identity by employing the exclusion-of-the-other: ‘you not Mat’ and ‘we don’t talk like them’ (line 10). Here, Aziz assumed a position of power by contesting Ramlee’s self-appointed out-group identity. Using the we- and they-code, Aziz constructed ethnolinguistic rivalry with the Matrep and at the same time, intensified his ethnolinguistic solidarity within the *chill threesome*. For Aziz, the question of who is *in* and who is *out* in relation to his group membership was based on a particular linguistic behaviour, that is, his group did not speak like the Matrep. Thus, he was able to mobilise a capital of distinction based on linguistic behaviour which privileged the *chill threesome*’s group identity in the Malay/Muslim youth market.

In excerpt (3) on page 209, Sudin and Aziz attempted to construct an identity that positioned the Matrep at the periphery. (RS is the researcher):
Excerpt (3)

1 SUDIN: and you know how they speak in English right? “eh today what we doing”? [laughs]
2 AZIZ: “we going go City Plaza” [laughs] then you know how they talk in Malay? “gua caya lu’"! (I have trust in believe you)! [laughs]
3 RS: [laughs] so who knows how to speak like a Matrep?
4 AZIZ: Ramlee knows [laughs]
5 RAMLEE: a little bit. I have Matrep friends. but I speak normal with them, like I speak to you.
6 RS: what about you Aziz? do you have Matrep friends?
7 AZIZ: Ramlee [laughs] joking [laughs] I, I have one or two, I think.
8 RS: so Ramlee speaks like a Matrep?
9 AZIZ: [laughs] no. but I know some Mat words.
10 RS: how’d you know the words?
11 SUDIN: HE’S A MATREP! [laughs]
12 AZIZ: no. I listen to other Mats speak.
13 RS: so you do know how to speak like a Mat?
14 AZIZ: I know like a few words like “dok” (word equivalent to: mate) and “kena kencing” (literal translation: being urinated on; contextual expression: being played out) [laughs] and they speak Malay all the time.
15 SUDIN: “macam biskot” (literal translation: like a biscuit; contextual expression: being silly/stupid) and listen to “jiwang” (original Bahasa Melayu root word: jiwa, contextual expression: emotional) songs.
In excerpt (3), again linguistic behaviour and features belonging to the other have been mobilised to articulate difference. First, Sudin mocked the way English is spoken by the Matrep as he demonstrated a heavily-accented ‘eh today what we doing?’ (line 1). As discussed in Chapter Four, Sudin considered his ability to speak English (well) as an economic resource and social capital, thus, by identifying imprecision in the Matrep’s speech, he afforded himself a more favourable social position. Sudin knew the rules of the dominant linguistic game and by that, the Matrep are ‘deficient’ speakers of English. This could further imply that Sudin had positioned himself as a legitimate English speaker in the Malay/Muslim market.

Aziz’s rhetorical question: ‘then you know how they talk in Malay?’ (lines 3-4) articulated an underlying expression of his disapproval of the way the Matrep use the language. In other words, Aziz perceived his Bahasa Melayu variant as more prestigious and one that respected the norms of linguistic correctness and appropriateness as compared to Mat-speak. For the same reasons that Sudin had positioned Matrep as deficient English-speakers, Aziz had positioned the peer group as deficient Bahasa Melayu-speakers. This meant that Aziz was able to mobilise Bahasa Melayu as a capital of distinction which enabled him to position himself as a legitimate (and ideal) speaker of the language. This kind of linguistic scrutiny is a privileged sociolinguistic habitus of those in power.

Aziz consolidated his us-versus-they code according to the frequency of Bahasa Melayu used by the Matrep. Aziz’s criticism that the Matrep ‘[they] speak Malay all the time’ (line 22) positioned his identity within an ethnolinguistic rivalry. His statement could imply that the constant use of Bahasa Melayu is an over-investment in Malay/Muslim-ness. Aziz’s criticism could further imply that over-investment in Malay/Muslim-ness is not simply another way to distinguish his
identity from the Matrep, it could also be his strategy to mark ethno-class dynamics (McAll 1992). The ethno-class ideology is afforded to those who make sense of their limited position in the social and ethnic hierarchy by valourising that part of their identity which distinguishes them. In Aziz’s instance, his way of establishing social class difference from the Matrep was by making aspects of his ethnicity less pronounced.

Although the interaction in excerpt (3) was aimed at entertaining and may be regarded as humouristic, the underlying message was apparent; that the informants (particularly Aziz and Sudin) perceived negatively the linguistic behaviour and language features that are emblematic of the Matrep peer group. By constructing we- and they-code in excerpt (3), Aziz’s and Sudin’s humour served three significant functions; to establish and maintain solidarity in the group, manage power relationships and reduce perceived inequalities among the members (Holmes, 2000). Using humour, Aziz and Sudin articulated Mat-speak as lower in value and simultaneously positioned a more favourable position for them in the social hierarchy.

Nonetheless, the application of the simplistic equation of we- and they-code in excerpt (3) is problematic as it treats concepts such as agency, action, identification and social role as unproblematic. As a member of the chill threesome who had friends in the Matrep group, Ramlee acknowledged that he was able to speak ‘a little bit’ (line 8) of Mat-speak but was fast to claim in-group membership with Aziz, Sudin and I when he said: ‘like I speak normal with them. Like I speak to you’ (lines 8-9). It seemed that there is a reciprocal tension between Ramlee’s multiple group identities.

Ramlee’s reflections on his group identity in excerpt (4) below shows the complex, but not necessarily conflicting, negotiating between two friendship groups
that practiced different linguistic behaviours. The excerpt below was recorded two days after the Matrep encounter. In the excerpt, Ramlee tried to make sense of his dual-membership using English and Mat-speak as references to the memberships:

**Excerpt (4)**

With Aziz and Sudin, we always use English. Sometimes we use Malay, broken Malay. But most times we use English. Before I met them in secondary school, I used to speak Malay all the time. I guess I followed them to use English. It helps me with school but I still feel that I express myself better in Malay. I use Malay with my other Malay friends. The Mat friends that I have. But as I said, I don’t speak like them. I feel that there is a Mat in every Malay person. No matter how much you want to deny it. It is part of the Malay people history.

As a member of a group of middle-class, educated and socially mobile young Malay males, Ramlee could identity with the chill threesome’s use of English in interactions. Yet, his identification with his Matrep membership contrasted with the linguistic behaviour held by the chill threesome members. Consequently, while only Ramlee admitted to using some Mat-speak with his peers who he considered to have the characteristics of Matrep, altering aspects of his language features accordingly when interacting with two disparate social groups means that he was not surrendering allegiances to either of those groups.

As seen in the reflection above, Ramlee was claiming his Malay/Muslim identity not only through the use of Bahasa Melayu with his ‘other Malay friends’ and ‘the Mat friends that I have’ but also with Aziz and Sudin with whom he used ‘broken Malay’. It can be assumed here that the Ramlee’s use of ‘broken Malay’ could have been the transfer of English into his mother tongue, which is common in the speech
of most Malay youths in Singapore. The term used by Ramlee to describe his competency in Bahasa Melayu in itself requires more than a simplistic definition.

6.2.2 Claiming a sociolinguistic habitus

In an interview with Samad, who was not part of the chill threesome, I felt that I needed to first ascertain his thoughts on the Matrep peer group in order to be able to compare the perspectives held by Sudin, Aziz and Ramlee. What transpired in Samad’s interview resonated with those from the chill threesome. In the beginning of excerpt (5), Samad hinted that he had a similar fashion sense as the Matrep. (RS is the researcher):

Excerpt (5)

1. SAMAD: I don’t like it when people call me a Mat. I have no probs with them. I know I look like them [laughs] but I got problem if people call me “EH MAT”. cos they very Malay [laughs]
2. RS: how are they, what do you mean by very Malay?
3. SAMAD: very Malay ah? it’s hard to explain lah. like. um, they, they do think like Malay
4. RS: think like Malay?
5. SAMAD: like not modern like that. like. how huh? like, take life very simple. don’t think about study. don’t think about work. do silly things. like that loh
6. RS: you’re saying that Malays are like that?
7. SAMAD: no. see, it’s difficult to explain. like old kind of Malay
8. RS: traditional?
9. SAMAD: not traditional. but like no motivation to make life better
10. RS: so Malays are like that?
SAMAD: not all. only those who are very Malay. like Mats *lah*.

RS: what else make them very Malay?

SAMAD: they speak Malay...

RS: I speak Malay too sometimes

SAMAD: we're different. they use MORE Malay

RS: so if we use MORE Malay, we will become a Mat? [laughs]

SAMAD: not like that *lah*. again it's so hard to explain. they use more Malay

and they use less English and when they use English they sound like

Malay, like that. so we're different. our Malay and English is also

different from them

RS: how is our Malay different from the Mats?

SAMAD: woah. your questions very difficult *leh*. [laughs]

RS: [laughs] well I want to know how different it is from my Malay…

SAMAD: how huh? like, like street Malay. no, like the sounds are

different. like they exaggerate like that. they also have

words like not normal Malay

RS: like “aper”, “giler”? [laughs]

SAMAD: where you learn huh? [laughs]

RS: [laughs] I know *lah*

SAMAD: I also use them but for *fun fun* only

Samad’s aversion to the Matrep peer group is evident in the beginning of the interview when he articulated ‘I got problem’ (line 2) if the Matrep referent was used by others to describe his identity. He connected this aversion by labelling the Matrep peer group as ‘very Malay’ (line 3). Although the term ‘Malay’ in this excerpt has been adjectivised by Samad, his initial attempts to conceptualise the term confused him further. The lay use of ‘very’ describes an extreme condition or
exaggeration to some degree, thus the label functions, in essence, to show distance between him and that peer group.

Despite the lack of confidence in his attempts to define ‘very Malay’ (line 3), Samad provided some rationale to his adjectivisation of the Matrep identity. His rationalisations supported the unfavourable perspectives popularly prescribed in the State’s socio-political discourse on the Matrep group. From Samad’s perspective, the Matrep is not modern but at the same time, not traditional and has simple values and a lack of drive to succeed in life (lines 8-14). Relevant to this dissertation, he problematised the concept of ‘very Malay’ as more frequent use of Bahasa Melayu (line 20), Malay-accented English (lines 23-24), and exaggerated sounds and vocabulary, which were different from the his norm (lines 30-31). Consequently, he attached particular language features to this unfavourable representation of the Matrep identity.

For the same reasons identified in excerpt (3) in which Aziz’s exclusionary strategy could be perceived as establishing ethno-class distinction, Samad’s ‘very Malay’ could similarly imply that he had positioned the Matrep less favourably in the Malay/Muslim market based on the group’s over-investment in Malay/Muslim-ness.

In excerpt (5), Samad clearly expressed ethnolinguistic rivalry with the Matrep peer group when he said: ‘we’re different’ (line 20) and ‘so we’re different’ (line 24). According to Wodak et al. (1999:47), the use of pronoun ‘we’ in line 20 and 24 is a form of ‘linguistic annexation’. Thus, because the interaction in excerpt (5) was between Samad and I, he was potentially annexing ethnolinguistic solidarity. For the same reason, Samad’s use of ‘our’ in ‘our Malay and English is also different from them’ (lines 24-25) could further suggest that he has positioned his identity in relation to a sociolinguistic habitus that this researcher belonged to.
The previous discussions thus far have demonstrated the informants’ exclusionary strategies from the Matrep peer group. The dominant discourse and the Matrep stereotypical representations fed by their socialisation experiences led to differing constructions of Malay/Muslim youth market. The informants’ explanations of in-group characteristics and/or aspirations have immediate implications for our understanding of attitudes towards and evaluations of out-groups. In comparing the features of Bahasa Melayu used between two groups, the informants were able to position themselves more favourably in the peer-social hierarchy within the Malay/Muslim community. By doing so, the informants not only legitimised the marginalised minority status of the Malays, they concurrently contested the State’s ideology that the mother tongue functions as a tool to manage intra-ethnic differences and relations.

Due to the negative representations of the Matrep, it can further be assumed that Mat-speak was not a de facto vernacular used by the chill threesome and Samad from the makan-makan collective. This assumption could possibly be extended to include many others in the Malay/Muslim community who do not want to be perceived unfavourably in inter- and intra-ethnic discourses. From my experience in the field, this assumption is far from being consistent with reality. Indeed, it is safe to say that many Malay/Muslims use Mat-speak in their everyday social interactions and my informants were no exception.

6.2.3 Mat-speak in discursive spaces

When I first entered the field, I observed that in spite of what the informants said about their in-group linguistic features, they used Mat-speak in some of their daily interactions. However, the evidence was mostly unrecorded and usually emerged in
observational data. In one of my early observations written in the fieldnotes described Samad from the makan-makan collective in a group conversation with some Malay/Muslim students at his polytechnic. I jotted in my fieldnotes: 'not Singlish but cakap macam Mat (talking like a Mat) and laughing non-stop'.

Excerpt (6) below is a self-recorded interaction between Aziz and Ramlee after a class at the polytechnic. What is prevalent in excerpt (6) is the high frequency of codeswitching involving the use of Mat-speak, which was not evident in most of the chill threesome’s recorded data:

**Excerpt (6)**

1. **AZIZ:** eh dok, nanti petang lu buat aper? Jom gi jumpa kat TM
2. (what are you doing later? let’s meet [unclear] at TM)
3. **RAMLEE:** not sure lah dok (not sure mate.) think heading home after
class
4. **AZIZ:** come on. join us lah lu malas ke per? (come on. join us. are you lazy?)
5. **RAMLEE:** gua busy lah dok. lu jumpa sapa? (I’m busy, mate. who are you meeting?)
6. **AZIZ:** jumpa itu mamat (to meet that guy) [laughs]
7. **RAMLEE:** [laughs] mamat mana? (which guy?) [laughs]
8. **AZIZ:** mamat lah mamat Simei bawah block lah. (that guy. that guy from Simei’s void deck)
9. **RAMLEE:** [laughs] Sudin?
10. **AZIZ:** [laughs] Sudin.
11. **RAMLEE:** siol lah lu (expression equivalent to: ‘you’re an asshole’)
12. **AZIZ:** jumpa Adam. nak survey kedai apple. (meeting Adam. want to survey the apple shop)
Aziz’s exaggeration of vowel sounds [aper] for the vernacular [apa] or [ape] in (line 1), the truncation of ‘pergi’ for ‘gi’ in the same line and ‘per’ for ‘aper/apa’ (line 5) marked some of the accented features of Mat-speak. Other lexical features of Mat-speak found in this excerpt are: ‘dok’ (line 1; to express: mate or brotherhood), ‘jom’ (line 1; to indicate a suggestion or option), ‘gua’ (line 7; used as the demonstrative ‘I’ or ‘me’), ‘lu’ (lines 5, 15, 19 and 22; used to indicate ‘you’), ‘amacham’ (line 18 and 20; to express ‘how about’ and/or ‘what if’) and ‘minah’ (line 20; the female equivalent of a Matrep but in this utterance it is used to indicate a female in an intimate relationship). In the excerpt, Ramlee used ‘picit’ (literal meaning: to press) in line 20 to indicate the act of sending a text message (or making a call on a mobile phone). Although excerpt (6) is a short and swift interaction between Aziz and Ramlee, shows incongruence between the informants’ linguistic behaviour and their actual use of language in interactions.

The lexicography of Mat-speak is not exhaustive and the informants identified features in excerpt (6) as typical of the contrasting styles of their Bahasa Melayu and the lower status sociolect. Nonetheless, I argue that Mat-speak is not necessarily

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65 To the best of my knowledge, there is no scholarly literature on the linguistic features of Mat-speak (apart from online discussions) though there are studies on the group’s identification (see Fu and Khiun 2009).

66 Here, I would like to state that my knowledge of Mat-speak was informed by what my informants’ defined as the linguistic features of the sociolect and from my own observations of those I perceived to embody the characteristics of Matrep. Conversely, these characteristics were also informed by the informants’ definition of the peer group.
very different from the Bahasa Melayu vernacular used by its speakers. Some of the differences lie predominantly in the articulation of the end-vowel sounds, clipping/truncation of first syllables and literal transference of Bahasa Melayu into English, and vice versa.

In excerpt (6), Aziz’s and Ramlee’s Mat-speak was deliberately performative, hence, stylised (Rampton 1995, 1998, 2005; Coupland 2001a, 2001b). Borrowing Coupland’s (2001a:345) explanation of the term ‘stylisation’, the informants’ shift in particular linguistic features illustrates “the knowing deployment of culturally similar style and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking contexts”. Excerpt (6) shows that both Aziz and Ramlee were familiar with the sociolect’s distinctive features such that they could similarly reproduce them, as evidenced in their accent-stylised utterances. The informants’ further showed knowledge of a particular Matrep’s culture referent, namely, spending time and/or meeting at the void deck. I suspect that they were also putting on a different persona in the form of linguistic behaviour belonging to the Matrep as part of this performance.

This is particularly evident in excerpt (7) on page 220, where I was part of the interaction and was able to see the not-so-subtle shifting in linguistic features and style. In excerpt (7) the conversation initially started with the two informants and I using English and minimal Bahasa Melayu. The shift in linguistic behaviour started as we were about to end the conversation for the day. Aziz proposed that we meet for the weekend. (RS is the researcher):
Excerpt (7)

1  AZIZ: lama lepak lepak sama kita semua on Saturday? Go see show at
2  Cine. sama budak budak lain, chill chill apple semua, [laughs] kita plan
3  tengok show pukul dua lama? (do you want to hang out with us
4  on Saturday? Go see a show at Cine. with the others, chill with all,
5  we plan to watch the two o’clock show, do you want to?)
6  RS: chill chill apple? [laughs]
7  RAMLEE: yeah. jom lah join mesti gerek punya! (yeah. come and join.
8  will be great!)
9  RS: I’ll see how…
10  AZIZ: don’t worry. you don’t need to belanja us (don’t worry. you don’t
11  need to give us a treat)
12  RS: kita tengok cerita apa? (what show are we watching?)
13  AZIZ: cerita aper best? itu nanti leh settle. takyah kecoh-kecoh
14  [laughs] janji lu muncul [laughs] (what movie is best? we can
15  settle it later. don’t get over-excited. what’s important is that you
16  turn up.)
17  RS: gua tengok amacham nanti, tak leh janji (I’ll see how later, no
18  promises)
19  AZIZ: eh lu cakap macam Mat lah (eh you’re talking like a Mat) [laughs]
20  RS: abih lu cakap macam Mat. gua cakap macam Mat lah [laughs]
21  (you’re talking like Mat. so I talk like one too.)
22  RAMLEE: [laughs] stoppit sey! gua tak leh tahan! [laughs] (stop it! I can’t
23  stand this!)

Excerpt (7) shows a high frequency of Mat-speak between Ramlee, Aziz and I. In the
earlier conversational turns, which have not been included in the excerpt above, the
conversation revolved around a discussion of who among their male friends the informants considered to be Matrep. In excerpt (7), Aziz initiated a sequence of talk that mixed three codes: Mat-speak, Bahasa Melayu and English. His questions: 'lu mau lepak lepak sama kita semua' (line 1) and 'lu mau' (line 3) are distinctively Mat-speak due to some of the vocabulary in the utterances and the animated and exaggerated manner as he articulated them. Ramlee joined in the conversation using Mat-speak in line 7. Ramlee’s convergence with Aziz’s linguistic features, I suggest, was to echo his peer’s performance of an associated identity which both were familiar with.

However, line 10 shows Aziz’s linguistic incongruence when he reverted back to his normal practice of codeswitching into his dominant English language. Aziz’s lapse in speech consistency supports my suggestion of the performative nature of this excerpt. Taking cue from Aziz and Ramlee, I responded in Bahasa Melayu (line 12) and subsequently in Mat-speak (line 17). In line 17, I used the Mat-speak linguistic norms: ‘gua’ (demonstrative ‘I’) and ‘amacham’ (from assimilating Bahasa Melayu ‘apa macam’ to indicate a possibility) and truncation of the first syllable of ‘boleh’ to ‘leh’ (to indicate ability). Aziz was surprised in my linguistic style. In the subsequent turns, our use of Mat-speak (lines 13-22) regularised the interaction. The high-use of Mat-speak was, however, short lived as we reverted to using English with some Bahasa Melayu after Ramlee remarked about the awkwardness of the situation (lines 22-23).

Excerpt (7) is an example of strategic use of Mat-speak by the informants. This interaction occurred approximately three weeks into the fieldwork when the informants and I had spent quite a lot of time socialising. Prior to this, I could not find any evidence in my data of high frequency of codeswitching particularly relevant
to Mat-speak. Both excerpts (6) and (7) illustrate a degree of linguistic convergence between Aziz and Ramlee.

The two excerpts subsequently illustrate the same convergence due to the informants’ familiarity with me and the relationships that formed between the three of us. However, I argue that this linguistic convergence through stylisation was not always easy nor possible. Often it was indicative of the speakers’ intergroup and interpersonal alliances. For example, although in excerpt (7) the informants and I were able to stylise Mat-speak, possibly indicating some level of crossing into the Matrep identity, it should be noted that this performance was only ever constructed in private spaces.

With the exception of Ramlee who used the sociolect with one of his friendship groups in public spaces, the rest of the informants claimed linguistic exclusion as they struggled to find any positive recognition in using Mat-speak. They further claimed that they did not use Mat-speak in their everyday interactions. Given the negative views of Matrep who the informants perceived as social outcasts, uneducated and unsuccessful, it was clear that they neither identified themselves with, nor wanted to be identified as one. The informants were also careful not to use Mat-speak in certain settings and only with certain people/peers for fear that, by adopting the linguistic feature of the Matrep, they would run the risk of being identified as members belonging to that group. Thus, it was apparent that my informants were not concerned about using Mat-speak per se, rather, they were more concerned about the perceptions of others and how they would be positioned if they were found to use the sociolect of an undesirable group.

An overarching process that the informants had undertaken when socialising was ‘othering’. Similar to the discussions in Chapter Five, the features of the other
are often imagined as homogeneous. Significant to the process of othering by the informants discussed in Chapter Six is the salience of accents in making social judgements of the other. The informants’ othering thus presupposes an ideology that their Bahasa Melayu variant is a more desirable and has a higher positive social value. This ideology promotes ‘the language subordination process’ which designs to simultaneously valorise the standard language and devalue the non-standard and its associated cultural forms (Lippi-Green 1997).

The next section focuses on the informants’ use of a shared language to exclude themselves from another group of speakers: the Malays in Malaysia. In the discussions that follow, ‘Bahasa Melayu’ is used to indicate the collective varieties used by the informants and those who use the language in Malaysia. In instances where the term ‘Bahasa Malaysia’ is used, it is not linguistically informed (as suggested in earlier in this chapter). Rather, the latter is used to distinguish the variety perceived by the informants to be different from their own.

6.3 Accented other: The Malays in Malaysia

Before discussing discourses of difference in this section, the Malay/Muslim in Singapore market needs to be briefly contextualised in relation to the colonialist history experienced by the Malays in Singapore and Malaysia. Singapore was part of the Federation of Malaya from 1963 to 1965. The post-1965 separation when Singapore gained independence meant that the Malays in the two countries have had dissimilar socio-geopolitical experiences thereafter. Some of the dissimilarities experienced by the Malay/Muslims in Singapore and those in Malaysia include the management of ethnicity by the respective States, economic progress and access to education. What remained constant for the ethnic groups in both countries are the
shared language, Bahasa Melayu, and the pervasiveness of the Muslim identity (see discussions in Chapter Five).

The set of data below was recorded after the chill threesome’s return from a one-week vacation to Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia which is a popular holiday destination for many Singaporeans. During one of our conversations about the chill threesome’s experiences vacationing in Malaysia, they recounted an interaction with an African-American male at Zouk, a popular club in Kuala Lumpur (RS is the researcher):

**Excerpt (8)**

1. AZIZ: so happening _lah_ the place, you been right?
2. RS: yeah. it’s at Jalan Ampang there right?
3. AZIZ: so many “cun” (colloquial Bahasa Malaysia to express beauty) girls also [laughs] then this black gay guy came up to me.
4. RAMLEE: he’s not gay _lah_…
5. SUDIN: yeah. then why he kept staring at him? [pointing at Aziz]
6. AZIZ: cos I’m handsome _mah_ …[laughs]
7. RAMLEE: _tak malu_. (literal translation: not embarrassed, contextual meaning: without shame/unbashful)
8. RS: so where was he from?
9. AZIZ: he said San Francisco. then he asked if I’m Malay. then I said I’m Singapore-Malay. then I speak American to him. [laughs]
10. RS: speak American?
11. AZIZ: _cakap macam orang putih_. (speak like a white person) [laughs]
12. SUDIN: tell him what he said about your English.
13. AZIZ: I speak English very well. then I said _of course_. I’m from Singapore.
14. [laughs]
Aziz’s response in lines 11-12: ‘I’m Singaporean-Malay’ to the African-American’s enquiry clearly distinguished him from the other Malay club-goers at the club who were Malaysians. By focussing on the ‘national’ aspect of his identity, Aziz articulated a belonging to an identity outside of Malaysia. Though Aziz would not have looked nor sounded any different from the other patrons at the venue who were from the same ethnic group. Aziz’s internalised ethnicisation illustrated “an attitude of regional exceptionalism, triumphalism and ambivalent regional identification” (Rahim 2009a:42). Aziz’s attitude could have been informed by his perceptions of Singapore’s economic and political achievements as compared to Malaysia’s. More significantly, Aziz’s internalised ethnicisation of the Malaysian Malays could be explained from his stylisation of discursive identity in the space.

First, this process can be seen from his: ‘then I speak American to him’ (line 12). Aziz’s use of ‘American’ to indicate his speech after he articulated his identity as Singaporean-Malay, however, is ambiguous. In all my interactions with Aziz in the field, I have not heard him using American-accented English. Thus, Aziz’s use of ‘American’ could not possibly suggest the mainstream variant spoken by speakers in the United States. Nevertheless, Aziz’s ‘cakap macam orang putih’ in line 14 with its literal translation ‘speak like a white person’ could provide some understanding of his speech in that interaction. His expression could suggest his styling of a variety close to the variant used by the American co-participant.

Thus, when the co-participant complimented Aziz’s English proficiency in line 16, it consolidated the identity that distinguished him from the Malays from
Malaysia. Aziz’s ‘of course, I’m from Singapore’ (line 16) in response to the African-American’s compliment can be perceived in two ways. On the one hand, the response could be read as him making a confident statement of his identity as a Malay from Singapore. Conversely, it could indicate internalised ethnicising based on the perceived socio-political representations the informants have of their Malaysian counterparts. Implicitly, the compliment affirmed Aziz’s perception that Malays in Singapore have a higher proficiency in the English language compared to their Malay Malaysian counterparts.

It is interesting to note that when describing his identity in the national space in Chapter Four (Section 4.4.1), Aziz placed his ethnic identity as more dominant than his national identity and articulated a hyphenated ‘Malay-Singaporean’. However, in excerpt (8) above, he foregrounded his national identity and located his identity as ‘Singaporean-Malay’. This renegotiation of identity reinforces a previously established argument in Chapter Four that ethnicity and nationality can be managed as distinct and separate entities and shows quite clearly how multiple identities are locally-managed situated contexts.

When I questioned the informants about the relative frequency of their use of English compared to their use of Bahasa Melayu when they were in Kuala Lumpur, they recalled that in situations when they felt that they needed to distinguish themselves from the Malays in Malaysia, English was their preferred choice. According to Sudin, even in simple transactions such as ordering food at fast food joints, they used English with the locals, presumably indicating some kind of perceived status or power with its use.
6.3.1 Mobilising ethnolinguistic solidarity

Interestingly, the chill threesome shared that they used Bahasa Melayu (and often, pretended to be Malaysians) in situations where it would be advantageous to use their mother tongue and to invest in their Malay/Muslim-ness. The use of Bahasa Melayu was advantageous when negotiating a good bargain at the shops, for example. Excerpt (9) illustrates Ramlee’s and Aziz’s making meaning in which Bahasa Melayu was mobilised as a symbolic resource. They recalled a shopping experience in which Aziz’s shift in identity from that of a Bahasa Melayu-speaker from Singapore to that of a speaker from one of the Malaysian cities proved advantageous for him.

Excerpt (9)

1 RAMLEE: eh you remember when we at Bintang?
2 SUDIN: which one is Bintang?
3 RAMLEE: Bukit Bintang lah, mana lagi? (where else?)
4 AZIZ: why huh?
5 RAMLEE: remember the perfume girl who look like Siti?
6 SUDIN: yeah I remember.
7 AZIZ: [laughs] oh she asked where I was from…
8 RAMLEE: yeah.
9 AZIZ: then I said dari (from) Johor and she believed me! [laughs]
10 RAMLEE: how can she tell that you from Johor, I also don’t know! [laughs]
11 maybe you look like someone from there.
12 AZIZ: no lah. I don’t look Malaysian what. I told her we orang (people)
13 from JB (Johor Bahru) then she asked “betul ke”? (is that right?)
14 then I said “betul”. (correct) [laughs] (…)
(Subsequent turns show how Aziz tries to convince the salesperson that he is a Johorian by using what he perceived as the variety spoken by the locals. He also tries to impress the salesperson with his knowledge of the Malaysian city.)

RAMLEE: then she gave you discount for your mother’s perfume right? how much huh?

AZIZ: fifteen ringgit. it’s fake perfume lah. that’s why cheap only. but she said she only give discounts to locals because tourists got money to spend. I know one. if I talked to her in English she sure know I’m not local. should got one for your mother too, man.

In excerpt (9), Aziz initiated a response in which he mobilised Bahasa Melayu with ethnolinguistic solidarity when the salesperson asked where he was from. In line 9, Aziz located his identity as ‘dari JB’ (from JB), suggesting to the salesperson that he was a Malaysian from the Malaysian city, Johore Bahru. According to Aziz, he was believable as a Johorian because he used an accented-Bahasa Melayu, suggesting that the variety was Bahasa Malaysia. This could further imply that the Bahasa Melayu variety that he had used was different from his norm in Singapore. Aziz went on to model what he perceived as Bahasa Malaysia in lines 12-14 but I was not able to tell the difference between the variety that he used in our interactions. The Bahasa Malaysia Aziz claimed to have used with the salesperson could be more of a convergence to his perceived accent of the co-participant. This convergence could conversely indicate his generalisation of the various accented Bahasa Melayu found in Malaysia.

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67 Johor Bahru, or affectionately termed JB by Malaysians and Singaporeans alike, is the city of the Malaysian state, Johore. The Johore state is located on the southern part of Malaysia and is conveniently accessible from Singapore via bridges.
Furthermore, in excerpt (9) Aziz emphasised that ‘she said she only give discounts to locals because tourists got money to spend. I know one’ (lines 18-20). Aziz’s certainty as evidenced in his statement: ‘I know one’ indicated his tacit knowledge that to enact such a solidarity through language would subsequently privilege him, if successful. Ramlee’s contribution in the conversation supported Aziz’s rationale in shifting his identity and that the styling was successful and advantageous. Thus, Aziz’s performance was deliberate and strategic as indicated in his account: ‘if I talked to her in English she sure know I’m not local’ (lines 20-21).

In a complementary group interview (excerpt 10), Aziz reflected on the chill threesome altering its linguistic style in the Malaysian city, that is, using more Bahasa Melayu than they normally would in Singapore. (KL is short for Kuala Lumpur, a city in Malaysia):

**Excerpt (10)**

When I think about it, we used a lot of Bahasa Malaysia when in KL. Definitely more Malay. Mostly when buying food at the roadside and bargain with the abang-abang. I got a good discount for one t-shirt when I spoke to the abang in Malay. The day before Sudin got the same thing, he didn’t get it cheaper. That’s the good thing using Malay when in KL. They can’t tell if you tourist or local, so they cannot ketuk you. At the hotel we use English. And when shopping at Bukit Bintang.

Though mitigated to some degree by the epistemic modality of ‘I think’, Aziz’s reflection above indicates that some of the chill threesome members’ experiences and knowledge of Bahasa Melayu variants enabled the informants to cross the boundaries between their identities when they were in Singapore and those that they were motivated to adopt in Malaysia. In excerpt (10) above, Aziz
problematised Sudin’s unsuccessful attempt to get a discount for a similar purchase a day earlier was probably due the latter’s language choices – that Sudin did not use Bahasa Malaysia in negotiating the purchase. Aziz further rationalised that if Sudin had used Bahasa Melayu, the latter’s national identity might have seemed ambiguous to the ‘abang-abang’ and ‘so they cannot ketuk you’. The term ‘ketuk’ is a vernacular expression similar to ‘being ripped off’. Aziz’s identity as a Malay/Muslim tourist from Singapore was thus negotiable as he assumed the language feature of a local from Malaysia.

It can be further observed from Aziz’s reflection in excerpt (10), yet another layer of performance. In his interaction with the t-shirt sellers, Aziz used ‘abang’ to address them. The address form ‘abang’ was used here not only to indicate the person being older than Aziz, such as an elder brother or an uncle (with or without any familial relations), he had used the address form as an affectionate term that suggested a level of respect, and subsequently mobilising ethnolinguistic solidarity with the t-shirt sellers. Aziz’s use of ‘abang’ allowed him to simultaneously become a Malay/Muslim person from Malaysia, a member of the socio-economic and political milieu experienced by the sellers and thus be part of a brotherhood of sort. Thus, by using Bahasa Melayu and assuming membership with the t-shirt sellers, Aziz was given a discount without even asking for one.

The examples in Section 6.3.1 so far refer to ways in which Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Malaysia has been stylistically and strategically utilised in situations where a negotiation of identity was advantageous to the informants. Notwithstanding, Aziz stated some exceptions in which the chill threesome used English to mobilise ethnolinguistic rivalry in the Kuala Lumpur experience in the earlier excerpt (8).
6.3.2 Mobilising ethnolinguistic rivalry

Excerpt (11) below is unique in the Kuala Lumpur interview data. This deliberate divergence of linguistic behaviour occurred in the hotel which the informants stayed at. In the excerpt, Sudin raised an issue in which his attempt at constructing ethnolinguistic solidarity through a convergence of language features did not yield the expected positive outcomes:

Excerpt 11

We didn’t book a room before we left. It was silly, but we wanted adventure. So we went to this small hotel near Pudu. Really small, you know. Five storeys. We thought we could get some service if we use Malay. So I talked to him and I was very polite to him. This person was so rude. I was very annoyed, cannot tahan (colloquial expression: it is unbearable) so I told the person that we’re not locals and showed my passport. From then, I didn’t bother talking to him in Malay. I think I even talked slang at him.

In his biographical description in Chapter Four (Section 4.4.2), despite being not fluent in Bahasa Melayu and that English was his dominant language, Sudin had initiated a conversation with a hotel employee using Bahasa Melayu in excerpt (11). Sudin’s change in linguistic behaviour suggested that he was negotiating a membership that belonged to the co-participant. His negotiation of this identity presupposed that the co-participant would similarly converge to his code choice. However, Sudin’s attempt to negotiate a shared habitus with the hotel employee was unsuccessful which resulted him to reassess his identity performance. In Sudin’s case, he had tried to position the hotel staff with ethnolinguistic solidary based on their habitus and assumed an investment that was not necessarily reciprocated by the
individual. His defensive reaction was to cease using Bahasa Melayu and revert to using his dominant language English and talking ‘slang’.

Here, Sudin’s use of the term ‘slang’ does not refer to its usual linguistic definition of informal vocabulary and expressions. To ‘slang’ in the lay understanding of English speakers in Singapore is to exaggerate the register of the language and is often motivated by the intent to show some kind of socio-economic distinction. This can be interpreted as a show of a power position. This register could include the enunciation of English words using (perceived) prestige-sounding accents, strict adherence to prescribed grammar rules and/or the use of more formal vocabulary and expressions. Sudin’s reactionary ‘slang’ could subsequently be seen as him renegotiating his identity by attempting to display socio-geopolitical distinctiveness between Malays in Singapore and in Malaysia. In excerpt (9), he has used language to show this socio-political distinction as he articulated an ethnolinguistic rivalry based on the ethno-class ideology that Malays in Singapore speak English and/or are more proficient in English compared to their Malaysian counterparts. Again, I have to emphasise that this distinction is perceptual.

As the co-participant in the above interaction, the hotel staff did not interpret Sudin’s use of Bahasa Malaysia as particularly meaningful nor favourable that could have resulted in a shared habitus. In other words, the hotel employee did not recognise the meaning behind Sudin’s linguistic choice – hence, the local production of meaning was absent. When compared to Sudin’s performance and the hotel employee’s non-reaction, Aziz’s stylised performance was successful because the social meaning was shared by him and his co-participants; the salesperson in excerpt (9) and ‘abang-abang’ in excerpt (10).

Discussions in the Section 6.3.1 and Section 6.3.2 have shown Aziz’s and
Sudin's flexibility in negotiating their multiple identities and/or by belonging in faux memberships. However, I have to acknowledge that not all uses of language represent choices involving the indexing of identity performance. In discussing the linguistic resources available to the informants, a particular variety or code might have been selected for its communicative value in a specific situation. For example, the informants could possibly have initiated a conversation in Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Malaysia in situations where they felt that it would facilitate ease in communication with another speaker who might not be able to converse in English effectively. In this instance, the use of language by the informants could essentially be a communicative tool without conveying anything meaningfully symbolic. The marking of a specific identity, however, can be observed from Aziz’s retelling of his experiences and Sudin’s reaction to the hotel employee’s lack of attention to the group when he chose not to use Bahasa Melayu/Bahasa Malaysia to continue with the interaction. Sudin’s statement: ‘I think I even talked slang to him’ after showing the employee his passport, clearly articulated an identity performance.

6.4 Discussion and summary

In order to understand how key informants positioned their identity in the Malay/Muslim market in Singapore and while on a short-trip to neighbouring Malaysia, this chapter has presented a multi-layered examination of the their sociolinguistic habitus and the ways Bahasa Melayu was used as a symbolic resource in negotiating identity. The objective is to gain a deeper insight into the structure of the market and the construction of Malay/Muslim-ness. What we have learned is that a (perceived) legitimised sociolinguistic habitus privileges the key informants with considerable access to positions of power within the Malay/Muslim market.
Chapter Six has discursively analysed the informants’ processes of othering through the use of Bahasa Melayu (and English) amongst others who share the language. Due to the peculiar conditions that were involved in my informants’ othering, the term ‘internalised ethnicisation’ has been introduced to refer to the informants’ adjectivisation of features attached to others who share or embody Malay/Muslim-ness. The informants have attached symbolic associations and socio-pragmatic meanings to a certain sociolect termed Mat-speak. Within the Malay/Muslim community in Singapore, Mat-speak is emblematic of the peer group Matrep. The construction of other-ness mediated the informants’ social judgment as they attached perceived and real language features in the generalisation and/or stereotypical representation of this group.

Subsequently, the process of internalised ethnicisation was discussed in this chapter in relation to the Malays in Malaysia. The discussions presented in this chapter showed the informants’ internalised ethnicisation was mediated by the their perceived socio-geopolitical experiences. When in Malaysia, the informants’ linguistic identity became more apparent as they negotiated using English and Bahasa Melayu in their interactions. The informants’ internalised ethnicisation of the Matrep and the Malays in Malaysia has significant social relevance as it involved marking meanings for linguistic variations in terms that privileged their habitus and marginalised others.

Central to the discussions in Chapter Six is the notion of style that informs the relationship between language, identification and identity performance (see Eckert 2000; Irvine 2001; Rampton 1999). Through adopting styles of others, that is, the linguistic features of the Matrep peer group in Singapore and the Malays in Malaysia, the informants were able to strategically exclude themselves from those
whom they perceived to be socially incompatible to their identity. The process of social exclusion through internalised ethnicisation enabled the informants to reflexively negotiate and renegotiate their identities in public and private contexts. The analysis, subsequently, illustrated the informants’ strong awareness and nuanced understanding of how performing a particular linguistic style carried social meanings (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 2005), and how reflexivity informed their identity performance in social settings. Some of the informants were more successful than others in their performances due to varying levels of Bahasa Melayu proficiency and habitual use of English.

In addition, Chapter Six showed how the informants reconfigured the social structuration in the context of the broader Singapore society and redefined the processes of exclusion of social actors belonging to a marginalised group. Within the Malay/Muslim market, the informants positioned themselves as the centre and their Matrep peers as residing in the periphery. This chapter has shown evidence of such marginalisation based on the informants’ shared perceptions of the Matrep and its representations in the Singapore society. The informants distinguished themselves from the Matrep through the latter’s linguistic features which consisted of a high frequency of Bahasa Melayu-use, heavily-accented spoken English, and use of the sociolect, Mat-speak.

One of the informants further articulated that the Bahasa Melayu used by the Matrep is ‘like not normal Malay’ presumably treating it as deviant. The consequence of informants’ homogenising of the normative use of their mother tongue meant that they excluded or suppressed other groups who used the language in a way that did not fit into their idealised Bahasa Melayu speakers. The informants strategically excluded Mat-speak by labelling it as a variant that is not
only different but also socially undesirable. In this chapter, Mat-speak, as a Bahasa Melayu sociolect and one of the core constituents in the Matrep identity, was stigmatised not only in terms of correctness and appropriateness but also in terms of the idea that it indirectly reflect on the deviant lifestyles, issues of morality and other unfavourable aspects of its users. The dominance of the informants' variety of Bahasa Melayu established through the association of it with a high level of prestige and, conversely, the subordination of Mat-speak, is symbolic in establishing hierarchical positioning within the Malay/Muslim market.

Within the discourse of Mat-speak used by the Matrep to enact their social realities and performed identities, the informants' use of the sociolect extends the discussion on the notion of crossing (Section 6.2.3). While the young people Rampton's works stylised an out-group language feature so as to “cultivate alternative minority solidarities” (Rampton 1995:294), this chapter showed that the Mat-speak styling by the informants' was not to indicate ethnolinguistic solidarity nor affiliation with their Matrep peers. Rather, it was to mark ethnolinguistic rivalry through the exclusion from the Matrep membership. In particular reference to the Matrep identity, the informants understood and were aware of the risks of the negative labelling inherent in using Mat-speak indiscriminately. Therefore, the informants chose to use the sociolect strategically, often to mock the Matrep membership. Further, the informants used Mat-speak in private spaces and with those who they were familiar with so as to be certain that they would not be perceived as belonging to the other. The informants might index familiarity with local peer group and its style, however, discussions have shown that they did not necessarily want to belong to the Matrep identity nor be perceived as one.
Discussions on the power-language relationship extended to the enactment of an others' linguistic features to exercise of power inherent in the positioning of selves and others using humour (Holmes 2000). By differentiating their Bahasa Melayu variant, the informants signal their group belonging and position themselves more positively than the Matrep whom they position in periphery. Through internalised ethnicisation informed by the ideology of language subordination (Lippi-Green 1997), the informants convey the coherence of negative conceptions of Matrep that exist in public discourse.

Subsequently, the analysis in Chapter Six explicated the negotiation of faux identities that can be performed and affirmed through the re-appropriation, flexibility and transferability of linguistic styles. The discussions have been framed around how the informants valued language as a capital resource by exercising a level of strategic thinking and reflexivity. Data in this chapter showed that the informants used Bahasa Melayu to manipulate their national- and transnational identities depending on where, when and how the linguistic style that they have chosen could be advantageous in their interactions with others. What was apparent in the internalised ethnicising of the Malays in Malaysia was the generalisations about the Bahasa Melayu used in the neighbouring country. Subsequently, through this process of simplification, the informants attached a homogenised variety of Bahasa Melayu (Bahasa Malaysia) to attribute a less valued Malay Malaysian identity.

To conclude, Chapter Six has explored the agency of the informants in relation to the use of their mother tongue, Bahasa Melayu. As social actors and informed by the local, historical and socio-geopolitical discourses, Aziz, Ramlee, Sudin and Samad created social meanings through ‘othering’ of the Matrep peer group and the Malays in Malaysia. The discussions in this chapter have explored the
making and inferring of meaning in the use of Bahasa Melayu variants (Mat-speak and Bahasa Malaysia), which informed the informants' understanding and articulation of their own social habitus. More significantly, the maintenance of this habitus was based on deep-rooted language ideologies. The informants' language ideology served to generate linguistic differences, exaggerate and increase already existing levels of social differentiation, and emphasise the correlation between particular linguistic features in social interaction with the construction of social structures locally and geopolitically. The informants perceived their Bahasa Melayu to be different from the other variants used in Singapore and by the Malays in Malaysia, which in turn, presupposed a set of linguistic forms that has a known and uniform social value. Further, this ideology has become a system of belief for the informants in dominant discourse in which they could use to rationalise the processes of exclusion from and marginalisation of the other. Nevertheless, there can only be a coherent relationship between the informants' ideology if those around them share the same assumptions and expectations that informed this ideology.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation is about the lived experiences of four young Malay/Muslim males in Singapore. It discusses how their identities are related to the ways they conceptualised their selves, interpreted their lived experiences, lived their lives as social actors, how they perceived others and how they wanted others to perceive them. Though some may not find the process of identity negotiation in discursive spaces problematic, the Malay/Muslim youths have to negotiate their selves against the backdrop of inherited social structuration and ethnolinguistic marginality. Indeed, this is the social reality of the Malay/Muslim community.

The negotiation of the Malay/Muslim identity in dominant discourses is implicated with the ideological construction of homogeneity and linguistic difference. These have further essentialised the Malay/Muslim habitus and in many cases, resulted in the normalisation of marginality, exclusion and symbolic domination by those in the market. This is the focus of this study. This research was motivated by my own questions growing up as a Malay/Muslim male in Singapore and to challenge the dominant discourses of homogeneity in the Malay/Muslim market.

As the previous chapters have discussed, examples of how an actor’s agency can be limited by the dominant sociolinguistic constraints need to be understood against the backdrop of Malay/Muslim-ness and examine the discursive construction and negotiation of identity within dominant discourses. These constraints are imposed by those in positions of perceived and real power who define what counts as legitimate performances of Malay/Muslim-ness. The analysis in this dissertation has shown that agency is tied closely to the Malay/Muslim male young persons’ experiences growing up in a marginalised minority (e.g. Li 1990; Rahim 2001;
suratman 2004; kahn 2006; zuber 2010), within the rigid management of ethnicity by the state (e.g. clammer 1990, 1998; vasil 1995) and the state’s intrusions into the affairs of islam (e.g. alatas et al. 2003; hassan 2003; hussin 2005; aljunied 2006; nasir et al. 2009; rahim 2009b; tan 2007, 2008, 2009).

it is important to establish that beyond the specificity of examples drawn from the male male/muslim experience, this dissertation demonstrates that notions of language and ethnicity are not entirely about personal characteristics. and, the relationship between language and ethnicity is not entirely about agency (i.e. what a person chooses to be). instead, ethnolinguistics are about markets where agency and habitus work themselves out in contexts with specific histories and politics. the examples of constrained agency, of structural marginalisation and of investments in the male/muslim identity that support this research shed some critical light on the complicated political economy of language and identity in the singapore’s male/muslim market. they reveal how this market is structured internally and externally and what the consequences of that structuration are in terms of how people, resources and discourses are positioned in specific spaces.

7.1 research questions revisited

questions in this dissertation focused on the productive and dialectic tensions between structure and agency, and between the exclusion/inclusion, centre/periphery and self/others nexus. these questions privileged language and identity as a social practice embedded as situated performances in specific markets in response to social, political and economic constraints. these constraints are seen to limit an actor’s access to symbolic and material resources. these questions are important as they explore the role of language in the construction of identity among
members of the Malay/Muslim community within their market and the broader Singapore society.

I am aware that identities can be framed through different aspects. Nonetheless, the research questions for this dissertation has examined negotiations of identity against the backdrop of the ways the key informants, as social actors, invest in their Malay/Muslim-ness. Researching against this background enabled this researcher to understand the political economy of ethnicity articulated by these actors. In order to understand the power behind dominant discourses, and how an actor is positioned with respect to them, it is important to situate the historical, political and economic conditions in which this market is constructed. This dissertation questioned why and how actors negotiate dominant discourses, why and how they position themselves in these discourses, and if they reproduce, redefine or contest these positionings. These questions could possibly produce a critical view of language and identity where ethnicity is intertwined with other social constructs and is structured along ethnic lines. I hope that the research questions in this dissertation could set the trajectory to extend more understandings about the Malay/Muslims and the Malay/Muslim market e.g. what will the Malay/Muslim market look like in ten or twenty years time? And, will there be any difference to the ways in which the Malay/Muslim ethnolinguistic identity is used to construct and mark class relations? These questions have been explored through a critical ethnolinguistic enquiry.

Any research conducted through the lens of a qualitative enquiry raises questions around the generalisibility of the researcher's interpretations. Often questions are asked if the interpretations are subject-specific. Or if these interpretations can be generalised to other subjects or groups? My response is that questions of generalisibility are seldom definite. The objective of language to the
actor in constructing and negotiating identity is precisely to generate material that operates on the individual level, albeit the fact that this is invariably set against, and is conducted in interaction, with considerations that relates to group identity. In return, group identity itself is experienced at both the level of individual, that is the self – and, the group. For this reason, I argue that in the study of sociolinguistics, it is not possible to separate the self from group identity. Neither is it possible to separate the group from the individual identity.

That said, the question remains on how much of the interpretations in studying the relationship between language and identity which relates to the self is generalisable to the group identity. To continue with this line of reasoning presented earlier and within the context of this dissertation, the question is, how much of the key informants’ experiences and their habitus can be applied to other young Malay/Muslims males in Singapore? Because of the positionality and context dependent experiences of those who engage in this type of research (the researcher and researched), as I have argued, there is not a simple response when it comes to generalisibility in a qualitative endeavour. It would be safe for this researcher to say that some Malay/Muslim young people can relate to most, some or none of the interpretations that I have discussed in this dissertation.

The next sections revisit the research questions and draw together key interpretations from the analysis chapters.

7.1.1 Constructing and contesting the national identity

The objective in Chapter Four was to reveal the importance of self-reference in constructing the self. The self-reference exercise enabled key informants to pursue identity ownership, ascriptions and erasure. The almost-clean and coincidental
separation of identity references in the analysis (i.e. Singaporean, Malay, Malay-Singaporean and Singaporean-Malay) were based on the premise that identity is subject to continuity and change, and conformity and diversity, and carried with them symbolic meanings. Using Bourdieu’s (1997:86) notion of habitus which refers to the ‘subjective but individual systems of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception and action common to all members of the same group or class’, a number of considerations underlined the key informants’ acts of habitus renegotiations (i.e. habitus-maintaining or habitus-defining practices). What are the discourses behind their understanding and constructions of ‘national identity’? What are the resources used in these discursive spaces?

I argue that core to Aziz’s, Ramlee’s, Sudin’s and Samad’s investing (or not investing) in their Malay/Muslim habitus in the national space was their understanding of the socio-political meaning of identity in dominant discourse. Central to their explorations of self-reference was the State’s contradiction in attending to multiculturalism which has created among the Malay/Muslim informants knowledge of ethnolinguistic marginalisation and social structuration. Against this background, the chapter located socio-political meanings as fundamental to these self-references. Because language use is embedded in complex relationships of social constructs such as race, ethnicity and gender (Miller 2003; Pavlenko 2001; Fishman 1989), the key informants’ reference of self gave prominence to language psychologically and symbolically as a motif in relation to which they negotiate their identities. Their negotiation of multiple identities included articulating their sense of belonging and displacement in the national space. The strong association of language and the ‘home’, should come as no surprise surrounding Malay/Muslim-ness in dominant discourse since the home is a defining site for socialisation of ethnic cultures, identities and
languages. However, ‘home’ can be associated with the meaning of displacement in terms of locality and linguistically. Accordingly, the key informants showed the capacity for language to be mobilised as valued forms of social-economic capital, and linguistic and cultural capital in negotiating their identities within the national space.

Interpreting the references of self revealed the discursive negotiation of exclusion and inclusion in the national space and relates to constructing the coherent self. At the same time, economic, political and social pressures often determine both the informants’ attitudes and language considerations. What was unique in my informants’ self reference exercise was the absence of Singlish in articulating a local identity. This supports the current consensus in public discourse that the colloquial variant is not a marker of national identity (Ho 2006; Lee-Wong 2001; Wee 2002).

7.1.2 Construction and negotiation of the religious identity

Chapter Five has focused on the issues surrounding significant considerations in naturalising Arabic in investing in the Malay/Muslim identity. This chapter further questioned the attitudes towards Arabic and Bahasa Melayu in relation to the constructing their Malay/Muslim-ness. The fact that Bahasa Melayu did not evoke the same feelings of belonging as Arabic in the Malay/Muslim market, meant that the key informants had placed the latter with higher symbolic value in the social domain. This could be due to the deeply held attitudes and beliefs about the language. Other ideological considerations included: for what purpose was the language selected in the interaction? What meanings does Arabic have for those around them? More significantly, with whom are these meanings shared and true? And for whom are these meanings perhaps not true? I argue that the informants’ linguistic identity performance cannot be separated from their own and others’ attitudes towards
these considerations. More significantly, the ideological construction of linguistic difference gave the key informants the authority to make coherent their differentiation and marginalisation of the other (Anderson 2007).

This chapter showed the complexity of the Arabic-self link and its treatment in Singapore in interesting, to say the least. I have asserted that the knowledge of Arabic as a hegemonic code reveals the structures of power and hegemony in the Malay/Muslim market. The ideology further suggests the relationship between the position in the religious social structures and the (real or perceived) competency in Arabic. For further discussion, it would be interesting to explore if this relationship would have similar meanings outside socio-religious contexts. Would a person who is competent in Arabic similarly be positioned with some level of authority and importance in everyday interactions that are not embedded with any discussions on religion, religious commitment and religious identity? Would the relationship between positionality in the religious social structures and competency have any meaning in these interactions and the speakers? If the relationship still exists outside socio-religious context, how is this shown in the linguistic behaviour of the speakers?

Based on the discussions in Chapter Five, Arabic is not simply employed as a means of communication in the functional sense of the term but also a lens through which the informants can look at how they as an individual and a group feel about themselves and their status in the Malay/Muslim market. In the informants’ scheme of things, Arabic may have considered Arabic as a sacred language because of it is the language of the Qu’ran, however, this is far from being a straightforward discussion and is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, what was obvious was that the key informants saw their ability to use Arabic as a religious-cultural product and a symbol of belonging and exclusion.
Arabic was not only used to index a religious identity, it made coherent and congruent the language ideology by placing the construction of sameness and difference within the larger ideological frames that connects Arabic to characteristics of ideal Muslims. By constructing a strong social exclusion between Muslims and non-Muslims, the use of Arabic assists to enforce perceived boundaries of religious segregation in Singapore. More sophisticated data is required to understand how social processes of exclusion are carried out among and by Malay/Muslims, as suggested by the State. It would be significant to see the interplay of social interaction and social distance, if and when Malay/Muslims use Arabic in the presence of or with non-Muslims.

There were some discrepancies in observing commitment to the language ideology dispute over Arabic words which have been used differently among members in the group. Questions involving what is appropriate and correct usage resemble the rhetoric of standardisation (Milroy and Milroy 1999). However, where disputes and disagreements arose, the perception of self or others was not necessarily affected. In resolving issues, there was a tendency for the informants to use knowledge that has been passed on from others.

7.1.3 Negotiating the ‘other’ and self within the Malay/Muslim market.

Due to the State’s multiculturalist policy in which ideologies of language are implicated in the construction of the nationalist ideology, a fundamental characteristic of a Malay/Muslim person is whether or not they can speak Bahasa Melayu. One of the paradoxes of Bahasa Melayu is that as a language (based on the State’s policy) it can bring the Malay/Muslims together through a shared habitus (i.e. ethnic solidarity), however, it is also capable to differentiate/fragment the shared
habitus (i.e. ethnic rivalry). Thus, in this chapter, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of the ‘other’ because through acts of ascriptions, the ‘other’ contributes to the authoring of the self (Maalouf 1998).

Chapter Six addressed the discursive social reproduction of marginalisation through the processes of construction of self/group ethnolinguistic identity. The key informants showed that having the power to determine which linguistic norms that are more acceptable socially is an important aspect in the construction of self which resulted to the hierarchical positioning of others. This chapter showed how the informants had used Bahasa Melayu to negotiate social distance and marginalisation of the Matrep. This discourse of exclusion was exemplified by the informants’ ideological construction of linguistic difference which included the vernacularisation of the Matrep’s Bahasa Melayu and thus, deviant.

Of course, there is never complete certainty that a vernacular style has a social meaning, or that the speakers of this variety are invoking any of these meanings perceived and shared by the informants. This analysis however, expands our understanding of available social expectations and value-laden categories which influence what is made socially relevant in the different speech styles. In this chapter, the informants conceptualised their language situation in more or less dichotomous way, ascribing particular features to their Bahasa Melayu and the variety used by the Matrep and Malaysians. It seemed that the perceived dichotomy between their Bahasa Melayu variety to that of the peer group has been deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of the key informants. It is important to emphasise that the exercise of power in identity work is not simply a matter of using a particular language. Indeed, in focusing upon one aspect affecting a person’s construction of self, there is a danger of being tempted to reduce it to that aspect alone.
The informants recognised that Bahasa Melayu could be used to strategically enact greater identity options, as individuals or groups based on the ideology of linguistic difference. It has allowed the informants to challenge the dichotomous notions of centre and periphery within their Malay/Muslim market and in the broader social milieu. Bahasa Melayu and its variants further enabled them to articulate a complex resistance to societal and ethnicised ascriptions as they became more aware of the issues of inherited marginality. Subsequently, the informants were able to reflect on the range of identity positions available to them by using Bahasa Melayu and the negotiability/non-negotiability of these options. These options are based on their own or shared experiences and group memberships, including imagined and real benefits in those memberships.

In the second part of Chapter Six, the analysis addressed the discourses of exclusion in Malaysia based on (perceived) ideological linguistic difference. This study argue that the perceived differences could be related to socio-political and historical incidences (Rahim 2009a) and not necessarily, actual linguistically-informed explanations such as variations in phonology, lexicon, syntactical and pragmatics. In this study the focus on accent was prevalent in the informants’ articulation of difference in their Bahasa Melayu variant. More exploration is necessary to provide insights into the inclusion/exclusion processes of intra-Bahasa Melayu speakers in the region.

More importantly, this chapter has discussed the ways of structuration and power were played out within and across the Malay/Muslim male youth identity at the micro- and macro-level. This is especially significant when Bahasa Melayu has been used to serve as key to naturalising the boundaries inherent in the Malay/Muslim market. My informants have exercised agency in the options that they make
themselves available to and the positions they claim in order to access and control symbolic and material resources. These ideologies were intertwined with the explanations/rationalisations of the identities of self and the marginalisation of others.

As discussed within this dissertation, ethnolinguistic identity is a dominant form of structuring the social, within the ethnic groups and across the broader Singapore society. The young male Malay/Muslim informants faced multiple levels of pressure and placed a considerable degree of salience on language in constructing and negotiating their multiple identities. Many of these identities involved the establishment and maintenance of certain ideological assumptions. These ideologies of nationalism, language and class, among other forms involved the essentialising discourses that resulted to practices of inclusion and exclusion. It is unfortunate to learn that to some extent, the key informants have further reproduced ethno-class dynamics within their Malay/Muslim market. I recommend that a systematic and subtle analytical approach should be able to assist in reconstructing social cognitions about other groups that reside within this market. I will now move to a discussion of the implications of this study.

7.2 Research implications

This study has provided alternative accounts to the understandings of youth in Singapore and is one that contributes to the literature on negotiation of youth identity in multilingual contexts outside the Anglophone world (e.g. Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou 2003; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2003). Contributions to knowledge on how youth navigate their local social worlds is especially significant when the scholarship on the study of youth and identity has been Euro- and American centric or focused on sociological perspectives which
considered youth as either deviant cultures or resistant to power and authority (cf. Bucholtz 2002; Williams 2007). Through a small-scale longitudinal ethnographic qualitative research, this study has achieved three main implications.

First, this dissertation has made a contribution to existing theory by assisting in making palpable the pervasive inequalities in Singapore that has impacted the lived experiences of Malay/Muslims in the construction and negotiation of identity (see works by Rahim; Li 1990; Suratman 2004; Kahn 2006; Zuber 2010). More significantly, this study has attempted to understand identity performance in the national space against a background of social structuration and ethnolinguistic marginality. In particular, this study calls for research to consider more closely the complex and situated practices of identity negotiations by Malay/Muslim youths.

The second is to offer an alternate orientation towards the study of identity in Singapore by supporting the call for research in exploring language ideologies in the production of social identities of various kinds; gender, ethnicity, indigenous and national identities (e.g. Inoue, 2006; Makihara 2007; Shankar 2008; Bunte 2009; Kroskrity 2009) and in discussions in linguistic anthropology/sociolinguistics (e.g. Agha 2007; Kroskrity 2000a, 2000b; Miller 2004). The concepts of power, language and identity as a theoretical orientation was found to be useful in linking inequality, positionality and awareness in the discourses of social contemporary Singapore and in relation to a minority group. This study has shown that the informants’ language and identity relationship was sustained by shared and contesting linguistic ideologies. Within this discourse, the informants had access to a common set of beliefs and expectations supporting their use of English, Bahasa Melayu and/or Arabic. The analysis has important implications relating to the deep rootedness of the informants’ language ideologies in their belief system, which in turn, informs how they
differentiate and discriminate themselves from others within the Singapore social
space. As one of the most important symbolic resources in society, language cannot
avoid the interference of ideology, neither should we protect it against such
interference.

The third implication is more practical; the complex issues of negotiating self
show clearly that there has to be a more nuanced and multi-directional approach to
study language and identity in Singapore. By managing multiculturalism, the State has
facilitated the reproduction of ethnolinguistic differences which result to an unequal
distribution of resources, including statuses along ethnolinguistic and class lines in
dominant discourses. Through the Malay/Muslim young males’ negotiation of identity
in the national space, including religious and ethnolinguistic identities, the study has
shown that, how they perceive themselves and others was based upon the
knowledge and awareness of their habitus and market i.e. production of
ethnolinguistic differences. And, further contribute to determining the degree of
their social exclusion, both ideologically and in practice. A closer analysis of language
use in the social space can provide important considerations for policy in the
Singapore context, specifically towards a wider societal approach to multilingualism
and language policy. In addition, this study’s findings may prove useful to policy
makers insofar as it examines some of the consequences of ideologies of language
and identity that may have implications for social cohesion and integration in
Singapore.

7.3 Recommendations for further research

In addressing the limitations in this study, I recommend them for further research. I
hope that the questions raised in this section will challenge others to continue the
exploratory work begun here.

First, what this study has not engaged explicitly in the analysis is the dialectic relationship between the State’s multiculturalist policy and the informants’ identity concerns. Primarily, analysis in this dissertation did not examine how this policy motivated and/or facilitated informants’ identity work. Analysis was further unable to explicitly show in what way the key informants’ linguistic practices diverged from the State’s policy. Although in one of the analysis I was able to discuss a contradiction to the State’s ideology that the Bahasa Melayu functioned as a tool to manage intra-ethnic differences (Chapter Six), I was not able to provide evidence in the way this divergence was indeed a contestation of the State’s ideology. Specifically, when it can be argued that a divergence between policy desideratum and actual behaviour is not a recent insight. A more careful consideration for future research might explore the extent on how structure and agency apply to the individual young person or groups of young people in Singapore as well as the State. More specifically, explorations on the interrelationship between structure and agency in Singapore could explore how these differences might be more comprehensively and systematically analysed.

Another limitation concerns the voices that I have had to exclude from this critical sociolinguistics ethnography. They are the voices of those who do not conform to, are absent, are excluded or have excluded themselves from the dominant discourse. An example from this dissertation is the Matrep youth group. In the Malay/Muslim dominant discourse, their presence and habitus are often taken for granted and normalised, in the same way that unequal distribution of resources and the conditions that support the Malay/Muslim social structuration in Singapore are seldom questioned. An alternate research could examine how these groups navigate
the discursive spaces where they have been excluded from others who belong to the same markets. Those who are excluded from the dominant discourse can provide the contrast against those the dominant discourse have valorised with symbolic and material resources.

Without contest, the dissertation is disproportionately informed by male experiences. Chapter Three has provided an explanation for the male bias. Given that gender is one of the constituents in a person’s identity and the ways power, language and ideology permeate gendered identities, it is necessary to extend the analysis of structure and agency to young Malay/Muslim females in Singapore for future research. As a consequence of being raised in traditional patriarchal systems including the treatment and status of women in Islam, it stands to reason that young female Malay/Muslims could potentially feel or be perceived to be more marginalised than their male peers. Explorations can include how these young females employ and experience their agency differently from their male peers and/or affect different consequences. These insights are particularly relevant as constitutionally young Singaporeans have equal access to education, cultural and economic capital and is significant in light of the reemergence of the tudung/hijab issue in a forum on racial harmony in September 2013.68

The dissertation has shown that there is a convergence of homogenising ideologies in Singapore that legitimise the dominant discourses of what it means to be a Malay/Muslim. The nationalistic and multiculturalist logic has ignored and reproduced internal group division and inequality by reinforcing a homogenising ideology that dictates those identifying as Malay/Muslim must necessarily speak

68 In the forum, a polytechnic lecturer had asked a panelist consisting of State ministers why Muslim student-nurses were barred from wearing the headscarf before going on clinical attachments or starting full-time work. This sparked a discussion if frontline officers should be allowed to wear the tudung/hijab. (The Straits Times, 13 September 2013 - Spotlight on tudung ban and racial harmony)
Bahasa Melayu and that they speak the same variety that is stable and fixed. The Malay/Muslim young males in this study have similarly reproduced a homogenising ideology that gives particular value to a specific variety of Bahasa Melayu in the Malay/Muslim market; the variety that the key informants perceived as the ‘standard’ above all other variations, regional or otherwise. Another homogenising ideology that emerged in the discussions is that Arabic is the language for all Muslims which informs the social structure within the Malay/Muslim market based on religion.

In order to benefit some people and not others, as social actors, the key informants defined the symbolic and material resources within these dominant discourses. This positioning was based largely on an actor’s linguistic habitus and how it measured up or not against the dominant discourse. From the discussions in this study, ideology is what makes language quintessentially political.
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APPENDIX ONE

PART 1

Transcription conventions

[ ] researcher’s addition

( ) provision of meanings/use for non-English Language vocabulary

(…) continuing talk edited out as irrelevant

… interrupted speech

? rising intonation

[?] word uncertainty

! animated tone

, end of intonation unit, continuing intonation

. stopping fall in intonation

• CAPITALS indicate louder talk than the surrounding talk

• italised words are words from the Bahasa Melayu, Mat-speak or Arabic vocabulary. Their meanings/uses are explained in the excerpts and discussions.

• underlined words are stressed or emphasised

• italised-underlined words are from the Singlish (in data consisted mostly of pragmatic particles)
APPENDIX ONE (con’t)

PART II

The following is an example of an excerpt using some of the transcription conventions listed in Part I.

Aziz, Ramlee, Sudin from the chill threesome and I were about to order some Malay food from a foodcourt where we often frequented during fieldwork. As it was open-air dining and the weather was hot and humid, Ramlee was perspiring heavily. (RS is the researcher).

Excerpt (a)

1   Ramlee: panas ah (it’s hot)
2   Aziz: why? the fan not working, is it?
3   Sudin: you are wearing double, you can take one off what. [laughs]
4   Aziz: are you eating, no?
5   RS: I think let’s share something. I’m wondering if we should…
6   Aziz: Sudin, kau tanya apa kawan kau masak sedap (ask your friend what he cooks well) [the use of ‘friend’ does not indicate some kind group membership with the cook but used in jest or to indicate familiarity] (…)
7   Sudin: you want grade B or grade C [laughs]
Ten Desirable Qualities of Ideal Muslims

A Muslim is someone who:

1. holds strongly to Islamic principles while adapting itself to changing contexts;
2. appreciates Islamic civilisation and Islamic history and has good understanding of contemporary issues;
3. appreciates other civilisations and is self-confident to interact and learn from other communities;
4. is morally and spiritually strong to be on top of challenges of modern society;
5. is progressive beyond forms/ritual and rides the modernisation wave;
6. is well adjusted as a contributing member of a multi-religious society and a secular state;
7. is inclusive and practices pluralism, without contradicting Islam;
8. believes that good Muslims are also good citizens;
9. is a blessing to all and promotes universal principles of values, and;
10. is a model and inspiration to all.

(Extracted from MUIS 2006)
TABLES

Table 2(a):
Resident Malay Population Aged 15 Years and Over by Religion from 1980-2010 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religions</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>93.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religion</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of Population 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore

Table 2(b):
Resident Population Aged 15 Years and Over by Religion and Ethnic Group (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Malays</th>
<th>Indians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>58.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taoism*</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Taoism includes other traditional Chinese beliefs. Christianity includes Catholic and other Christians. Sikhism is not included in this table.

Source: Census of Population 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore

Table 2(c)
Key indicators of the resident population aged 5 and over by language most frequently spoken at home (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese dialects</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahasa Melayu</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>82.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Censuses of Population 2000 - 2010, Department of Statistics, Singapore
Table 2(d):
Student performance based on at least 5 ‘O’ level passes in the GCE ‘O’ level examinations (2001-2010) by ethnic group (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 6(a):
Student performance based on at least 5 ‘O’ level passes in the GCE ‘O’ level examinations (2001-2010) by ethnic group (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 6(b):
Primary One Cohort Admitted to Post-Secondary Institutions by ethnic group (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>86.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>91.4</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>89.8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>