

# Singapore's *Speak Mandarin Campaign*: The Educational Argument

John Newman

School of Arts, Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Australia

## Introduction\*

During the late 1970's, the Singapore government embarked upon a campaign to persuade its ethnic Chinese citizens (who comprise approximately 77 per cent of the country's population) to use Mandarin in place of Chinese dialects. This campaign has been maintained since then, with one month being set aside every year for intensive campaigning through government statements, government sponsored programmes, posters, television and radio advertising, etc. Although the rhetoric of the slogans has varied somewhat over the years, it is convenient to refer to the campaign as the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*. This is also the most common way in which the campaign is referred to in official speeches and the Singapore press.

Obviously there are many possible ways to approach the campaign, including the political background, the administrative organization responsible for the campaign, implementational tactics, the role of the media, etc. These aspects have been covered in works such as Ng (1980), Altehenger-Smith (ms.), and Kuo (1984). My purpose here is not to repeat what has been said by these authors, but to concentrate instead on an aspect which has not yet been given the attention due to it, namely the argumentation publicly presented in support of the campaign. More than any other campaign conducted by the Singapore government, the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* has been accompanied by extensive argumentation and, in the early years of the campaign, debate. Obviously with a campaign such as this, the target audience needs to be convinced of the need to change patterns of language use in order for the campaign to be truly effective. It is appropriate, therefore, to examine the argumentation in some detail.

One difficulty in discussing the argumentation for the campaign is the fact that a number of interconnecting arguments have been proposed in support of it. These arguments need to be kept apart when one comes to do a serious evaluation of them. Noss (1984: 25) distinguishes three official arguments: educational (if there were no dialects, the bilingual policy would be more successful), cultural (Mandarin can be a symbol of the Chinese cultural heritage), practical (Mandarin can function as a lingua franca amongst the Chinese). Occasionally, other arguments may be put forward, but the three mentioned by Noss are certainly the major ones. Here I will be

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concerned with the first of these, the educational argument, and I will base my analysis of this argument on a single, but major, speech by the Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew. Although this approach may appear rather narrow and one-dimensional, I believe that this kind of microscopic analysis is an important part of the basic research on such a campaign. The approach taken here may be seen to complement the existing literature on the campaign which has tended to take a much broader view of the campaign without undertaking any detailed analysis of the campaign rhetoric.

Since the argument being considered here makes extensive reference to the bilingual policy, it is necessary to provide some background on the education system in so far as it involves language. For this reason, I will discuss the historical background to the present language policy before turning to the educational argument itself.

### **Historical Background**

#### *The Colonial Era*

For the most part, Singapore's Colonial period 1819–1959 was characterized by blatantly preferential treatment of English both in the government supported schools (the Christian missionary schools and the "Free Schools") and in the society at large. To some extent, the Malay language also enjoyed some official support as the "natural vernacular" of all the Straits Settlements. Chinese, however, was not given official recognition in society at large; nor were the Chinese schools (run by the Chinese using Chinese as the medium of instruction) given any kind of assistance until the 1920's. Partly the reason may be found in the continuing image of Singapore as part of a larger Malay world in which Malay was the main lingua franca, rather than an image of Singapore as a sovereign state in which the Chinese predominated (an image of Singapore shared by most of the political leaders of modern Singapore up to 1965); partly a lack of materials and properly trained personnel to teach Chinese (especially before the development of Mandarin as the national language in China); the multitude of Chinese dialects represented in Singapore; and possibly a certain distrust on the part of the Chinese themselves towards local (as opposed to mainland China) education.

By the 1920's, the neglect of the Chinese schools had become more serious. For a start, the proportion of ethnic Chinese to the total population of Singapore had increased in the course of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the century it had stabilized to about 70–75 per cent (in 1921, 74.5 per cent). Not only were the Chinese in the majority, they could no longer be seen as transient guest-workers. Secondly, the government in Peking was beginning to involve itself in serious language-planning efforts, following the establishment of the Republic of China. In addition to developments within China (such as the gradual emergence of a high-status Peking-based variety as the national standard and the establishment of a standard pronunciation), there were also developments initiated by Peking which affected the Overseas Chinese. As reported in Wilson (1978: 56), the Chinese Ministry of Education sent two representatives to Singapore and Malaya in 1917 to inspect Chinese schools, following which three new Chinese schools were set up. In other words, the Chinese schools in Singapore were regarded by the Republic of China as being under the control of its Board of Education through the Chinese Consul-General. In 1920, then, a bill

was introduced to give the Colonial government more control over Chinese schools, by providing for the registration of all schools in Singapore. The bill sparked off a controversy involving, among others, the Chinese Consul in Penang, the Foreign Minister in Peking, Sir Laurence Guillemard (the new Governor), and Winston Churchill (the Colonial Secretary). These developments are discussed in Wilson (1978: 60-62).

As a follow-up to the compulsory registration of schools, a system of grants-in-aid was introduced by the Governor in 1923. It is interesting to note the exact conditions under which such aid was provided and these conditions, included in 1923 Annual Report on Education, were (as quoted by Chelliah, 1947: 83):

- (a) It is desired to encourage and assist the education of Chinese-speaking children through the medium of their own domestic dialect or dialects which they understand. Where a Straits-born or other Chinese has no domestic Chinese vernacular his language shall be taken as English and he shall be eligible directly for entrance to an English School.
- (b) It is unnecessary to assist by grants-in-aid the teaching of English in Chinese Vernacular Schools.
- (c) While there is no objection to the teaching of Mandarin or of English in Chinese Vernacular Schools, these two subjects should not be considered grant-earning.
- (d) It is desirable to assist by grants-in-aid the further education in their own domestic dialects of Chinese-speaking children not proceeding to English Schools at the age of ten years. In the case of Chinese-speaking children proceeding to English Schools at the age of ten years, a certain number of free places should be provided for those who have spent at least three years at an approved Vernacular School and who are promising pupils of suitable age and the children of poor parents.
- (e) The curriculum in aided Chinese Vernacular Schools should as far as possible be so arranged as to make it a useful preparation for an English Education with special reference to Arithmetic and Geography.

Clearly, the bill was not designed to promote either Mandarin or English in the Chinese-run schools. It would hardly be acceptable, then, to either the China-oriented who would favour Mandarin or the Western-oriented who would favour English. It would mainly cater to dialect-speaking children who would not be given the opportunity of an education in either of the two prestige languages, apart from the few who might graduate to an English school. There was no pretense that the legislation was supposed to promote the cause of Chinese language and culture. The government's recognition of Chinese dialects came too late for the Chinese community which now looked to Mandarin as the prestige variety and the one which should properly be promoted in the education system.

The immediate post-war years saw no real change in government policy on the status of the various languages, despite a White Paper of December 1953 entitled "Chinese Education — Bilingual Education and Increased Aid" which proposed to give pupils in the Chinese schools a working knowledge of both English and Chinese. During these post-war years, however, various issues had further increased the gulf that existed between the British administration and the Chinese-educated community (denial of citizenship in some cases, the perception that the Chinese-educated har-

boured communist sympathies, refusal to do National Service by students in Chinese High Schools, the involvement of the Chinese High Schools in the Hock Lee bus riots of 1955). In addition, there had been a gradual drift of students from Chinese schools to English schools in the period 1945–54, which could be seen as posing a threat to the continuation of Chinese education. While in 1945, the Chinese-educated community would have felt neglected, they could at least take comfort in the fact that they were in the majority and so could look forward to being more influential in the independence era. By 1954, however, as the post-colonial era approached, it appeared that the Chinese-educated community was not going to maintain itself as a majority in successive generations. The Chinese-educated community would thus not be as influential in the post-colonial era as they might have expected a decade earlier. The general tension over political issues, the perceived threat to Chinese education and by implication a traditional Chinese way of life, and the continuing snubbing of Mandarin led to a highly charged situation in the mid-fifties which called for more serious actions in support of Mandarin and Chinese education generally. The establishment of Nanyang University in 1956 by the Chinese community was an attempt to elevate the status of Chinese education and Mandarin as the medium of instruction. Significantly, the impetus for the University came from the Chinese community, and not from the Government.

#### *Self-government and the Bilingual Policy*

In the light of the social unrest of the 1950's, prior to self-government in 1959, it would be hard to imagine a self-governing Singapore without substantially new policies in these areas. The PAP Government in 1959 followed in the main the recommendations which had been made in the Report of the All-Party Committee of the Singapore Legislative Assembly on Chinese Education. The Committee had been appointed in 1955 and the Report was published in February 1956. The clearest indicators of change were to be found within the education system, where equal treatment was accorded to all four language streams (English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil). This was signalled by, among other things, the institution of the Primary School Leaving Examination in all four streams in 1960. One might note that steps towards more equal treatment of the four language streams had been taken in the two years prior to self-government, as discussed in Doraisamy (1969: 53–54). These steps included the establishment of government Chinese schools and free primary education in English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil according to parents' choice.

Compulsory bilingualism is another aspect of Singapore education which had its beginnings about this time. There are at least three starting dates for compulsory bilingualism found in the literature. A fairly official view (Doraisamy, 1969: 53–54) notes that a second language was compulsory already in 1957 and 1958, that is, before self-government. A second view, as found in Gopinathan (1980: 181), speaks of compulsory bilingualism as beginning in 1960 at primary level, whereby a pupil had to study two of the four school languages (English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil). (In this respect, the PAP bilingual system differed somewhat from that proposed in the All-Party Report where it had been proposed that the English stream pupils should begin their education with a year of Vernacular, followed by a year of Vernacular and

English.) Others prefer to see compulsory bilingualism as beginning only after Independence in 1965. Chiew Seen-Kong (1980), for example, on occasion appears to attribute the beginning of bilingualism to 1966 ("Bilingualism was made compulsory in 1966" [p. 238]; see also the diagrams on p. 242). Chapter 2 of the Goh Keng Swee Report (1978) presents a short history of the education system in Singapore in which the discussion of bilingualism begins with the note: "From 1966, Secondary I pupils were required to learn a second language" (p. 2.2). No mention is made of the beginning of bilingualism at the time of self-government, although some other features of the education system, such as the equal treatment for all language streams, are traced back to 1959. Presumably the reason for backgrounding the early phase of bilingualism from 1960 to 1965 has to do with the fact that the bilingualism of this early years was not exactly the same as that which established itself after Independence. Between 1960 and 1965, an ethnic Chinese (including the peranakans who might prefer taking Malay as a subject, rather than Chinese) could freely choose English as the first school language and Malay as the second school language. From 1966 on, however, it appears that ethnic Chinese choosing English as their first school language have been expected to take Chinese rather than Malay as their second language. Even so, it has been possible for some Singaporeans to choose a language other than the language associated with their ethnic group as their second language — this has been reported at least for ethnic Indian pupils who have taken Malay or Chinese as their second language (Gopinathan 1980: 186). The bilingual policy in the Independence era was pursued vigorously and measures were taken to increase the exposure time to the two languages being studied. The significance of the second language results in examinations was also increased, so that in 1973, the second language paper was of equal importance to the first language paper, with both languages carrying twice as much weight as mathematics or science. From 1979, secondary pupils had to obtain a pass in the second language in order to gain admission to Pre-University classes.

Outside of the school system four languages (English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil) were accorded official status, with Malay being designated the "national language". As far as the official recognition of the four languages is concerned, here too one may note that steps towards this had been taken already at the time when David Marshall was Chief Minister (1955–56). In 1955, the Legislative Assembly became multilingual in the sense that debate could be conducted in any of the four languages mentioned above. After the 1957 City Council elections, also, meetings of the Council could be conducted in any of the four languages, following the example of the Legislative Assembly.

It is important to note that the promotion of Chinese took the form of promotion of Mandarin. A number of factors contributed to this. First of all, Mandarin was the official form of Chinese being vigorously promoted in Mainland China at the time. Secondly, the threat which the Chinese community perceived under the Colonial rule was not simply that the Chinese language was not given the recognition it deserved, but, much more than that, the Chinese saw their traditional cultural values threatened through the official neglect (and later suspicion) of their education system. Mandarin, as the variety of Chinese taught in the education system and used as the medium of instruction, symbolized more than anything "Chinese culture".

### *The Goh Report*

While there was an inevitability about the promotion of Mandarin in the post-colonial period, there was no inevitability about the success of the particular bilingual policies implemented in the school system. The most severe official criticism of the post-independence educational policies was contained in the Report on the Ministry of Education 1978, prepared by the Minister of Defence at the time, Dr Goh Keng Swee, and "The Education Study Team", and published in February 1979. Many aspects of the prevailing education policies were reviewed and criticized in this report, but the aspect which is of most relevance here is the bilingual policy which had been in effect since Independence. Among the facts noted under a section called "Ineffective Bilingualism" (Section 4 of Chapter 3) was the fact that less than 40 per cent of the pupil population manage to attain the minimum competency level in two languages. In the following chapter which analyses the contributing factors to the existing problems in the education system, the following observation is made (p. 4.4):

The majority of the pupils are taught in two languages, English and Mandarin. About 85% of these pupils do not speak these languages at home. When they are at home, they speak dialects. As a result, most of what they have learned in school is not reinforced.

The recognition of a *dialect problem* in the Goh Report, whereby the Chinese dialects were portrayed as hindering the effective teaching of English and Mandarin, was a very significant development in official thinking about language policy. While post-colonial Singapore had always supported the teaching of Mandarin in schools, the dialects had been left to themselves. Although the All-Party Report of 1956 makes little mention of dialects, there is some discussion of Chinese dialects on pages 40–41. There, in fact, dialects are seen as exerting a positive influence on pupils learning Mandarin: "We are also reliably informed that there would be no trouble at all for the pupils in Chinese schools in which the pupils predominately speak one dialect to learn Mandarin.... We are also informed that versions in *literary as opposed to colloquial Chinese*, whether in Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Hockchia, Hockchiu, Shanghainese, etc. dialects, have very close affinities to the Mandarin version, and these no doubt help the Chinese child to adopt Mandarin as the common medium of communication in schools and outside them" (p. 41). Although the passage in the All-Party Report refers only to literary varieties of Chinese, the same point could have been made even with respect to colloquial varieties of Chinese, for there are many aspects of the phonology, lexical structure, syntactic structure, and discourse structure of dialects which could facilitate the learning of Mandarin. As happens so often in discussions of the Chinese language, the passage in the All-Party Report related merely to the readings of characters, but this is only one aspect of the language system. Newman (1982) illustrates how systematic relationships between (colloquial) Hokkien and Mandarin can be utilized in the teaching of Mandarin, even though Hokkien and Mandarin are superficially some distance apart and are mutually unintelligible.

The change in perception of dialects, from viewing them as a positive influence to viewing them as a negative influence, may be linked with other social phenomena. The promotion of Mandarin in the People's Republic of China from the beginning

of this century, and especially in the Fifties and Sixties, tended to foreground Mandarin. A diglossia pattern prevailed, and to a large extent still prevails today in Singapore, whereby many Chinese tend to dismiss the low varieties (the dialects) as insignificant or "not really languages", in line with the classic diglossia situation (Ferguson, 1959). The historical setting at the time the bilingual programme was introduced is also significant. Since the bilingual programme was in part a reaction to the colonial neglect of Mandarin, it was natural to counter the colonial prestige language, English, with the Chinese prestige language, Mandarin. As long as English was seen as threatening to the Chinese community, it was natural to present a unified front to resist the influences of English. The diversity of dialects did not really help the anti-colonial rhetoric, which preferred to oppose "the colonial language" with something equally imposing and monolithic, namely "the mother tongue" (*not* "mother tongues").

Another way to describe the problem which manifested itself in the 1970s is to say that the "elite bilingualism" being propagated through the schools was seen to be challenged by the enduring presence of a "folk multilingualism" outside of the schools. By "elite bilingualism", I mean the ideal bilingualism of Mandarin/English which is imparted through the education system; "folk multilingualism", on the other hand, refers to the multilingualism acquired outside the education system (through the family, extended family, friends, situational necessity, etc.) which, for Chinese in Singapore, might include some variety of Malay, some variety of English, and a smattering of dialects.

By the late 1970s, then, some government action was deemed necessary with respect to the bilingual policy. The most significant action was the launching and continued maintenance of a campaign to promote Mandarin amongst ethnic Chinese outside of the school system, as discussed in the following section. Essentially, government intervened by attempting to eradicate, or at least minimize the folk multilingualism, in order to clear the way for a more effective elite bilingualism. The basic tenet of the bilingual policy, requiring the teaching of English and Mandarin to ethnic Chinese pupils was not questioned.

## **The Educational Argument**

### *Background*

The most obvious starting date for the Speak Mandarin Campaign is 7 September 1979, when the campaign then called "Promote the Use of Mandarin" was officially opened at the Singapore Conference Hall. (References to a "Speak Mandarin" campaign can be found the following month, e.g., Straits Times, henceforth ST, on 15 October 1979, but already at the outset of the campaign there were various slogans including "Make Mandarin the Common Tongue of Our Chinese Community" and "Speak Mandarin Instead of Dialects".) A number of statements and developments before this date, however, clearly show that the campaign was getting under way well before this time. As reported in the New Nation 26 January 1977, dialects would not be allowed in Chinese-language commercials over Radio and Television Singapore from July 1. ST 12 December 1977 reported that Dr Ow Chin Hock, Parliamentary Secretary (Culture) had urged parents and teachers to help bring it about that English

and the mother tongue would be taught from the kindergarten stage. Dr Ow left no doubt that this meant Chinese parents should be using Mandarin rather than dialects with their children: "Wherever possible, members of their (the children's) family should converse with them in Mandarin or other mother tongues and in English, by refraining from the use of dialects." Mr Ong Teng Cheong, Acting Minister for Culture, speaking on 18 February 1978 (Speeches 1: 9) announced: "The extensive use of Mandarin, the common language among the Chinese communities, should be encouraged to help lighten the load of learning so many languages." Important speeches by the Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, on 21 February 1978 (repeated on 4 March 1978) and 11 February 1979 also were concerned with the need to promote the use of Mandarin. The 1978 speeches by the Prime Minister constituted in effect the first launching of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, although it lacked the extensive publicity surrounding the second launching of September 1979. Mr Rajaratnam, Minister for Foreign Affairs, speaking on 15 May 1978, alluded to an already existing campaign: "Recently the Prime Minister initiated a campaign to popularize Mandarin among the Singapore Chinese" (Speeches 1: 12). While the content of the Prime Minister's speeches referred to above is similar in all these cases, I will single out for special consideration the speech presented in February and March 1978, given the title "Mandarin: lingua franca for Chinese Singaporeans" in the collection of official speeches (Speeches 1: 10). This speech is not only the first official extended argumentation for the campaign, but it is also the longest of the early speeches on the campaign. Page references to this speech are based on the copy of the speech in Speeches.

The outline of the argument contained in the 1978 speech is as follows:

- Basic assumption: The bilingual policy (i.e., learning English and Mandarin) is essential in order to avoid a "fractured" multilingual society where people speak only dialects and English.
- (1) Learning a language is difficult.
  - (2) Most people can cope with learning two languages, but not three.
- Statement of the dialect problem
- (3) Many school-children use a dialect outside the classroom.
  - (4) The more a child uses dialect, the less Mandarin is used.
- Solution: The use of dialect must therefore be restricted, in order for the bilingual policy to be effective. To restrict the use of dialect, parents and pupils must use Mandarin instead of dialect.

### *The Overall Structure of the Argument*

Before proceeding to discuss each of these points in turn, one may first make some observations about the roles of the education system and society in this argument. A pattern of behaviour in society (the use of dialects) is seen as being in conflict with the education policy (the learning of English and Mandarin). The solution advanced in the speech is not to modify the education policy, but to alter the patterns of behaviour in the society at large. An interesting symmetrical relationship is thus established between the education system and the society at large. On the one hand,



the education policy has been designed in part as an instrument of social change, putting education at the service of society. Thus, the bilingual policy in education is seen as the means by which a more harmonious society will come about. On the other hand, society at large is being called upon to change, in order to support the education policy by changing certain patterns of behaviour. This latter approach is not in principle any different from, say, parents being asked to reduce the number of hours their child spends watching television, so that the child can do more homework. The Singapore case differs, however, in degree and scope, for the request involved is stated formally, is addressed to all ethnic Chinese in the country, and affects their daily lives in much more profound ways than, say, forbidding a child to watch an hour of television.

One might construe the campaign in a slightly different way. One might, for example, note that the ultimate goal of the bilingual policy in education is to bring about a Chinese community, where everyone is competent in, and uses, just English and Mandarin. The campaign to replace dialects by Mandarin is thus simply a more direct means of accomplishing this goal, compared with the relatively indirect means of relying on the result of the education policy. In some ways, an argument along these lines is stronger, in so far as a more direct connection is being made between the means and the end (a social change to help achieve a social goal). However, this is not the structure of the argument in the speech under consideration. While there are passing references to the ultimate social goal within the speech, the argument justifies the campaign with respect to the intermediate goal of supporting the education policy, rather than the ultimate goal of creating an harmonious society. This may seem surprising to some, but is more understandable when one takes into account the importance which attaches to education in Chinese societies. Indeed, Lee Kuan Yew opens the speech with the following remarks:

One great strength in our society is the strong support for education. It springs from the conviction of our people that our children's future depends on education.

(p. 1)

These opening remarks, appealing to the traditional respect for education, as well as to the traditional parental dedication to ensuring children's future prosperity, would establish a perfectly acceptable frame of reference to many Chinese for the justification of the campaign. Having to justify the education policy with respect to the larger social goals is not as crucial as it would be in, say, an American or Australian context.

### *The Basic Assumption*

Turning to the argument itself, one might begin by considering the basic assumption, namely the necessity for the bilingual policy as a way of avoiding a "fractured" multilingual society. The fracturing mentioned here refers to the barriers to communication posed by the mutually unintelligible Chinese dialects; if there were only one variety of Chinese used by Chinese Singaporeans, on the other hand, there would not be comparable barriers to effective communication between the Chinese. The equation is basically as follows:

(a) The use of mutually unintelligible dialects implies a "fractured" society.

(b) The use of just one variety of Chinese implies a unified, harmonious society.

Both of these positions have, I believe, a certain surface validity. When one comes to appraise them with the Singapore context in mind, however, each of them is seen to be weaker and less compelling than one might have first thought. Taking (a) first, one must take cognizance of the fact that many, probably most, Singaporean Chinese who would claim to be able to speak some dialect would also have some competence in another dialect or language. In fact, one could say that familiarity with, though not necessarily proficiency in, a number of Chinese dialects and Mandarin is a hallmark of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia (excluding the *peranakan* Chinese). This is the polyglossic situation well described in the literature, especially in the writings of John Platt. Platt (1980: 64) characterizes the typical verbal repertoire of a Singaporean Chinese as follows:

It usually includes:

- (1) The native Chinese dialect
- (2) The dominant Chinese dialect
- (3) One or more additional Chinese dialects
- (4) Bazaar Malay

It may include:

- (5) English
- (6) Mandarin
- (7) Baba Malay
- (8) Malay

Of course, few Chinese, if any, would be equally proficient in all these different codes. Rather, a Singaporean Chinese will have the degree of competence in each code which will be appropriate for the way in which he uses that code. Consequently, it would be somewhat unusual for two Singaporean Chinese not to be able to find some common means of communication, even though they might have as their first languages different and mutually unintelligible Chinese dialects. As for the (b) part of the equation, it too has a certain superficial appeal, but is easily refuted by the fact that some of the worst civil wars in history have involved sides which speak basically the same language, such as the American Civil War. In other words, the mere fact that citizens of a country all speak one and the same language is no guarantee that the citizens will be living in harmony with one another. In fact it has been suggested that under certain social conditions, it is inevitable that there will be varieties of a language despite all attempts to standardize it throughout the society (Milroy, 1980: 162). It is known, too, that identification with a linguistic or ethnic group can persist well after a person has lost the linguistic ability which may have originally been a salient feature of the group. So, for example, in contemporary Australia, there are many people who have an Aboriginal ancestor, claim Aboriginal ethnicity, and strongly identify with the Australian Aboriginal group, without being able to speak or understand any Aboriginal language. Their full integration linguistically into White society is not matched by their acceptance of the social values of White society. Indeed proficiency in English can be used as an instrument to argue all the more eloquently for a separation between those persons and the White society. In the Singapore context, this would suggest that clan feelings of solidarity, for example, may persist even after the dialect characterizing the clan is no longer used.

In making these comments on the basic assumption, I am not questioning the necessity for some kind of English/Mandarin bilingual policy in the education system. The historical background sketched above points to the political necessity of some

such programme. The divisions in Singapore created by the existence of government-funded English stream schools and privately funded Chinese-stream schools before self-government did in fact represent a real "fracture" in the society. A bilingual policy is, I believe, well justified in the light of such historical background, however. Instead, the bilingual policy is justified with respect to the rationalization of inter-Chinese communication:

Our task is to create an enduring society. It must have some essential common features. One of these is at least ability and ease in communicating with one another through the use of one common language in our multi-lingual, multi-cultural society. Hence our bilingual policy in education.

(p. 2)

The choice for Singapore is simple — continue with dialects, and we will end up using only dialects and English. We will continue to have a fractured multi-lingual society.

(p. 3)

My comments on the basic assumption relate, then, to the argument for the bilingual policy as advanced in the speech. While there may be good reasons for the policy (not enunciated in the speech), the policy is justified in the speech as a counter-measure to the social "fracturing" imposed by the use of dialects. This line of argument has flaws, as I have shown, but that is not to say that there are no other convincing arguments in support of the basic assumption.

There is a second argument for the bilingual policy offered in the very last paragraph of the speech. It is only in this one paragraph that the argument appears and must be seen as a secondary argument in the context of speech under discussion. The argument is expressed in the following excerpt:

We must keep the core of our value systems and social mores. To do that, we must have our children literate in Chinese and English. To be literate, they must be Mandarin-speaking, able to read the books, the proverbs, the parables, and the stories of heroes and villains, so that they know what a good upright man should do and be. Hence the Mandarin part of our bilingual policy must succeed.

(p. 8)

This sub-argument is meant to establish the necessity for teaching Mandarin alongside of English. It thus complements the earlier argument for the bilingual policy which is aimed more at establishing the necessity for all Chinese to learn and use Mandarin instead of using a variety of dialects. As presented in this speech and quoted above, there are some weak links in this argument. Consider, first, the claim that children must be literate in Chinese in order to preserve the value systems and social mores of the community. It is necessary here to distinguish the "high culture" of literature and art from the "low culture" of domestic and folk behaviour patterns, without implying anything derogatory by using the semi-technical term "low culture". There is also the high culture of Northern China as manifested in Beijing opera, as opposed to the high culture of Southern China, such as Cantonese opera. It is not entirely clear that a person must be literate in Chinese in order to appreciate, say, Cantonese opera. More plausibly, one could insist that one can only appreciate the

full extent of pan-Chinese high culture if one is literate in Modern (and for that matter Classical) Chinese. (Interestingly, however, the Singapore government considers it quite feasible to teach Confucian ethics through the English language.) It is equally true, however, that one need not be literate in Chinese to learn about, participate in, and impart to others the low culture. Here I would include such things as the practice of filial piety, habits of thrift, respect for authority, certain religious practices, appreciation of Chinese cuisine etc., just the sorts of things in fact which Singapore Chinese children are supposed to acquire. Furthermore, there are many aspects of daily life which I believe Singapore Chinese see as being traditional and worthwhile continuing which have no basis at all in the high culture of China. So, for example, being literate in Chinese does not help one better understand *nasi lemak*, batik, Indian curry etc. Consider also the second link in the argument: in order to be literate in Chinese, one must be able to speak Mandarin. As is well known, it is possible to be literate in a language without being able to speak the language. One can read Shakespeare without being able to speak like Shakespeare. Similarly, many people can read Chinese quite well without being able to speak it in an equally proficient way. Especially with Chinese is this so, partly as a result of the largely logographic nature of the Chinese writing system and partly as a result of the traditional way of teaching Chinese (at least among those Chinese I have interviewed about this) where the emphasis was on reading and writing, rather than on conversation as such. The minor argument for the bilingual policy, then, is flawed in even more obvious ways than the major argument.

#### *Statement of the Dialect Problem*

The presentation of this part of the argument revolves around the four basic points quoted above. (1), as it applies to a second language, would be readily agreed to by most people who have had to either teach or learn a second language through formal education. It does not apply to learning one's first language, nor does it apply to learning of languages or dialects in a natural multilingual setting where one is continually exposed to the languages in question. Given the initial observation of (1), that learning a language is difficult, one might have expected the next point to be something along the lines: "Since learning a second language is difficult, one must not expect too much of children learning a second language." Instead, the next point to be made is the assertion (2): "Most people can cope with learning two languages, but not three." (2) does not logically follow from (1), nor is there any psycholinguistic evidence which can easily settle the matter. Nevertheless, (2) has a certain commonsensical ring of truth about it which would make it as acceptable as any of the other points (1)-(4). The two remaining points ("Many school-children use a dialect outside the classroom" and "The more a child uses a dialect, the less Mandarin is used") are perfectly valid.

A feature of the presentation of the problem which has been alluded to already in the discussion of the basic assumption is the underlying monolithic view of language and what it means to properly know a language. The monolithic view is the one which regards all the language skills (speaking, comprehension, reading, writing) as equally indispensable in learning a language. In this view, being proficient in the language

means being proficient in all these language skills. Proficiency in just one or two of these skills is seen as an inadequacy. When it happens, as it does so often in Singapore, that a person can read Chinese (i.e., Mandarin) satisfactorily, but speak mainly dialect, then this will be viewed as an undesirable state of affairs. Dialect is seen, then, as *competing against* Mandarin rather than *complementing* Mandarin. Much depends here, too, on whether one approaches questions about language use from a broad social perspective or from a purely educational perspective. If one considers language use from the social point of view, then the criterion for success in language use would be an ability to communicate appropriately in whatever situation one finds oneself. "Communicating appropriately" in this case might be the ability to call upon any of the eight languages typifying the polyglossic reality of Singapore quoted above. A successful communicator by this criterion may be able to read and write some Chinese but may not be at all proficient in speaking Mandarin; such a person may, however, be very proficient at speaking a Chinese dialect and may be able to understand well a number of dialects and Mandarin. From an educational viewpoint, however, the natural criterion for successful language use would be proficiency in all aspects of the school languages. Not being able to speak Mandarin well is then an (educational, rather than social) inadequacy. Use of dialect is then viewed as an obstacle to proficiency in the use of the school languages, rather than playing a complementary role in the daily lives of people. Here, as indeed throughout the whole speech, there is a strong bias towards an educational perspective. It is as though the whole society is being treated as a (Neo-Confucianist?) extension of the school system.

Another feature of the statement of the dialect problem, again a feature of the whole speech, is the absence of any reference to people's *attitudes* towards the languages being discussed. So, for example, the first point, that learning a language is difficult, is discussed entirely in terms of brain capacity and through comparison with computers:

But let me reassure all parents: your child has a brain bigger than the biggest computer man has ever built. Whilst the world's biggest computer cannot handle two languages, most human beings can, especially if they are taught when young. Every human brain, unlike the computer, has an innate sense of language and syntax.

(p. 3)

There is not even any hint of the possibility that success in language learning may be dependent in part upon the attitude the learner has to the language, the associated culture (Mandarin, it should be noted is based on a dialect of Northern China), and the motivation the learner brings to the language-learning task. Similarly, in the discussion of the use of dialects, there is no acknowledgement that Singaporeans may sometimes use dialect because they like to use dialect or because dialect makes them feel more relaxed etc. This avoidance of reference to the attitudinal dimension of language use has the effect of making the speech appear rather cold in tone (though there can be no doubt that the author of the speech is himself aware of the attitudinal dimension).

### *Solution*

The solution to the dialect problem has already been examined as part of the discussion above on the overall structure of the argument. It attempts to bring educational policy and the reality of everyday life into agreement not by modifying the educational policy but by changing the patterns of everyday communication.

The solution advocates restricting the use of dialect, rather than abandoning dialect completely. The relevant passage is the following one:

We can solve this problem without throwing any dialect away.  
But we must limit the vocabulary of dialect for only home needs,  
and only in homes where parents cannot speak Mandarin or  
English. I am certain your child will pick up enough dialect to  
satisfy his grandparents.

(p. 7)

Vocabulary is singled out as the one aspect of dialect which needs to be restricted, but I think one can safely assume the passage does not mean to imply that the other aspects which go to make up a dialect (a good pronunciation of segments and tones, syntax, stylistic differentiation etc.) are to be cultivated. *Vocabulary* is referred to here presumably because it is one of the most familiar metalinguistic terms. Also, many Singaporeans conceptualize a Chinese dialect simply in terms of its words and have difficulty appreciating the reality of syntactic rules in the modern linguistic sense as these apply to a Chinese dialect. Even Mandarin is viewed in the same way sometimes. Not only is the dialect to be restricted in its vocabulary etc., but it is only to be tolerated as a way for a child to "satisfy his grandparents". This somewhat condescending reference to grandparents dismisses rather briefly a difficult paradox in the government's policies regarding senior citizens. On the one hand, a strong and persistent theme of the Singapore government has been the cultivation of respect for, and admiration of, the lifestyle, the values, and the achievements of the older generation. And yet, on the other hand, the languages associated most with this older generation, the Chinese dialects, are now said to be no longer appropriate for modern Singapore. One could possibly resolve this paradox by claiming that what is said is more important than how it is said and so go on to argue that one should still pay attention to the content of what the older generation says, rather than the dialectal form. In the speech under discussion, however, there is no recognition of any paradoxical consequences of the "Speak Mandarin" policy *vis-à-vis* the older generation.

The solution being advocated, then, is not the sudden and total abandonment of all dialect, but a gradual elimination of dialect in the way described in the preceding paragraph. To put it in anthropomorphic terms, the policy is to choke dialects to death rather than guillotine them.

### **Conclusion**

Since this study has focused primarily on a single aspect of the campaign, the educational argument, it must not be construed as a critique of the campaign as a whole. For one thing, I have not addressed the other arguments which have been offered in support of the campaign; nor have I considered the various activities associated with the campaign independent of the rhetoric. All these aspects must surely be con-

sidered if one is to do a complete analysis of the campaign. On the other hand, although the scope of the study is limited, an attempt has been made to be as thorough as possible in examining the data, and I believe there is a need for this kind of closer scrutiny of parts of the campaign.

Clearly, the educational argument touches on many diverse and sensitive issues and even though I have tried to approach the argument in a fair and reasonable way, it is nevertheless true that, because of my background, I am bound to evaluate the argument from a (Western) linguistic viewpoint. The rhetoric of the campaign quite obviously is not directed at linguists, Western or otherwise; rather, the rhetoric is directed at ethnic Chinese Singaporeans. Claims or inferences which may be suspect from a linguistic point of view, may be perfectly acceptable to most ethnic Chinese Singaporeans, as I have suggested at various points in the discussion. In a sense, then, my analysis of the campaign must remain a rather academic exercise until it can be shown that a majority of the target audience of the campaign is reacting to the argument in similar ways. One might expect in fact that one of the priorities in the conduct of the campaign would be the determination (through various feedback mechanisms) of the effectiveness of the various arguments. This would seem an essential exercise in order for the public argumentation in support of the campaign to be kept effective. This study could be seen as a contribution to that exercise.

From the perspective I have adopted, the educational argument for the Speak Mandarin Campaign contains a number of dubious claims which (I believe, seriously) weaken the argument, though one must bear in mind the caveats of the preceding paragraphs. This is so, despite the fact that there is compelling historical reason for instituting a bilingual policy in the school system, as my sketch of the historical background shows. The weaknesses of the educational argument for the Speak Mandarin Campaign relate not to the need for some kind of bilingual policy, but to the imposition of that policy on the society at large.

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