Cultural values and practices: the pillars of heritage language maintenance endeavours within an immigrant multilingual Malayali community in the UK

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Abstract

The widespread marginalisation of heritage languages in public and political discourse coupled with the association of proficiency in host languages with personal and professional gain have led many diasporic communities to shy away from transmitting their heritage languages at home (Curdt-Christiansen 2016): a context considered to be optimal for minority language maintenance (Vaccarino 2011). This does not imply however that attempts-on the part of migrants-to keep alive their heritage languages, are non-existent. Demonstrating a harmonious convergence between their everyday language practices and the above-mentioned assumption that the home is a 'stronghold' for heritage language use (Pauwels 2016 p.90) are a Malayali community based in Yorkshire, England. Making this a possibility was their commitment towards maintaining certain cultural practices and values associated with the first-generation migrants' country of origin, India. Drawing on semi-structured interview responses, observational field notes and audio-recorded family conversations obtained from this community, what I thus propose in this paper is that these cultural values and practices form the pillars that support the Malayalis' attempts to preserve their heritage language Malayalam. Furthermore, my findings suggest the agents behind these endeavours to pan across three generations, in two countries: the UK and India.

Keywords: heritage; maintenance; cultural practices; multilingual; Malayali; immigrant

Maintaining the currency of heritage languages in the diaspora

Migration brings about the inevitable physical distancing from one's place of birth and heritage culture. What follows thereafter are the expectations and the necessity to settle into a host country. Amongst the multiplicity of challenges migrants face when starting anew is passing on their heritage language to the younger generation(s). Even though their historical and personal ties with the language may seem reason enough for it to be maintained in the diaspora, seminal research (King 1999; King & Fogle 2006; Yagmur 2011; Curdt-Christiansen 2016) suggest otherwise. They thus find heritage language maintenance to be overshadowed by socio-economic motives that are largely achievable through the use of the dominant language within the host context. Its outcome: a language shift and the gradual replacement of a speech community's heritage language by another (Pauwels 2016).

This widely-observed shift towards the more economically-viable and nationally and/or internationally recognised languages leads to a decline in multilingualism within the home domain and beyond. The resulting question of how the currency of heritage languages can be maintained within the diaspora, is one that migrant communities and researchers alike ask and continue to seek answers for. Drawing on my PhD research (Meddegama 2013) on a Malayali community in the UK, this article attempts to respond to this topical question and thereby address a niche in extant literature; its significance and rigour substantiated further by data obtained from the inherently private domain, the home (Mayor 2004 p.2). And so, with reference to the Malayalis' home language practices, this paper presents a two-fold proposition: firstly, that the Malayalis' attempts to maintain Malayalam can be interpreted as a by- product of their engagement with heritage cultural values and practices and secondly that these endeavours are the outcome of not one but three generations working in unison from two geographical contexts.

The common paradigm: the shift from heritage to host languages

The marginalisation of heritage languages in public and political discourse began to receive mention within linguistics as early as the 1950's (Haugen 1953; Weinreich 1953; Fishman 1964). Despite this growing awareness, the advocacy of host rather than heritage languages continues to prevail: strengthened by the ideology that associates host languages with socio-economic gain (Ricento 2018). Owing to this pervasive

thinking, transmitting heritage languages continues to be an issue of contention for immigrant families based primarily in English-dominant nations (Vaccarino 2011).

Giving rise to this shift from heritage languages to English is the global currency of the latter: a key trigger also for the discrepancy noted between the language beliefs and actual language practices of migrant families. Supporting this claim is Canagarajah's (2008) work that finds English to be the sole language that is advocated within Sri Lankan Tamil families in the multilingual yet predominantly English metropolises of London, Lancaster and Toronto. Although the grand-parents in these diasporas reportedly look on in dismay at this language shift, their wish to preserve Tamil is disregarded by their children. These findings reflect what is perhaps everyday knowledge to those from former British colonies like Sri Lanka and India. In such countries, the traditional social stratification system either disadvantaged or favoured locals on the basis of the caste they were assigned to at birth. Levelling this social inequality to a certain degree during the British regime was competence in English which soon became an avenue for socio-economic mobility. English as a means for furthering one's social standing has since become a global phenomenon and can explain the Sri Lankan Tamils' preference for the language over Tamil (Canagarajah 2008); an inclination which may eventually lead to the loss of the heritage language within these diasporic communities.

A similar dissonance between language beliefs and actual language practices is reported by Kirsch (2012) and King and Fogle (2006) who focus on Luxembourgish families in the UK and Spanish-English families in the US respectively. Both researchers surmise that migrant parents acknowledge the home as being favourable for maintaining heritage languages. However, in practice, none of these communities promote the heritage languages because of the socio-economic advantages associated with the English language.

Such trends are not confined to Anglo centric contexts. Having considered parental language ideologies and their impact on family language practices, Curdt-Christiansen (2016 p10) concludes that the hierarchy within the linguistic landscape of Singapore where English presides over Mandarin and Hokkien 'has caused conflictual attitudes in many families and parents'. So ultimately the parents' wish to retain their heritage culture and language, is

overshadowed by their knowledge that it is English that enables social advancement.

Research on multilingual migrant families seems to thus reinforce the global currency of English as impacting on the continuity of heritage languages (Vaccarino 2011; Ricento 2018). As such, the inclination to conclude language shift as the 'norm' within diasporic settings is understandably strong.

Niche for present study

The findings of seminal research- such as those discussed in the preceding section- are mostly based on self-report data (King and Fogle 2006; Canagarajah 2008). This begs the question about the validity of research findings as a significant discrepancy between the languages that immigrant communities use in actuality and those that they claim to use has been identified by the likes of Block (2006). To elaborate further, Block finds a tendency amongst UK-based South Asian immigrants to not report using heritage languages in their homes. What discourages them from acknowledging their true home language practices is English, the language with higher socio-political prestige. Based on this premise, the credibility of findings primarily reliant on self-report data can be questioned. Addressing this methodological lapse, my research adopts three pools of data to cross-reference and substantiate its findings with.

Major work on language maintenance and shift also seem somewhat constricted in their consideration of *inter-generational* language transmission as most merely study the role of parents in heritage language maintenance (Fishman 1991; Canagarajah 2008; Vaccarino 2011). As family units- both nuclear and extended- encompass a much wider group of members, my research explores and identifies older siblings of children as well as extended family members as contributors to heritage language maintenance endeavours.

Thirdly, most key research on family language policies (Spolsky 2004) discuss language ideologies and how they impact on language practices. However, an area often overlooked which is how family language policies are potentially shaped by migrants' engagement with other cultural practices and values (Canagarajah 2008) will be a focal objective of this article.

Finally, the Indian Malayalis being presented in this paper are a hitherto un(der) researched migrant community in the UK where ethnically Indian Hindi, Punjabi and Gujarati-speaking migrants have generally received wider scholarly attention (Creese et

al. 2008). The conceptualisation of Indians as a homogenous group has been identified as a leading cause behind this absence of research on ethnically Indian yet regionally diverse individuals from India (Jacobsen and Raj 2008). Addressing this research void, this paper explores the language maintenance endeavours of a UK-based Malayali community.

The Malayalis

Originally from the South Western belt of India known as Kerala, the Malayalis who form the locus of my research presently live in the North of England. Because of their historical tendency to migrate overseas, Malayalis are often referred to as the primary 'export' of Kerala (Thekaekara 2013). It comes as no surprise then that the Malayalis formed 5.5% of the overall population in the North Eastern English city where my research was based (ONS 2013).

The above-mentioned inclination amongst Malayalis to migrate is largely attributed to their women who enter the nursing profession and subsequently secure work in the Gulf nations, Singapore, Malaysia and further afield in the USA and the UK (Eapon and Kodoth 2003). Reinforcing this link between career choice and migration were the women from the Malayali families who contributed to my research. They were therefore nursing staff of the National Health Service and had facilitated their families' move to the UK.

These three four-member families will henceforth be referred to as family A, B and C. They reported to be Roman Catholic by religion, ethnically Indian and British Asian in nationality. The first-generation migrants or the parents in the families had been born, raised and educated in India. Their children- some born in the UK and others overseas- were being raised and educated in England.

Table 1. Participants' country of birth and domain-specific language use in the UK.

Family A	Birth country	Language(s) used at home[1]	Language used at work[2]
Janak[3] (father)	India	Malayalam	English
Deepa (mother)	India	Malayalam/English	English
Kavita (elder daughter)	Oman	English/Malayalam	NA
Priti (younger daughter)	England	English/Malayalam	NA
Dev (paternal grand-father)	India	Malayalam	NA
Devika (paternal grand-mother)	India	Malayalam	NA
Saroja (paternal aunt)	India	Malayalam	NA
Family B			
Ashok (father)	India	Malayalam	English
Chitra (mother)	India	Malayalam/English	English
Anjali (elder daughter)	India	English/Malayalam	NA
Ajith (younger son)	England	English/Malayalam	NA
Family C			
Shantha (father)	India	Malayalam	English
Vineeta (mother)	India	Malayalam/English	English
Anand (elder son)	India	English/Malayalam	NA

[1] Home language use data based on interview responses, field notes and audio-recorded family conversations

[2] Language use at work data based purely on interview responses

[3] Pseudonym as is the case with all other names assigned to participants

Anju (younger daughter)	India	English/Malayalam	NA

As seen in Table 1, the father in family A Janak worked as a chef in a local restaurant. Janak and his wife Deepa have two daughters Kavita and Priti who were twelve and six years old when the research started. This family had lived in the UK for seven years at the point of their first involvement in my work. The paternal grand-parents Dev and Devika and the paternal aunt Saroja live in India. However, as they contributed to the data collection process, they will also be referred to later on in the paper. Family B had lived in England for 8 years when the research first began. Whilst the husband and wife duo Ashok and Chitra worked for the same NHS hospital, the former's position was as a health care assistant. Their daughter Anjali was ten and son Ajith was five when I approached the family as a researcher. Finally, family C had been in England for 5 years when their contribution to the research started. The father Shantha worked as a taxi driver and together with his wife Vineeta they had two children: Anand twelve and Anju eight.

As the participants' self-perceived proficiency in the languages within their linguistic repertoires seemed to be reflected in their home language use, their self-rated spoken proficiency in Malayalam and English are presented below.

Table 2 Participants' self-perceived spoken proficiency in Malayalam and English

Participants	Malayalam	English
Family A		
Janak	Fluent	Basic
Deepa	Fluent	Proficient
Kavita	Fluent	Fluent
Priti	Proficient	Fluent
Family B		
Ashok	Fluent	Proficient
Chitra	Fluent	Proficient
Anjali	Fluent	Fluent
Ajith	Proficient	Fluent
Family C		
Shantha	Fluent	Basic
Vineeta	Fluent	Proficient
Anand	Fluent	Fluent
Anju	Proficient	Fluent

As outlined in Table 2, two of the fathers claimed to have a basic competence in English. And this claim was supported by their partners. For instance, talking

about her husband's knowledge of English, Deepa informed me that Janak 'could manage in English'. I observed, first-hand, the validity of this statement when I found Janak to rely heavily on his wife and children when interacting with me in English. Unlike their older siblings, the younger children were apparently unable to comprehend and/or use complex vocabulary in Malayalam. According to Vineeta from family C, this was because Malayalam is 'a hard language' to learn. So, the younger kids reported to be proficient and not fluent in the heritage language.

As mentioned earlier, the families' chief motivation for migration was employment. Offering the children schooling where the language of instruction is English, was yet another reason. According to the Malayali parents, although Indian schools run in English were not restricted to the 'elite' (Ricento 2018 p. 226), the 'best' ones were. Deepa from family A presents this information whilst talking about their reasons for migrating to the UK:

Excerpt 1

Deepa: I wanted children to go to the best school in India. But Janak's ideas hadn't changed –he wanted the children to go to local English school. So, coming abroad was the only way to achieve my dreams for the children's education.

As Deepa explains, her husband Janak was not in favour of bearing the expenses associated with sending their child to one of the best schools in India where the language of instruction was English. So Deepa moved to the UK instead knowing that Janak and their daughter Kavita would join her in the UK soon afterwards. Like Deepa, the other Malayali parents also referred to English and its benefits for social mobility when conversing with me.

A dance school in Yorkshire was where I met these Malayali families for the very first time. And what became obvious straight away was their shared passion for Bharatanatyam: a classical dance form which has its origins in Kerala and also happens to be the most well-established dance style in India. As noted in relation to table 1, the parents, the three older children and one of the younger children have previously lived in India and had consequently experienced first-hand the Malayali culture in its ancestral setting. Thus, their exhibited enthusiasm towards preserving this performing art form in the UK resonated with what Canagarajah (2008 p.168) had observed in Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas. Therefore,

the Yorkshire Malayalis' fervour towards perpetuating a heritage dance form in the UK made me wonder how committed they may be towards maintaining Malayalam in the diaspora. Unearthed as a result of addressing this question, was a link between the Malayalis' value system and cultural practices and the Malayalam language.

Data collection and analysis within a sociolinguistic framework

The surge in *sociolinguistics* research could be traced to Labov's pioneering work on social factors and language variation in the 1960s. Since then, sociolinguistics has branched out further to include the study of language use and change within immigrant multilingual communities (Li Wei 1994; Canagarajah 2008; Hua 2008). Drawing inspiration from such work, the methodology that underpins this research is based on a characteristically ethnographic yet broader sociolinguistic framework. Conceptualising ethnography as the detailing of human behaviour in relation to contextual factors (Geertz 1973; Denzin 1989; Agar 1996; Wolcott 1999), I opted to situate myself (as far as feasible) and the participants in their homes during the data collection process.

The first pool of data that informed my research was naturally-occurring family conversations which the families recorded at home using digital audio recorders provided by me. These recordings totalled up to approximately seventy hours to include periods of silence as well as conversations covering a range of activities such as cooking, watching TV, children completing homework, evening prayers and playtime. Owing to the participants' generosity in offering their time, I also received ample opportunities to observe their language behaviour in their homes during the two years I spent collecting data. So during this period, I visited each family at least three times and each visit lasted between an hour to two hours. This allowed me to make observational field notes which I compared against the language practices captured in the recordings. Welcoming me into their homes, each family also participated in up to a maximum of four semi-structured interviews. So their responses constituted the third set of data. The inherent flexibility of semi-structured interviews (Mason 2004) allowed me to modify and rephrase pre-designed and ad lib questions according to the English proficiency of the two and, on occasion, three (during visits from extended family) generational family members. The following are some of the pre-scripted questions that I adapted from Baker and Sanderson (2000 p.88) for the first round of interviews:

(1) Why did you and your family move to the UK?
(2) What languages did you use on a daily basis before moving to the UK?
(3) How often do you speak to your relatives in India?
(4) In what language(s) do you speak to your relatives?
(5) In what language(s) do the children speak to the relatives?

Proving 'open-endedness' to be the essence of ethnographic interviews (Saville-Troike 2003 p.100), such questions prompted narratives from the participants, helping me build their linguistic profiles from an emic point-of-view (Spradley 1980; Agar 1996).

After concluding the first round of interviews with the three families and after receiving roughly 5 hours' worth of interactional data from each family, I began the data analysis process. To understand better the participants' habitual home language practices, the bilingual family conversations were transcribed and/or translated in/to English. As an interpretive process was adopted in analysing the interactional data, the transcriptions were not done verbatim. These transcriptions were then presented in two distinctly different fonts to show the distribution of the two languages (Auer 2013 p.4) listed in the appendix. As a non-Malayalam user, I followed methodological precedence where the primary researcher did not share the same linguistic background as that of the participants (Pauwels 2016 p.67), and recruited two Malayalam-English users to assist me with the transcription process. Whilst these translators cross-checked each other's work, I contributed by checking the accuracy of the English utterances. Close reading of these transcriptions helped me identify segments that I interpreted as episodes of heritage cultural transference. For the purpose of this research, *culture* was defined rather broadly to include the intangible beliefs and attitudes that feed into customs, traditions, practices and fundamentally a way of life within a specific community (Banks and McGee 1989). So on this basis, I identified the use of specific forms of address for family members, religion, literacy and upholding extended family ties as cultural values and practices that seemed of primary importance to this community.

Next, the selected conversational excerpts were subjected to another level of scrutiny. As Abreu Fernandes (2019 p. 89) explains how 'daily chores and unstructured mundane interaction…provide multiple teaching and learning opportunities for children and parents. Language learning is accomplished through

various forms of family talk, parental discourse and socializing practices such as directives, mealtime, bedtime or homework routines.' So based on this premise, the carefully chosen interactional episodes were studied further to identify both overt and covert instances of Malayalam learning and/or teaching.

Scaffolding this interpretive process were the follow-up interviews for I was able to contextualise the conversational segments mentioned earlier with the participants' assistance. For instance, the audio-recordings were not always adequate to gauge what activities the family members were engaged in whilst conversing. So the family members filled in the gaps enabling me to study the excerpts further in relation to four interlocking factors presented in Hymes' (1972) ethnographic framework: Content, Participants, Language Practices and Other Contextual Factors. I defined Content as key conversational topic(s), Participants as the family members who contributed to the conversations, Language Practices as the use of one or more languages in the interactions and Other Contextual Factors as the activities that the participants were engaged in whilst conversing. Therefore, the follow-up interviews became central to the context-building within the data analysis process.

These interviews were also employed to seek the families' level of agreement/disagreement with my interpretations of the interactional data. Their perspectives helped clarify further and strengthen the etic, or in this instance, my interpretations of the family conversations.

As mentioned earlier in the literature review, self-report data on language use is 'not generally accepted by sociolinguists uncritically as 'true' reflections of actual usage' (Milroy and Gordon 2003 p.2). I was able to address this issue to a certain degree using my field notes where I had made a note of child-child, child-parent and spouse-spouse interactions that were consistently similar. Therefore, these notes from actual observations helped substantiate the language practices which emerged in the interactional and self-report data (Pauwels 2016 p.64). The resulting findings are therefore presented henceforth; their purpose, to corroborate the nexus between cultural practices, values and heritage language maintenance endeavours.

Mutual beneficiaries: heritage language, values and practices

This section thus explores the ways in which the Malayalis' endorsement of heritage cultural values and practices was seen as creating a platform for promoting the Malayalam language. Malayalam, in turn, makes the children's acculturation into the wider heritage culture much more meaningful: making the heritage language, values and practices mutual beneficiaries of one another.

Forms of Address

It is customary in many South Asian contexts to use terms of address that designate a person's status based on gender, seniority by age and/or familial relationship (Saville-Troike 1989 p.73). For instance, in Sinhala, my first language and an official language of Sri Lanka, the lexicon has specific words for maternal and paternal aunts, older and younger sisters, nephews and nieces that indicate the variables mentioned above. Accordingly, an older male brother is referred to as aiya and malli is used for a younger male sibling. Using these nominations in place of an addressee's name is therefore a norm and an indicator of the users' acknowledgement of this cultural practice.

Capturing instances where the Malayali children were being taught such forms of address, the interactional data seemed to suggest how it reciprocally contributed to the younger generation's enhancement of the Malayalam lexicon. The following conversational segment between the mother Deepa from family A and her daughters is one such example. This exchange occurs within a discussion about a song choice for a dance recital the children are preparing to rehearse.

Excerpt 2

Priti: **Kavita**
Deepa: **Don't call her by name. She is your elder sister**
Kavita: **I am your elder sister so call me chechi**
Priti: **Kavita**
Kavita: **Call me Kavita chechi**
Priti: **Chechi**
Kavita: **Oh she finally called me chechi**

In the opening line, we see six-year-old Priti address her elder sister Kavita by

her name. In response, both Deepa and Kavita remind Priti of the conventional protocol within the Malayali culture which the latter appears to disregard at first. When Priti eventually complies in the penultimate line, it is welcomed by Kavita.

Whilst excerpt 2 reflects both cultural transference as well as language 'instruction', what is also noteworthy is that the exchange is situated within an authentic conversation. So unlike a language learner in a classroom who may be introduced to target vocabulary within fictitious materials, Priti finds herself immersed in a naturally-occurring conversation in the target language. And when she produces the target word 'Chechi', Priti receives immediate endorsement from her sibling.

As previously noted, neither Kavita nor Priti were Indian-born as their birth countries were Oman and the UK respectively. However, as the family had moved back from Oman to India briefly before migrating to England, Kavita had had the chance to use Malayalam in Kerala:

Excerpt 3

Deepa: We were in India for a short while. When Kavita started speaking, she was in India. So she knows Malayalam well.

Therefore, as Kavita was in India when she first started speaking and was five when moving to the UK, it can be assumed that she had roughly three years of exposure to Malayalam in India. Priti however was born in England. So, apart from when they made annual trips to India or had visits from extended family in England, Priti relied on her parents and the Malayali community in the UK for exposure to Malayalam and heritage cultural practices. This background information only emphasises the significance of what Deepa and Kavita seem to jointly achieve in excerpt 2: the endorsement of not just a cultural practice but also of the Malayalam language.

The effectiveness of such overt attempts by Deepa and Kavita to transmit the heritage culture is mirrored within the family conversations recorded over the months that ensued. In excerpt 2, Kavita's exclamation 'Oh she called me Chechi' could be interpreted not just as positive reinforcement but also as (Pauwel 2016 p.123) 'a stimulus for continued use' of the heritage language by the younger child. So I began to notice how, in the months that followed, Priti continued to use 'chechi', as deemed

appropriate by the Malayalis. And unlike in excerpt 2, Priti adopted the form of address of her own accord with no prompting from her sibling or parents. For example, the next excerpt, from a recording completed two months later, substantiates this observation evincing that the efforts of Deepa and Kavita had not been in vain. This recording captures a phone conversation between Priti, Kavita, their grandparents Dev and Devika (who were visiting to the UK) and the children's aunt Saroja in India:

Excerpt 4

Devika:	**I will give the phone to them**
Kavita:	**Hello**
Saroja:	**Are you having a good time with your grand-parents?**
Priti:	**Yes**
Dev:	**Ask about your cousin**
Priti:	**Where is chechi?**
Saroja:	**You are calling her chechi**
Devika:	**This is Kochu**
Saroja	**Oh really? I thought it was Kavita**
Priti:	**I can speak Malayalam. They are teaching me well**

In this monolingual phone conversation, Priti enquires after her cousin, senior to her by age, using the appropriate term of reference chechi. The aunt Saroja's initial response 'you are calling her chechi' is triggered by her misapprehension that she is speaking to Kavita. As Kavita is older than the cousin, the former wouldn't be expected to refer to the latter as 'chechi'. At this point, the grandmother Devika interjects clarifying who the speaker is. Whilst Priti attributes her aptitude in Malayalam to her immediate family, what she perhaps does not realise is how her aunt was also in that very moment providing her with further opportunity for practicing Malayalam alongside a cultural norm: both of which the child uses aptly with no prompting from her seniors.

Extended family ties

Phone conversations such as the one presented above were frequent occurrences in the Malayali households and they indicated to me that maintaining close ties with extended family was a key value that this immigrant community upheld in principle and in practice. In place of allowing the geographical distance between themselves and their relatives to affect their relationship, they appeared to remain well and truly connected

via annual trips to and from India. Furthermore, when I enquired how often they spoke to relatives in India, the parents reported the following:

Excerpt 5

Deepa: Every day we phone them.
Vineeta: Every three to four days.

This consistent approach to keeping in touch with family had inadvertently become a means for the second-generation Malayalis in England to test and build on their knowledge of Malayalam. This is because the relatives were not proficient in English leaving Malayalam as the only common language between the two parties. Whilst the parents reported this to be the case in responding to my question 'do you speak to them (relatives) in Malayalam or English?', the field notes and recordings of phone conversations confirmed the statements to be factual:

Excerpt 6

Deepa: We only speak in Malayalam.
Chitra: Only Malayalam.
Vineeta: My parents and in-laws, they don't know English. That's the only way of communicating, Malayalam.

As a result, even the British-born children like Priti from family A whose habitual language practices involved, using English on its own or the alternation between English and Malayalam, succeeded in conversing with relatives in the heritage language. Here, Priti reflects on her participant-specific language choices at the first interview:

Excerpt 7

Priti: Everything English except my mum and dad and my grandma and granddad.

Whilst supporting Priti's statement, Deepa was keen to elaborate as follows:

Excerpt 8

Deepa: When Priti talks to them (relatives), she speaks Malayalam. She might be adding some words in English but the sentence is spoken in Malayalam. Where ever possible, Priti speaks in English but she recognises people whom she can speak to in English.

So Priti's capacity to use language in an interlocutor-specific manner was reflected not just in phone conversations but also in her interactions with relatives visiting England. For instance, when the grand-parents visited England Priti would, to quote her mother, 'revert back to speaking in Malayalam'. Conversations such as the following supported this statement. Excerpt 9 illustrates an exchange between the grand-parents Dev and Devika, the parents Janak and Deepa and the children Kavita and Priti. During this interaction, Deepa and Devika are making pickle whilst the latter attempts to encourage the children to eat. Devika refers to Kavita as Kochu and Priti as Kichu which, I later learn are terms of endearment used in the family for the children.

Excerpt 9

Devika: You sisters eat this. It's so good for you both.
Priti: Grandmother, chechi is not giving me the ball
Devika: Kochu, please give her the ball as well. After all she is a baby.
Show me how you play this. Meanwhile eat this too.
Shall I get you more to eat?
Dev: What's that smell?
Deepa: It's fish.

Devika: Kichu is eating well
Deepa: Should we not put pickle powder in this?
Devika: Also add salt. I think I bought some pickle powder with me.
Let me have a look
Deepa: I think this is too hot. Let's not put so much chilli powder
Priti: Grandmother, grandmother ((cries))
Devika: What is happening there? Don't fight dears. Give it back to her
Kavita: Grandmother, grandmother
Devika: Yes coming

This segment is from a recording that lasts for a total of four hours and thirty-six

minutes during which time the older Malayalis update each other on news in England and back in India. As seen in excerpt 9, the children interject intermittently, and are also spoken to, in Malayalam. And the children respond, always in Malayalam, never even once in English. The grand-daughters therefore seemed to acknowledge the fact that Malayalam is the sole medium of communication for the grand-parents and adapt their language use accordingly. Being accommodating in this manner appears to be a conscious endeavour on the part of the children; what is inadvertent is the resulting exposure and practice they receive to the use of their heritage language. Thus, the key and undeniable role played by extended family in heritage language maintenance is emphasised by Pauwels (2016 p.124) who claims that 'extended family are better placed than small nuclear families' to diversify the input that children receive in the heritage languages.

And the extended families' contribution to heritage language maintenance is reciprocated when these very same languages help strengthen ties with migrant children. So my findings concur with the work of McLeod et al (2019) who study Vietnamese families in Australia and acknowledge the importance of heritage languages in sustaining links with relatives.

Religion and literacy

As my acquaintance with the Malayalis grew, I observed that the advocacy of heritage cultural practices and values was not confined to the participants' homes for it took place on a much grander scale within the wider Malayali community. Making this possible was the Roman Catholic Church within their local parish which had become a viable hub for the Malayalis to practice their faith by attending mass on a weekly basis. The church also provided a home for the complementary school run by the Malayali parents on Sundays. Creese et al. (2008) define a complementary school as a voluntary organisation that caters to a specific linguistic, religious or cultural community. As such, the main goals of the Malayalis' school were the provision of catechism and Malayalam language classes.

Home to seven universities, the Malayali parents' context of origin Kerala is famously recognised for its 100 % literacy rate. As a result, it came as no surprise when the Malayali parents expressed their wish for the children to become literate in Malayalam at the very first round of interviews:

Excerpt 10

Vineeta: We tried to teach Anju and Anand Malayalam even before we got the citizenship. Even if we live here, they will go back to India to visit. So, it would be good to teach them how to read.

Whilst Vineeta's aspirations were echoed in the responses given by the other parents as well, it seemed that this sentiment was shared equally by the Malayali children themselves. For example, Chitra from family B referred to her older child Anjali's interest in learning Malayalam as follows:

Excerpt 11

Chitra: she (Anjali) wants to learn Malayalam in writing. She says 'oh mummy how to write this word?' So she's copying in Malayalam writing. Very keen to write.

And true to their word, by the time I met the families for the second round of interviews, the parents had already set up the Malayalam language classes as part of the Sunday school.

Excerpt 12

Chitra: They (children) know how to talk now, they are learning how to write on Sunday afternoon after catechism. They are learning the letters. If they see words on TV they try to read the words.

Chitra's response offers an insight into the extent to which Malayalam was a part of their everyday lives in England as all the families in this community subscribed to Malayali television channels and I had walked into their homes on many an occasion when they were watching them. So, it is the impact of the language classes that Chitra refers to in excerpt 12.

Even though data was not obtained from the complementary school itself, its influence on the Malayali children's curiosity for and understanding around Malayali culture was observed in family conversations at home. Consequently, the interactional

data comprised many occasions such as the one presented next, where parents like Deepa were heard actively encouraging the children to practise their prayers in Malayalam.

Excerpt 13

Deepa: Now repeat the prayer again 'Our Father'

Priti: ((recites the prayer))

Priti: Mum what does **Dushta Rubi** mean?

Deepa: It means bad spirits

Priti: What does temptation mean?

Deepa: You know that

Priti: I can't remember what it was

In excerpt 13, Priti's interest in the two Malayalam words 'Dushta Rubi' seems to be triggered by the prayer in which the lexical items feature. Deepa who was one of the teachers of the complementary school confirmed later that the religious texts used in the Catechism classes comprised this prayer. As an active proponent of her faith at home as well, Deepa explains the meaning of the words straightaway to Priti before the latter moves on to another question enquiring after an English word. Therefore, this excerpt and many others appeared to indicate how a cultural practice, i.e. religious education, not only seems to allow for the child to understand a religious concept but also develop her vocabulary knowledge in Malayalam. So, the way in which heritage language instruction becomes an off-shoot of religious instruction reiterates the widely- discussed notion that language teaching cannot be divorced from the teaching of culture or vice versa (Kaplan 1966)- as language is integral to and the channel for transmitting culture.

The children's engagement with the religious education stemmed from the fact that they knew that there was a practical application to what they were learning at the Catechism classes. I came to know of this during my visits to the participant homes when the families eagerly shared with me key events in their children's academic and personal lives. As the field notes below from family B describe, one such event that all families talked about was the holy communions of their children:

Excerpt 14

Both husband and wife showed me an album of Anjali's holy communion and housewarming they had celebrated in India last year.

Looking through the photos, it became clear that celebrating their children's holy communion was of utmost importance to the Malayalis. Whilst these holy communions were led in Malayalam, the children involved were expected to recite prayers in the heritage language as well. Therefore, like Anjali, the Malayali children in this community studied the religious texts at the Catechism classes in preparation for their own holy communions that were either held in the UK or back in India. Priti from family A was one such child. So during a mundane conversation with her sister and mother, Priti introduces the topic of her holy communion as follows.

Excerpt 15

Priti: When is it? my communion, holy communion?

Kavita: In years to come Priti

Deepa: When you are 8 or 9 years old

Priti: Years to come?

Deepa: hmm. By the time you have to learn all the prayers, that's the important thing. **What did Pravina aunty teach you? Was it 'Our Father ' prayer? Say it**

Priti: ((recites the prayer))

What is noteworthy in this conversation, is how Deepa uses Priti's query about the holy communion as an opportune moment to instruct the child to practice the prayers learnt at the Sunday School. Interestingly, Deepa also switches from English to Malayalam when referring to a specific prayer that Priti has been taught by a volunteering Malayali parent. In this instance, Priti recites the prayer for roughly two minutes and when she is prompted later on in the recording to practice the same prayer one more time, the child seems to comply willingly. Therefore, as mentioned previously, the children were aware that this religious education in Malayalam would prepare them for a hallmark event in their lives.

The interactional data also suggested that the home was a context not secondary to the church for the observance of religious customs by the Malayalis. This offered the children further opportunities to practice what they were being taught at the Sunday School. So huddling around the images of Jesus adoring the walls of their homes, the

Malayalis said their prayers, every evening: engaging in a custom that unified them in faith, belief and language. The next interactional segment documents such an occasion from family C where the parents Vineeta and Shantha recite prayers with their son Anand and daughter Anju.

Excerpt 16

Anand: Do we have to say our prayers now?

Vineeta: Yes, we have to. Go sit there for your prayers

((Shantha, Vineeta, Anand, Anju chants prayers and hymns in Malayalam))

((Anju reads out a religious text in English))

((Shantha recites in Malayalam))

As illustrated in this excerpt, it was customary for Shantha, Vineeta and twelve-year old Anand to recite prayers individually in Malayalam. Anju however, only uses Malayalam when reciting prayers from memory and was given the option of using English when she had to read a religious text on her own. This was because Anju was less literate than her sibling in Malayalam. Born and brought up in India until the age of seven, Anand had had much greater exposure to the use of Malayalam than his sister Anju who had moved to the UK as a toddler. Furthermore, the mother Vineeta reports that although 'Anand was in an International English-medium school in India' Malayalam had been part of the school curriculum. Despite this difference in the exposure the children had received to Malayalam, the daily religious customs in their UK homes seemed to consolidate the children's knowledge in Malayalam by providing them with further exposure to its use. Consequently, these findings coincide with the research on Dutch Australians (Pauwels 1980) and Indonesian Christians in Australia (Woods 2004) which draw similar conclusions and claim that through public and/or private prayers and recitations, the domain of worship contributes to the use of the heritage language.

By observing the hitherto discussed cultural practices and by cultivating family-orientated values across the generations, the Malayalis seemed to inadvertently advocate Malayalam: a thriving language within their homes and community. What is more, if language transmission can be gauged by the adequate use of the language by its speakers in the presence of the learners and also by the learners' use of the language in

question (Ostler 2011 p.315), then the consistent and considerable use of Malayalam in the participant homes is testament enough to its transmission. And making these language maintenances endeavours a possibility are not only the the parents but also the older children and relatives in India. These findings therefore contradict current knowledge (Canagarajah 2008; Kirsch 2012) which surmise that many diasporic families associate English with social mobility and only promote its usage in their homes. The Malayalis too acknowledge the importance of English. And as previously discussed, enabling the children to study in English in the UK was also a key reason for their move to England. However, within their homes and community, they seem to overtly encourage the use of the heritage language.

Concluding remarks

The escalation in the shift from heritage to host language(s) within diasporic communities emphasises the pressing need for empirical examples of heritage language maintenance endeavours. This article presents one such paradigm: an immigrant multilingual Malayali community in Yorkshire, UK whose commitment to safeguarding heritage cultural practices and values has become a channel for endorsing their heritage language.

When considering commonly observed language trends amongst diasporic families, host culture is identified as a common denominator for bringing about a shift from heritage languages. What the Malayali families seem to present is somewhat of a different paradigm indicating that assimilation into a mainstream does not necessarily impact negatively on heritage language transmission. The Malayali parents have without doubt, embraced certain socio-economic aspects within the dominant culture. What they have also chosen to do is to integrate heritage cultural practices into their everyday lives in England. This has consequently ensured that Malayalam remains an integral part of their linguistic repertoires offering their children with daily opportunities to use and build on their knowledge of the language.

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Appendix

Transcription symbols

Arial Rounded MT Bold: Malayalam utterances translated to English

Candara: English utterances

(( )): Description of event