





## Language Choice in Multilingual Spaces: A Study of Malay-English Bilinguals in Kuala Lumpur

Farhanah Syazwani Binti Md Safian<sup>1</sup>, Nur Hanani Binti Nordin<sup>2\*</sup>  
Amy Sofeena Binti Kamarulzaman<sup>3</sup>, Nur Zafirah Binti Zainol<sup>4</sup>  
Nur Faiqah Binti Mohamed Ismail<sup>5</sup>, Khaleda Alia Binti Mohamad Jamil<sup>6</sup>  
Amir Lukman Bin Abd Rahman<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.  
Email: farhanahsafian@uitm.edu.my

<sup>2</sup>Centre of Foundation Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Dengkil, 43800, Dengkil, Selangor, Malaysia.  
Email: hananinordin@uitm.edu.my

<sup>3</sup>Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.  
Email: sofeena@uitm.edu.my

<sup>4</sup>Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.  
Email: zafirahzainol@uitm.edu.my

<sup>5</sup>Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.  
Email: faiqahismail@uitm.edu.my

<sup>6</sup>Centre of Foundation Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Dengkil, 43800 Dengkil, Selangor, Malaysia.  
Email: khaledaalialia@uitm.edu.my

<sup>7</sup>Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.  
Email: amirlukman@uitm.edu.my

### ABSTRACT

#### CORRESPONDING AUTHOR (\*):

Nur Hanani Nordin  
(hananinordin@uitm.edu.my)

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Past studies that have been carried out on language choice commonly look at issues related to identity, language planning and language policy rather than the factor that influences the language choice of bilinguals. There is a dire need for more research that looks into the language choice of bilinguals and the factors affecting it. Hence, this study investigates the language choice and the factors that influence the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals for communicative purposes in family, neighbourhood, education, employment and religious domains. A qualitative approach via online semi-structured interview was conducted. The participants of this research were Malays from Kuala Lumpur who speak English as their first or dominant language. A total of 10 interviewees participated in this. The results of this study showed that Malay-English bilinguals' language choice in the family, neighbourhood, education and employment domains is both Malay and English, whereas, in the religious domain, it is Malay. Aside from that, participants, situation, content, and function highlighted by Grosjean (1982) influence their language choice in all the domains in this research. The findings of this study will shed some light on the factors that influence the language choice of these bilinguals in the five domains and could be used as a future reference for

people who are interested in studying the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals in Malaysia.

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**Contribution/Originality:** This research contributes to the current body of knowledge by examining the language preferences of Malay-English bilinguals in various social contexts in Kuala Lumpur. It identifies important influences such as the people involved, the setting, and the topic of conversation. The findings also reveal a growing use of English among the younger generation and provide deeper insights into bilingual communication in Malaysia.

## 1. Introduction

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital, is home to a diverse population, including Malays, Chinese, and Indians. The Malays, whose mother tongue is Malay, constitute the largest community. According to [Ting, Tinggang and Metom \(2021\)](#), Malaysia, a former British colony, addresses its linguistic diversity by designating Bahasa Malaysia as the national language to foster unity and identity, while granting English the second language status to enhance its global presence. Consequently, many Malaysians are bilingual or multilingual, using different languages for various purposes in daily interactions. [Jack et al. \(2024\)](#) observe that the function of the English language is no longer restricted for communication purposes but it is now a language used by Malaysians to express emotions even in their dreams. This phenomenon may result from early exposure to English, its perception as a language of empowerment, its role as a neutral medium for social integration, and its pragmatic value for professional growth and career advancement ([Abd Rahman & Abd Rashid, 2023](#)). Given this shift, some Malaysians, including Malays, now consider English their dominant language. This study aims to examine the language choices of Malays who use English as their primary language across various domains, as proposed by [Fishman \(1965\)](#), and to identify factors influencing their language preferences in these contexts.

Research on the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals in Malaysia remains limited. Existing studies ([Dubiner, 2018](#); [Treffer-Daller, Majid, Yap & Flynn, 2022](#)) primarily focus on identity, language planning, policy and code-switching rather than the specific factors influencing bilingual language choices. This highlights the need for further investigation in this area.

[Pillai and Ong \(2018\)](#) noted the rise of English-medium international schools, private colleges, and universities, which could lead to an increase in English-speaking Malaysians with greater job market opportunities. This prompts further inquiry into how these educational and professional factors influence Malay-English bilinguals' language choice, particularly in domains such as family, neighborhood, education, employment, and religion.

[Moro and Russo \(2024\)](#) found from an interview on Filipino-Malaysian families revealed that English is predominant in exchanges between Filipino and Malaysian families in their homes, reaching a peak of 70% for Malaysian Indian-Filipino households. This raises the question of whether similar trends apply to Malay-English bilinguals.

Thus, this study seeks to examine the language choices of Malay-English bilinguals and the factors influencing these choices across various communicative domains.

## 1.1. Research Questions

The research aims to investigate the language choice and factors influencing the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals for communicative purposes in family, neighbourhood, education, employment and religious domains. The research aims to answer the research question below:

What factors influence Malay-English bilinguals' language choice for communicative purposes in the five domains (family, neighbourhood, education, employment and religious domains)?

## 2. Literature Review

This section reviews key concepts and studies relevant to bilingualism, multilingualism, code-switching, code-mixing, language choice, and the factors influencing it.

### 2.1. The State of Language Proficiency in Malaysia

Malaysia's linguistic diversity fosters a bilingual and multilingual society where individuals navigate different languages for various social functions. Bilingualism refers to the ability to use two languages in daily life, while multilingualism extends to more than two (Hamers & Blanc, 1989). Though theoretically distinct, the boundaries between bilinguals and multilinguals are often blurred in practice. Kheder and Khan (2021) highlights that bilinguals typically use both languages in different contexts rather than possessing equal proficiency in both. In Malaysia, Malay and English complement each other across domains such as education, employment, and social interaction.

A key feature of bilingualism and multilingualism is code-switching—the alternation between two languages within a conversation. Assali (2023) defines code-switching as the use of two or more languages in the same discourse, occurring at inter-sentential and intra-sentential levels. Inter-sentential switching involves alternating languages between sentences, whereas intra-sentential switching occurs within a single sentence. Code-mixing, often used interchangeably with intra-sentential switching, refers to embedding elements of one language into another at the word or phrase level.

Several factors influence code-switching and code-mixing. Holmes (2013) highlights that speakers may switch languages based on identity, solidarity, emotional expression, or topic. Social relationships also shape language use, as individuals code-switch to accommodate interlocutors, signal group membership, or differentiate themselves from others. In multilingual settings such as Malaysia, code-switching is a natural linguistic phenomenon and is largely viewed positively, reflecting speakers' linguistic flexibility and pragmatic competence.

### 2.2. Language Choice and Factors Influencing It

Language choice refers to the selection of languages for different communicative purposes in varying social contexts (Fishman, 2007). Bilingual and multilingual speakers switch between languages depending on domains of interaction. Fishman's (1965) domain analysis identifies key areas where language choice occurs, including family, education, employment, and religion. Holmes (2013) expands on this by emphasizing three core factors affecting language choice: participants (who is speaking and to

whom), setting (where the conversation takes place), and topic (what is being discussed). The present study applies Fishman's (1965) concept of domain while replacing the friendship domain with the neighbourhood domain, which better aligns with Malaysian cultural values emphasizing close community ties.

Several factors influence language choice in bilingual and multilingual settings. Holmes (2013) categorizes influencing factors into four groups:

- i. Participants – The speaker and the interlocutor's background, such as age, education, social status, and language proficiency.
- ii. Setting – The social context, such as formal vs. informal situations, workplace interactions, or family conversations.
- iii. Function – The purpose of communication, such as to express emotions, negotiate meaning, or assert authority.
- iv. Topic – The subject matter, where certain topics may be more naturally discussed in one language over another.

Past studies provide insight into these factors. Research has shown that code-switching among Malaysian bilingual speakers is influenced by social factors such as identity and group membership (Wu, 2021). Similarly, Ong and Said (2022) demonstrated that ethnicity and ethnic identity influenced language choice in Malaysian multilingual families. Taqavi and Rezaei (2019) highlighted the role of age, gender, language attitudes, and ideologies in shaping Azerbaijani bilinguals' language choices.

Language choice in professional settings also varies based on context. Research indicates that bilingual individuals strategically select languages to navigate social interactions and professional environments effectively. Factors such as language proficiency, audience, and communicative intent play crucial roles in these decisions (Hadei et al., 2016). Additionally, the level of formality in workplace interactions influences language selection, with employees often favoring a dominant business language in meetings while code-switching in casual conversations (Sánchez Camacho Rodríguez de Guzmán, 2024). Furthermore, industry-specific jargon and technical terminology can affect language choice, particularly in fields like medicine, law, and engineering, where English often serves as the primary medium of communication (Ting, Tinggang, & Metom, 2021). These factors demonstrate how bilingual professionals make strategic language choices to ensure clarity, efficiency, and social alignment within their work environments.

While research on bilingualism, multilingualism, and language choice is extensive, studies specifically examining Malay-English bilinguals remain limited. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring language choice and its influencing factors in the family, neighbourhood, education, employment, and religious domains.

### 2.3. Theoretical Framework

Grosjean's (1982) framework serves as the theoretical foundation for this study, outlining four main factors influencing language choice: participants, situation, content of discourse, and function of interaction. Participants' characteristics, including language proficiency, preference, socioeconomic status, age, gender, education, and kinship relations, significantly impact language selection. Situational factors such as setting, presence of monolinguals, formality, and intimacy further shape language use. Table 1 below shows the factors influencing language choice by Grosjean (1982).

The content of discourse, particularly topic and vocabulary type, plays a crucial role in determining which language speakers use. Lastly, language choice may be driven by the function of interaction, including raising social status, creating social distance, excluding others, or making requests and commands. Grosjean's (1982) model provides a structured approach for analyzing the second research question in this study, offering a comprehensive lens through which to examine the factors shaping language choice among Malay-English bilinguals.

Table 1: Factors Influencing Language Choice

Participants	Situation
Language Proficiency	Location/setting
Language preference	Presence of monolinguals
Socioeconomic status	Degree of formality
Age	Degree of intimacy
Sex	
Occupation	Content of Discourse
Education	Topic
Ethnic background	Type of vocabulary
History of speaker's linguistic interaction	
Kinship relation	Function of interaction
Intimacy	To raise status
Power relation	To create social distance
Attitude towards language	To exclude someone
Outside pressure	To request command

### 3. Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach to examine language choice and its influencing factors among Malay-English bilinguals. Qualitative research offers a rich, contextualized understanding of complex social phenomena (Timonen, Foley & Conlon, 2024). This approach emphasizes the importance of context, meaning and the perspectives of those being studied, often employing methods such as interviews, observations and content analysis. Thus, utilising the qualitative approach in this study provided a broader perspective on language choice and its influencing factors.

Purposive sampling was used to select Malay-English bilinguals in Kuala Lumpur who speak English as their first or dominant language. Ten respondents were interviewed. The interviewees consist of female and male respondents. All of the interviewees are Malay living in Kuala Lumpur.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Voluntary online semi-structured interviews were conducted, with nine questions asked to explore language choice and factors affecting the language choices of interviewees across five domains.

The interviewees responded to a Google Form which was distributed via Twitter. Based on the Google Form responses, ten respondents were contacted via email and provided with a consent form before participation. Each interview lasted approximately 6–12 minutes, was recorded using a phone recorder, and later transcribed for analysis.

Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2016), was used to identify, analyze, and categorize data into themes. The interview transcripts were analyzed based on

factors influencing language choice, following Grosjean's (1982) framework. Ethical considerations were strictly observed. The interviews remained confidential and were used solely for research purposes. Interviewees' identities were anonymized, and consent forms were obtained before conducting the interviews.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. The Language Choice of Malay-English Bilinguals

#### 4.1.1. In the Family Domain

In the family domain, it was found that most of the interviewees prefer to use both languages (Malay language and English language), while some prefer to use only Malay language due to several aspects. For the interviewees who prefer speaking both languages (Malay and English) at home, it is mainly due to the fact that some family members are not fluent in the English language, mainly the older generation like grandparents or even parents, hence why they chose to speak in Malay and English due to convenience's sake. The older family members have different upbringing which resulted in code-switching and code-mixing at home. Another reason for using both languages at home is preference and wanting the younger family members to be fluent in the English language. The younger family members are more exposed to the English language due to social media influence, environment (at home and outside), and preferences based on the topic of conversation, resulting in the use of both languages at home.

Moreover, some of the interviewees mentioned the reason why they prefer using both languages at home is because they are used to it due to their upbringing, especially with the immediate family. Next, the interviewees who chose to speak only English among their family members are due to preference and also because of their parent/s upbringing or background. Apart from that, it is also evident that interviewees prefer speaking only English at home due to habit. Referring to Table 2, these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 2: Interview Responses - Family Domain (Malay and English Languages)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee A:	<i>I speak both, although I prefer English. My parents speak fluent English, so it feels natural to use it in conversations with them. My granddad was an English teacher, so she uses English fairly often. Only my granddad converses in full Malay, since he's the only one who didn't speak English growing up</i>
Interviewee B:	<i>My household speaks in northern accent so it's quite essential to talk in Malay, we also speak in English to each other especially the younger family members to help them become fluent in English conversations.</i>
Interviewee C:	<i>For siblings. It differs. So for example with my sisters, um we mix because there are just certain things that we speak about that are easier to you know the terms and whatever we're talking about is easier to speak in English and if we are talking about our family members or things like that.. things that are local.. things that are more.. things that are rooted in our childhood or who we are, then it's more Malay lah because that's just our surrounding.</i>

Next, the interviewees who prefer speaking only Malay are mainly because there are family members who could not understand English well. Using only Malay is also preferred by some of the interviewees as it is the language that they grew up with. Another reason why some interviewees prefer to speak only Malay at home is due to convenience. Referring to [Table 3](#), these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 3: Interview Responses – Family Domain (Malay Language)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee D:	<i>Most probably I guess it is because of my parents' level of education. My father only graduated from high school and my mother is a diploma holder. I would say their English language command is average.</i>
Interviewee E:	<i>Both my parents doesn't have the opportunity for education. My mom only graduated from primary school. While my dad only has SPM. So, they do not know English well.</i>
Interviewee G:	<i>Sebab dari kecil cakap Bahasa Melayu dan dibesarkan dalam keluarga Melayu." (Translation: Been using Malay since I was small and I was raised in a Malay household)</i>

To summarise, from the data collected, it is evident that Malay-English bilinguals prefer to use both Malay and English as a medium of communication in the family domain. However, it can also be seen that English has become the dominant language among the younger generations in the family domain, and this trend aligns with findings by [Granhemat and Abdullah \(2017\)](#), who observed that Malaysian multilingual youths frequently choose English in family interactions, influenced by factors such as gender, ethnicity and ethnic identity. There are no specific rules as to when or in what contexts the two languages are used, but they are dependent on how each member of the family accommodates each other, which can be seen through their language choice. Nevertheless, English tends to be the language that dominates most conversations. This finding concurs with [Dumanig et al. \(2013\)](#), whose results also showed that English is more dominant among Filipino-Malaysian families and has become an apparent pattern of language choice. The language policy in Malaysia could perhaps contribute to the choice of English in the family domain, given its significance in business and education. Hence, using English at home provides Malay-English bilinguals with “a wider speech community because of the wide use of English in different domains of communication” ([Dumanig et al., 2013](#)). Apart from that, factors such as age, language preference, language proficiency and topic of conversation highlighted by [Grosjean \(1982\)](#) contribute to the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals in the family domain. Other interesting factors for the respondents’ language choice in the family domain, which was found from this research, are due to upbringing, habit and convenience.

#### 4.2.2. In the Neighbourhood Domain

The majority of the interviewees prefer using Malay and English in the neighbourhood domain for a few reasons. Firstly, it is because they have multiracial neighbours. Secondly, it is easier for them to convey their message as it is more natural for them to do so using both languages. Besides that, the interviewees’ preferences towards a certain language also was mentioned as the reason why they chose both languages to use in the neighbourhood. Referring to [Table 4](#), these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 4: Interview Responses - Neighbourhood Domain (Malay and English Languages)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee B:	<i>My Chinese and Indian neighbours tend to use English, although they can also speak in Malay. I stick to English with them as they're less fluent in Malay, but we often use a combination of both languages (Manglish). Malay neighbours tend to prefer Malay, except for some who prefer English too.</i>
Interviewee F:	<i>Because I wouldn't know to what extent my Malay neighbours can speak in English. Therefore I choose to use the universal language that we both would know which the common denominator would be Malay. English with my non Malay neighbours because they start chatting with me in English first hahaha.</i>
Interviewee I:	<i>I use Malay to accommodate just in case the neighbour feels comfortable with that language, in the case they mix in some English I tend to mirror them as well for smoother communication.</i>

As for the interviewees who chose only Malay as the language choice in the neighbourhood domain, their reasons are mainly due to the fact that they live in a Malay neighbourhood. Another interesting finding is that age or generation were also mentioned by some of the respondents as the reason as to why they chose to speak only Malay in their neighbourhood. Although some respondents do live in multiracial neighbourhood, they stated that they use only Malay because it is the language their neighbours use to speak to them first. Another reason is because of the neighbours' preference to speak in Malay and are more comfortable with it. Referring to [Table 5](#), these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 5: Interview Responses – Neighbourhood Domain (Malay Language)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee E:	<i>Everyone understands and can speak Malay especially where my neighbourhood is majority Malay speakers.</i>
Interviewee G:	<i>My neighbours are both old Chinese that I doubt they would understand if I speak in English as usually they are the ones who will start the conversation, in Malay language.</i>
Interviewee J:	<i>Because uh I think majority of my neighbours are Malay. Even the Indians and the Chinese when they meet us, they would prefer to use Malay as well, I'm not sure why but even if.. even when I reply in English right they would reply to me in Malay as well. So I had to change lah from English to Malay.</i>

On the other hand, interviewees who chose only English as the language choice in the neighbourhood stated that the reason is out of necessity (since the people they speak to do not know Malay/are foreigners/are non-Malays). Referring to [Table 6](#), these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session.

To sum up, it is clear that the Malay-English bilinguals prefer to speak both Malay and English in the neighbourhood domain. The findings showed that they typically switch between the two languages according to who they are talking to; Malay is mostly used among Malay neighbours and English is mostly used among non-Malay neighbours. Malay is mostly used among the Malay neighbours as according to [Hudson \(2012\)](#) as cited in [Granhemat and Abdullah \(2017\)](#), “members of ethnic groups have a natural tendency towards the use of their ethnic language in their inter-communal relationships”

(p. 27). On the other hand, English is the common language that is used to show solidarity among members of a speech community (Granhemat & Abdullah, 2017). When talking to the older generation, it can be seen that despite the races, Malay is used due to the older generation not being proficient in English. This concurs with Ting’s (2016) study which found that proficiency in English and Malay depends on their age.

Table 6: Interview Responses – Neighbourhood Domain (English Language)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee A:	<i>“Most of my neighbours are non-Malay, so it is easier for us to communicate in English as they also preferred that way.”</i>
Interviewee C:	<i>“My place has a lot of foreigners, I would not want to assume their race/ what language they speak so most of the time I result to a more universal language: English.”</i>

Therefore, it is clear that the people that they are talking to play a prominent role in determining which language to use. This is supported by Holmes (2013) who stated that the participants influence the language choice of speakers. The participant’s age, race, level of education and preference of language contributes to the Malay-English bilinguals’ language choice in the neighbourhood domain.

#### 4.2.3. In the Education/Employment Domain

For interviewees whose language choices are both Malay and English in this domain, most of them stated that it is due to the fact that using both languages at their school/workplace makes it easier for them to communicate with everyone due to the multiracial populations. Additionally, some respondents feel more comfortable speaking in both languages according to the participant(s) involved and situation/topic of conversation. Moreover, some of the interviewees’ language choice depends on what language that the people they talk to use. It is also interesting to note that the people’s attitude towards a language was also mentioned by some of the interviewees as the reason why they chose to use both languages in the education and employment domain. Referring to Table 7, these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 7: Interview Responses - Education/Employment Domain (Malay and English Languages)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee B:	<i>My course is conducted in English. But I am comfortable using Malay with friends UiTM is predominantly Malay but our courses are taught in English.</i>
Interviewee F:	<i>If it’s a casual during lunch break non-working type of discussion usually those would be in Malay, in between just Malay/Chinese colleagues. I found that my Chinese colleagues like to speak in Malay, and I guess they’re better than me in terms of conversing in generic Malay language. If it’s a proper work thing, I will be conversing in English as we are working with international clients.</i>
Interviewee I:	<i>“I would say yes. I would accommodate to people’s preference because I would try my best to get my point across so I-I’ll fill them up first with BM and if they can’t understand me in BM then I’ll immediately switch to</i>

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*English.*

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In contrast, most of the interviewees who chose only English as their language choice stated that it is due to their school/working environment whereby English is mainly used. Additionally, some of them stated that it is because there are non-Malays/foreigners at their school/workplace, hence, English is preferred. Others also stated that they use only English as they are majoring in English at their universities, or even went to an international school where the medium of communication was in English. It is also stated by some interviewees that English is preferred due to the fact that they are in a professional setting, hence, it seems more formal and better at relaying information, or simply prefer to and would like to improve their English language. Referring to [Table 8](#), these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 8: Interview Responses - Education/Employment Domain (English Language)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee A:	<i>Everyone use English at my workplace and mostly Malay terms sounds weird in science field.</i>
Interviewee C:	<i>The school that I went to was an International School and English was the first language there.</i>
Interviewee I:	<i>To polish my speaking ability and gain more friends from another race. It's always interesting to know their cultures and religion.</i>

Meanwhile, most of the interviewees who chose only Malay as their language choice stated that Malay is used as the majority of the people at their school/workplace are Malays and they prefer speaking in Malay and are fluent at it. Referring to [Table 9](#), these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 9: Interview Responses - Education/Employment Domain (Malay Language)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee D:	<i>Majority of my colleagues are Malays.</i>
Interviewee H:	<i>My colleagues are more comfortable speaking in Malay and I have to respect that.</i>
Interviewee J:	<i>Most students are Bumiputra and come from more Malay/rural-centric backgrounds, being in a public university, they understand Malay more.</i>

In the education and employment domain, both Malay and English are used by Malay-English bilinguals. However, in the employment domain, English tends to be more dominant in the formal setting whereas Malay is preferred in the informal or casual setting. This could be due to the fact that in the private sector, English is the de facto official language ([Ting, Tinggang, & Metom, 2021](#)) and is used in meetings and written communication. Besides, English is also the dominant language in the formal setting of universities and private/international schools. According to [Ting, Tinggang and Metom \(2021\)](#), aside from it being the second most important language in the Malaysian education system, English is a prestigious language linked to modernity and education. Due to its prestige, Malay-English bilinguals tend to speak English to improve

themselves. This concurs with [Dweik and Qawar \(2015\)](#) which found that the more prestigious language is usually preferred as the medium of communication in various domains because of its broader social roles. Aside from that, using the dominant language gives them more advantage, extension of social networks, economic benefits and greater opportunities ([Dweik & Qawar, 2015](#)). English is also used as the lingua franca in this domain among education institutions and workplaces with multiracial settings. This is in line with [Kingsley's \(2013\)](#) study which showed that English played an important role in multinational workplaces as the language which is widely used and the default lingua franca. On the other hand, Malay is the more dominant language in the informal or casual setting for relational purposes such as solidarity and collegiality. This finding agrees with [Kingsley \(2013\)](#) which reported that employees use their mother tongue as a way to maintain and enhance relationships with fellow nationals.

It can be seen that even in the education and employment domains, the participants that they talk to influence their language choice in terms of the participant's language proficiency, language preference, race, age, occupation, power relation and attitude towards Malay/English. Apart from that, the situation they are in in terms of location/setting and degree of formality also play a role in determining the respondents' language choice in the education and employment domain. Hence, it is evident that the factors highlighted by [Grosjean \(1982\)](#) do affect the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals in the education and employment domain. These findings also agree with [Dweik and Qawar \(2015\)](#) who found that multilinguals are able to choose between languages according to the situation they are in and their choice is influenced by factors like topic, function and preference.

#### 4.2.4. In the Religious Domain

There are a lot of reasons as to why the majority of the interviewees choose to speak only Malay in the religious domain. Firstly, most of the responses gathered stated that using Malay in religious settings is the norm. Secondly, sermons, religious texts, Quran translations as well as communication is usually in Malay. Thirdly, the majority of the community speaks Malay, hence it is easier to communicate and understand each other. Next, some of the interviewees stated that most of the people present at the mosque are the elderly, so they might not be able to understand English well. It is also evident that the function of the interaction plays a role in determining their language choice. Some of the interviewees choose to speak in only Malay because they want to socialise, build camaraderie and also to fit in. Apart from that, some of the interviewees prefer to speak in Malay as they want to look more polite and do not want to appear arrogant. It is also evident that Malay is preferred as they consider the people's attitude towards using English to speak at religious settings. If they use English, they will be judged and criticised/made fun of. Therefore, they prefer to use Malay in the religious domains. Referring to [Table 10](#), these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 10: Interview Responses - Religious Domain (Malay Language)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee D:	<i>The scholars (ustaz/imam) are mostly Malay. The religious literature that I consume and the religious setting I was brought up with are mostly in Malay so I am more comfortable asking/conceiving and more familiar with the terminology in Malay.</i>

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Interviewee E:	<i>The religious teachers often converse in Malay or teach us in Malay. In fact, even our religious texts are in Malay which makes communicating in Malay easier.</i>
Interviewee G:	<i>The mosques I've gone to are usually populated with Malay Muslims. Speaking Malay to other Malay Muslims comes naturally and usually builds a camaraderie with them, especially with strangers.</i>

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On the contrary, the interviewees who choose to speak both Malay and English in the religious domain stated that the languages that they use (either Malay or English) depends on who they are talking to. Additionally, some of the respondents use both languages at the mosque as it is mostly filled with the elderly. Moreover, it could also be seen that the topic of the conversation also plays a role in determining which language to use in the religious domain. Referring to [Table 11](#), these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 11: Interview Responses - Religious Domain (Malay & English Languages)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee B:	<i>Two way communication. If the guru can understand and explain in English, I will react in English. If the guru use Malay then I'll respond and ask in Malay.</i>
Interviewee F:	<i>The people at mosques tend to be Malay people, especially from the older generation. They often converse fully in Malay, unlike younger Malay people who use both English and Malay. In mosques, I prefer to follow the language that the person I'm talking to is using, so if they're using full Malay then I'll use Malay too.</i>
Interviewee I:	<i>Most of the religious sources like books, hadiths and lectures are commonly translated to Malay as well as dua are also mostly made in Malay in this country so I find that it is natural to use Malay when discussing religion although I sometimes do turn to English translations to have a more international feel on religion as Islam is universal.</i>

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For interviewees who speak only English in the religious domain, it is due to a few reasons. Firstly, they have foreign religious guru. Secondly, it is due to the fact that the institution they went to uses English as the medium of communication. Finally, they understand the sermons/Quran translations better if it is in English. Referring to [Table 12](#), these are some of the responses gathered from the interview session:

Table 12: Interview Responses - Religious Domain (English Language)

Interviewee	Responses
Interviewee A:	<i>My religious teacher speaks and elaborates the holy book in English too.</i>
Interviewee C:	<i>IIUM is an international institution and most of them either speak Arabic or English and I chose English to understand despite being able to converse in Arabic to avoid them using their Arabic dialect.</i>
Interviewee I:	<i>My Quran translations are all in English because I find it easier for me to comprehend the Message of God. Aside from that, I prefer sermons that are conducted in English by preachers like Yasmin Mogahed, Tariq Appleby, Mufti Menk, etc. They sounded calmer and the message was very welcoming. I find Malay sermons rather discriminatory and unwelcoming.</i>

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To summarise, compared to the other domains, Malay is the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals in the religious domain. Malay is used as it has a wider social function and this is in line with [Dweik and Qawar \(2015\)](#) who stated that *“using the community language serves more benefits to the speakers and can be influential on their language choice because it helps in expanding their social network”* (p. 5). As mentioned by the respondents, Malay is preferred as it enables them to fit in, build camaraderie and socialise among the mosque-goers. In order for them to socialise in this domain, they have to take into account the participants’ language proficiency, language preference, race and attitude towards English. Hence, it is evident that factors such as the participants play a prominent role in the determination of respondents’ language choice in the religious domain.

Additionally, English is only preferably used with religious gurus or mosque-goers who are not Malaysian as it is the only lingua franca to enable communication. English is the least preferred language choice to use among themselves due to the participants’ attitude towards English. In this domain, speaking English would be considered disrespectful and would make them appear arrogant or detached. This in turn will create social distance ([Holmes, 2013](#)). According to [Sadanand \(1993\)](#) as cited in [Dweik and Qawar \(2015\)](#), *“attitudes towards the use of different languages are motivated by the speakers’ perception of the role of each language and the functions it performs in relation to each other”* (p. 9). As compared to English, Malay is viewed in a more positive light and this finding concurs with [Dweik and Qawar \(2015\)](#) who showed a positive attitude towards the mother tongue and this comes from pride and culture.

Clearly, the participants, situation, content and function all play a role in determining Malay-English bilinguals language choice in the religious domain which is in line with [Grosjean’s \(1982\)](#) outline of factors influencing the language choice of bilinguals.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research investigated the language choice and the factors influencing the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals for communicative purposes in the family, neighbourhood, education, employment and religious domains. Based on the findings, in the family domain, Malay and English are used among the family members, but English is seen to become more dominant among the younger generations in Kuala Lumpur. Next, the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals in the neighbourhood domain is both Malay and English, whereby Malay is mainly used among Malays and the older generation, and English is used among the non-Malays. Malay-English bilinguals also prefer to use Malay and English in the education and employment domain in which English is more dominant in formal settings and Malay in informal settings. Apart from that, Malay is their language choice in the religious domain. It is evident that they are able to choose which language to use in these domains. Apart from that, it is clear that factors highlighted by [Grosjean \(1982\)](#) such as the participants, situation, content, and function play a role in determining Malay-English bilinguals’ language choice in all the domains in this research. Aforementioned, it was found that English is seen to become more dominant among the younger generations in the family domain; hence, future studies can be conducted to investigate the language choice of Malay-English bilinguals across different generations. Future researchers can also explore more on how attitudes towards English and Malay affect Malay-English bilinguals’ language choice across different domains. Apart from that, since this study focuses on Malay-English bilinguals in Kuala Lumpur, further studies can explore the language choice among them

throughout Malaysia to better understand the current situation in terms of language choice.

### **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

This study has strictly adhered to all ethical procedures. The participants provided their informed consent and were clearly informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, with the option to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences. Their identities were kept confidential to protect their privacy.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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