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Running Head: The discourse of linguistic capital

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines the historical and current connections between English language education policy and economic development policy in Singapore. Policy statements on English language education policy in Singapore are used to demonstrate the ways that English is given a role in economic development and modernization by government officials and educators. The discourse of policy statements on the economic utility and cultural value of languages is discussed with reference to Bourdieu's concepts of *capital* and *field*. Comparative reference is made to policy statements on so-called "Mother Tongue." The analysis provides background on language policy in Singapore and locates current reform efforts within that discourse.

KEY WORDS. Bourdieu, English, English-knowing bilingualism, modernization, Mother tongue, Singapore, symbolic capital

ABBREVIATIONS

MT – Mother Tongue

EL – English Language

PM – Prime Minister

SM – Senior Minister

MOE – Ministry of Education

Introduction

This article explores the way that English has been portrayed as a crucial part of human resource development and human capital in language policy discourse in Singapore, and the way that portrayal continues to be implemented in current policy reforms. Language policy which explicitly links economic development, language, and education is examined. In so doing, this article follows some of the original goals of the Six-Nation Project¹ (McGinn 2004) and the Pedagogical Practices in English Language Education Project (see Introduction, this issue). Bourdieu's notions of *capital* and *field* are used to show that public policy discourse on official languages in Singapore attempts to assign different types of capital to English or the so-called "Mother Tongues" and so allocate the linguistic field in specific ways. Before addressing English language policy in Singapore, it is necessary to review a few of the basic concepts advanced by Bourdieu which will be used in this discussion.

Broadly speaking, economic capital is that which creates and/or helps to maintain material wealth including money, property, and human resources of economic value. This view of economic capital is quite common in discussions ranging from education, to business management, to politics. In contrast, Bourdieu (1986, 1991) has hypothesized that capital has four guises with economic capital as the root of the other three. The various forms of capital function in relation to each other in terms of their conversions. For Bourdieu, *economic capital* is directly convertible into material wealth. *Cultural capital*, on the other hand, entails

¹ For information, see <http://www.gse.upenn.edu/cms/cms.php?id=335>

accumulated knowledge and skills and how those are realized through institutions or objects. Cultural capital is potentially, but not directly, convertible into economic capital. Nowadays, especially in knowledge-based economies, accumulated knowledge and skills are commonly referred to as ‘human capital’, implying that they are resources which can be exploited for economic development both for the individual and the society. This view tends to see human capital as something objectifiable and transferable, separable from the individual. However, in Bourdieu’s view, cultural capital is integral to the individual and his/her predispositions (*habitus*, in Bourdieu’s terms²), and “marked by the earliest conditions of acquisition...” (1986: 245). Thus, while they have some similar characteristics, the concepts of ‘human capital’ and ‘cultural capital’ are quite different in terms of their presumed transferability and utility.

Bourdieu sees three areas of cultural capital, also distinguished by how each manages conversion of capital (1986). *Institutional capital* has to do with credentials and recognized qualifications which can be transformed into economic capital assuming a common institutional recognition of the value of these credentials.

Objectified capital includes objects which have value and might be transferable (the

² The concept of *habitus* is crucial to Bourdieu’s theory of an economy of practice (1980, 1986, 1991); to explain it as “his/her predispositions” is to simplify greatly.

However, since this article focuses only on a few key areas in Bourdieu’s theory, the concept of *habitus* will not be gone into in much detail. See e.g. Bourdieu (1977) and Bouveresse (1999) for explanation of *habitus*; Jenkins (2002) and Margolis (1999) for critiques.

sale of a painting) or transmittable (the appreciation of viewing a painting), or both. *Embodied capital* includes knowledge and skills which have been accumulated and inculcated in the individual.

Yet another area of capital is *social capital*. Bourdieu sees this as the aggregate of an individual's group memberships and social connections. It may be convertible into economic capital through mutual agreement but, perhaps more importantly, social capital depends on symbolic exchanges which allow it to be established and maintained. This leads to Bourdieu's fourth guise, *symbolic capital*, which is seen as accumulated prestige or honor. Symbolic capital derives out of any or all of the other forms of capital when those forms are recognized as legitimate (1987, cited in Calhoun 1993: 70). One example is that of official languages. In Bourdieu's view, the official language is the *legitimate language* and thus is imbued with symbolic capital. This should not be understood to mean that a language becomes legitimate by being declared an official language. Rather as Bourdieu notes, "The official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social uses. It is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitution of a unified linguistic market, dominated by the official language" (1991: 45). Further, he says, "All linguistic practices are measured against the legitimate practices, e.g. the practices of those who are dominant" (p. 53). This brings in the notion of power and how it plays out in relation to different forms of capital.

The notion of *fields* is essential for understanding how power interacts with capital.

[A field] is a structured system of social positions – occupied either by individuals or institutions – the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants. It is also a system of forces which exist between these positions; a field is structured internally in terms of power relations. Positions stand in relationships of domination, subordination or equivalence (homology) to each other by virtue of the access they afford to the goods or resources (capital) which are at stake in the field. (Jenkins 2002: 85)

Thus, fields are social contexts or ideological positions which operate as sites of struggle and through which the types of capital are distributed.

Although Bourdieu is not completely clear on how a specific field is determined,³ he has discussed several examples including the intellectual field, the political field (field of power), the field of ideological production, the field of class struggle, and the linguistic field (1991).⁴ According to Jenkins, “The existence of a field *presupposes* and, in its functioning, *creates* a belief on the part of participants in the legitimacy and value of the capital which is at stake in the field” (2002: 85) (italics in original). In this way the presuppositions of fields are connected to the *habitus*, or predispositions, of individuals and institutions.

In connecting these concepts, Bourdieu makes use of terms adopted from economics, not only ‘capital’ but also ‘market’ and ‘exchange’. Specific to the purpose of this discussion, Bourdieu has advanced the concepts of *linguistic capital*,

³ See Jenkins (2002: 84-91) for discussion

⁴ See Robbins (1991) for overview and discussion of the evolution of Bourdieu’s field theory.

linguistic market, and *linguistic exchange*. He conceptualized a linguistic exchange as a type of economic exchange “which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market), and which is capable of procuring a certain material or symbolic profit” (Thompson 1991: 66). Thus, English (as well as the MTs) is considered to be linguistic capital that can be exchanged within Singapore’s multilingual linguistic market; its value is embedded in the predispositions of those engaged in the exchange and the power relations of the linguistic field.

Concepts of power are also embedded in the discourse of language planning and policy, especially for standardization (Fairclough 1989, 2001) and determination of a national or official language (Cooper 1989; Kaplan & Baldauf 1997). For example, studies of language policy examine how those in power establish or maintain a particular language as the language of government, business and education (see Kaplan & Baldauf 1997 for an overview). However, a description of decisions taken cannot explain how the boundaries of the linguistic field are set or changed. Bourdieu’s theory helps to illuminate how boundaries of fields of politics, education, commerce, and religion intersect, and how individuals and institutions situate themselves in relation to these fields.

In Singapore, the linguistic field is occupied by individuals who stand in different relationships to the four official languages, but also by institutions such as schools, business, government which are positioned differently to the official languages, the individuals, and each other. Historically, English was the language of the elite, those who were educated in British schools. After establishing an independent

nation, nation policy was oriented toward bilingualism with English and a so-called Mother Tongue language; this was to be achieved through universal education. Struggles over power relations are evident in continuing discussions of purpose of learning/arenas of use, standardization, and educational reforms which toward bilingual elitism. In the next section, an overview of the development of Singapore's official language policies and how they are referenced to economic, educational and social needs, is given. The final section discusses current reforms in light of Bourdieu's concepts of *linguistic capital* and *linguistic field*.

Linguistic capital in Singapore, an historical overview

Integration of the education system with language and economic policies was central to economic planning in Singapore from the earliest days of independence. Language planning was especially visible in educational development. In particular, "acquisition planning" (Cooper 1989) – the intentional spread of a particular language and or of particular language standards, especially through language teaching – has been a key part of Singaporean language planning and policy. In addition, language policy discourse has consistently presented justifications and rationales which distinguish English from the other official languages of Singapore as the language of economic development.

Bilingual education has been a keystone of governmental policies linking language and economic development from the years immediately after WWII. Its promotion was an early step toward recognizing the linguistic capital associated with each official language as well as the linguistic capital associated with bilingualism. English learning was emphasized as a means of building up national cohesion via

inter-ethnic communication and of preparing a greater percentage of the population to participate in economic opportunities via international trade. Three other languages were also declared Official Languages (Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil) and all three have had a place in the development of bilingual education in Singapore. These three languages are collectively referred to as ‘Mother Tongue’ (MTs) for reasons explained below. Starting with the establishment of Singaporean self rule (1959)⁵ three broad time periods of economic development are used to frame the discussion of policy statements.⁶

Selection of Language Policy Statements

In this paper, examples of policy discourse from public documents (budget information, educational policies, and governmental websites), public speeches by governmental representatives, press releases, news reports, op/ed write-ups in the local English language daily, and letters to the editor are used to demonstrate the discourse of linguistic capital in Singapore both historically and currently. Over 300 policy statements from public speeches, press releases and news articles were examined. For historical documents (1950s-1980s), policy statements that are cited as being crucial for language and educational reform (Appendix A) were searched. For more current language policy statements (1990-2004) electronic searches using

⁵ A basic overview of Singapore history can be found at Knowledgenet Singapore (<http://www.knowledgenet.com.sg/>)

⁶ See Silver (2002) for a more detailed discussion of the economic development periods and connections with language education policies.

keywords combinations (Appendix B) were done. The selection of documents was narrowed by initially excluding most speeches and press releases for opening ceremonies at individual schools and fundraisers. Some of these were included later due to the repeated references in other sources. Speeches by the Prime Minister, Senior Prime Minister and Minister for Education were prioritized in the examination. This sort of searching was possible because of the extensive collection of speeches and press releases made available on-line by the Singaporean government.⁷

Language policies that were reiterated in multiple speeches, at different events or times were selected for further examination. News reports and op/ed write-ups that responded to the selected policy statements were then searched. In a few cases, interviews and autobiographical accounts were included. These data were examined for clear cut statements of language policy, including changes and reasons for maintaining or changing language policy. The examples included in this article were selected because they most closely and succinctly echoed language policy decisions and justifications of a particular time period. The sequence of presentation is chronological. Thus, the discussion provides an overview of language policy in Singapore, its justification(s), and connections to current reform efforts.

⁷ <http://www.sprinter.gov.sg/> Note, however, that this website has been updated with many historical documents added since 2003 when the majority of the searches were done. Searches in 2004 were restricted to policy reforms announced in newspaper articles, public speeches, and press releases.

Historical development of language policies and linguistic capital

The first period (late 1950's to mid-1960's), was one of 'basic development' economically and in terms of the educational system. Governmental efforts were bent toward overcoming economic, political, and racial instability. The establishment of an independent import-export trade was a focus of economic planning. Key policy features during this period focused on creating jobs, expanding educational opportunities to all, and forming a bilingual population through bilingual education.

In language policy statements, there was an attempt to justify multilingualism by dividing the linguistic field through different conversions of embodied capital (i.e. cultural capital) and social capital, and through different positioning to economic capital. English was treated as a necessity with regard to inter-ethnic communication and economic development. It was seen as having social capital only in that it was designated for networking across ethnic groups; its main purpose was through connection to economic capital. It was not accorded any social status or cultural value and so was portrayed as being low in symbolic capital. In contrast, the MTs were represented as being less useful for commercial purposes, but important for personal identity, a sense of heritage and inter-ethnic communication. Thus, their maintenance was justified mainly through social and symbolic capital. Explicitly connected in policy statements to each of the dominant ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, and Indian), these languages were categorized as 'Mother Tongues' in contrast to English, which was seen as lacking ethnic affiliation. As Lee Kuan Yew, the first Prime Minister (PM) of Singapore said of that era:

We realised that English had to be the language of the workplace and the common language. As an international trading community, we would not make a living if we used Malay, Chinese, or Tamil. With English, no race would have an advantage. But it was too sensitive an issue for us to make immediate changes. To announce that all had to learn English when each race was intensely and passionately committed to its own mother tongue would have been disastrous. So we left the position as it was, with four official languages—Malay, Chinese (Mandarin), Tamil and English. (2000: 170)

These ideological positions, taken early on, were maintained throughout the next several decades and into the present.

The next period of national development ran from the late 1960's and into the late 1980's. This was a time of restructuring and expansion, both economically and educationally. The economic focus was on industrial development. Again, language policy was interwoven with economic and educational policies. With that emphasis on export and industrialization came the development of a national school system dedicated to preparing adults to participate in an industrialized economy. Unified subject curricula and bilingual education requirements at primary and secondary school were implemented including greater exposure time to English and introduction of English as the language of instruction for Science and Math (Gopinathan 1980).

In this era “Bilingual” came to mean “English plus one other language” in Singapore.⁸ Throughout this period, the teaching of English was consistently

⁸ Kachru (1983) has termed this “English-knowing bilingualism” and Pakir (1991) has discussed the specific case of Singapore.

defended with utilitarian, economic justifications rather than cultural, or other, reasons. As Bokhorst-Heng (1999) has pointed out, the government saw language diversity as a problem that needed to be solved: Education with English plus one other language was the solution.

As in the initial self-rule period, the study and use of English was intended to be economic-development oriented and to provide opportunities for inter-ethnic communication. There was an intentional effort to separate English from any potential symbolic capital by referencing ethnic identity with a MT language and publicly marking English as merely functional:

Teach our children enough for them to understand and to speak freely in two languages....To be able to speak both fluently requires a great deal of effort. I am convinced that this effort has to be made, if we are to survive as a distinctive society, worth the preserving. Or we will become completely deculturalised and lost. If we become like some societies speaking pidgin English, mindlessly aping the Americans or British with no basic values or culture of their own then, frankly, I do not believe this is a society or nation worth the building, let alone defending....The minimum we must achieve is to teach enough, in the mother tongue, of the basic values, and culture.

Please note that when I speak of bilingualism, I do not mean just the facility of speaking two languages. It is more basic that, first, we understand ourselves: what we are, where we came from, what life is or should be about, and what we want to do. Then the facility of the English language gives us access to the science and technology of the West. It also provides a convenient common

ground on which the Chinese, Indians, Ceylonese, Malays, Eurasians, everybody competes in a neutral medium. (PM Lee Kuan Yew 1972: 5-6 & 9)

The above citation hints at an emerging concern that proficiency in the two languages of study (English and MT) was not reaching the standard desired. A governmental study was undertaken to examine the educational system and suggest improvement. The Education Study Team noted that “As Singapore industrialises, the English Language becomes more important relative to the other languages” (1979: 4-4) and this meant that proficiency must be improved. In a reply to that report, the then Prime Minister stated

It is foolish to believe that we can ever completely divorce language, culture, and education from the passions with which people jealously guard their personal identities. It has taken 20 years to convince all that no one is being asked to surrender his personal identity. The present political and emotional climate allows for frank and calm discussions on policies which will decide the kind of men and women our children will grow up to beThe principal value of teaching the second language is the imparting of moral values and understanding of cultural traditions. (Lee Kuan Yew 1979: iv-v)

Two points are worth noting here. Firstly, English was designated as the first language of the school and so it came to be referred as the “first language.” As a result, MTs were described as “second languages.” Secondly, although the Prime Minister noted close connections between language, culture, education, and personal identity, he reserved these “passions” for the MT, perhaps assuming that there was no such passion associated with English.

The Study Team made a number of recommendations having to do with expected standards, school facilities, teacher training and the structure of the educational system. The most controversial proposal was to put in place a “streaming” system which effectively placed children in different classes based on their perceived ability to learn. In the original proposal, compiled scores in English, MT, and Mathematics were to be used to determine a child’s “stream” from Primary 3 (P3) onwards. This determination would influence the level of the courses the child would take and, possibly, the number of years required to complete primary and secondary school. The proposal was adopted.⁹ Whereas previously quantitative and qualitative expansion had emphasized universal education, with the introduction of streaming came the development of an elite stream. Thus some tension surrounding elitism was also introduced into the system.¹⁰

Moving into the 90’s and early 2000’s, some of the basic issues around language (such as universal bilingual education) have become widely accepted, though specific elements of the system undergo periodic revision. English has clearly gained ground in the society as a whole with nearly 25% of the population using it as the dominant home language in 2000, up from less than 20% in 1990 (Singstat, 2000). Children who are immersed in English at school are more likely to use English at

⁹ From 1991 streaming was conducted at the end of P4 rather than the end of P3 as in the original proposal.

¹⁰ Similar tensions related to education and English language education have appeared in China, Japan and Switzerland (see articles by Hu, Butler & Iino, and Grin & Korth in this issue).

home with school-age siblings even when parents and grandparents use other languages at home (Li, Saravanan & Ng 1997). As much as 50% of the P1 Chinese population reports using English as a home language (PM Goh 2004, citing MOE data). Pakir (1997) has identified this as 'invisible language planning' -- the unintended language planning that happens at the individual and family level, either with or against governmental policies. In this case, although the shift may be unintended by the government, it is certainly intentional on the part of families who feel they can give their children a 'head start' in the educational system by shifting to English at home. This sort of individual initiative is clearly a response to the developing capital of English and was not taken into account in governmental policy and planning.

Current Issues and Reforms

In the early 2000s, statements on language and education policies continue to address English as the language of commerce and MTs as the languages of heritage and identity. There has been some change in the emphasis however – as official languages have been widely accepted, policy statements have emphasized the need for standardization in the different languages, especially in English and Mandarin. In addition, the struggle to maintain multilingualism as a national characteristic, in the face of encroaching English dominance, is addressed with arguments which have been successful in the past: development of economic capital, maintenance of social capital, and allocation of the linguistic field in particular ways with reference to the different types of capital. Language education reforms attempt to address these issues through policy statements connecting international (i.e. exonormative) standards with

economic capital and through the introduction of new syllabi which are intended to facilitate a ‘trickle down’ effect from policy to classroom pedagogy (see Silver & Skuja-Steele this issue).

Research on the localized variety of English, Singapore English, has been extensive (see e.g., Afrendas & Kuo 1980; Alsagoff 2001; Foley et al. 1998; Gupta 1989, 1994, 1998; Lim 2001; Platt & Weber 1980). Details of that discussion will not be given here. Suffice it to say that many scholars consider there to be a ‘standard’ variety used by more educated speakers in more formal environments, as well as a ‘colloquial’ variety (see e.g., Gupta 1989, 1994; Pakir 1991, 1994). Policy statements and discussions in the local press focus on so-called “Singlish,” usually associated with the colloquial variety. Importantly for the current discussion, the type of economic arguments that were previously used to establish English in Singaporean society are now used to justify insistence on an international ‘standard’ of English to be learned and used by all. Public policy statements make explicit links between this ‘internationally accepted standard’ and economic interests, emphasizing the importance of learning the ‘standard’ and deriding Singlish.

Will we then write our own school and university textbooks in Singlish? Will Singlish help you to write a business proposal? Will MNCs [multi-national corporations], banks or even local companies prefer to hire you if you speak Singlish instead of Standard English? (Deputy PM Lee Hsien Loong April 5, 2001)

Thus, the legitimate language is a particular variety of English, one which is based on exonormative standards rather than a local one. This has been integrated in

to the latest incarnation of the EL syllabus, introduced in 2001. For example, the newest English syllabus for primary and secondary school states that students will learn to use “standard English,” and explicitly defines standard English as that which is “internationally acceptable” (Curriculum Planning and Development Division 2001: 3). This syllabus attempts to update the view of EL teaching and learning in a way that “takes into consideration the emerging local and global trends of economic globalisation and developments in information, communications and scientific technology” (Ang 2000:8). The changes emphasize text types as an organizational framework rather than thematic units, as the 1991 syllabus did. This modification is intended to enhance the emphasis on English for communication and to encourage more connections between grammar instruction and language learning. The increased emphasis on grammar is intended to foster ‘correct’, standard usage in keeping with government policy.

A similar criticism has been leveled at the local variety of Mandarin, which the former Prime Minister dubbed “chap chye English,” referring to a local mixed vegetable dish.

This is Singlish’s counterpart. It is a mixture of dialects and Mandarin with English words thrown in. ‘Chap chye’ Mandarin is not understood in China and Taiwan. The Promote Mandarin Council may want to focus its efforts on encouraging the community to speak good Mandarin in future campaigns to parallel the Speak Good English Campaign. (PM Goh Chok Tong Sept 4, 1999)

Previously, the Promote Mandarin Council had focused on shifting the Chinese community from use of their traditional languages (designated as ‘dialects’ in Singapore policy statements) to the use of Mandarin as a community language through an annual Speak Mandarin Campaign (Promote Mandarin Council, n.d.). Also, historically, as shown above, the Mother Tongues have been treated as equivalent in the language policy discourse while English is dissimilar.¹¹ Thus, drawing a parallel between one of the MTs and English was a rather unusual move which showed some realigning of the usual EL/MT distinction.

In addition, there have been recent attempts to justify MT learning through connections with economic capital.

The economic value of knowing Mandarin has increased with China’s opening up of her economy. While interpreters may be available in big cities, they are not in the smaller towns and villages. Hundreds of village enterprises are eager to upgrade themselves. They are looking for foreign partners, to gain additional capital and technical know-how ...The ability to speak Mandarin with Chinese businessmen and officials is a tremendous advantage. (PM Goh Chock Tong 1993)

This type of argument is in direct contrast with previous policy justifications for MT study and for the traditional capital divisions found in Singaporean language

¹¹ Clearly the MTs are not entirely ‘equivalent’ (see, e.g. Schiffman 2003; Wee, L. 2004 for examples); however, an analysis of distinctions among the MTs is beyond the scope of this article.

policy. It is also problematic, as Wee (2004) has pointed out, because the economic value of MT is more plausible with Mandarin than with Malay and Tamil.

In the context of expansion of English into new domains, the government has been pushed to reinforce the importance of MT. Reference to symbolic and cultural capital are still used in policy statements to support MT learning.

Why is it of any consequence to us whether our children learn our mother tongue and culture? Ours is an open society. Technological changes have revolutionized and will continue to revolutionize the way we work, live and play. Like it or not, we are subject to many influences in this age of Information Technology and mass media. Amidst these influences, there should be a moral, cultural and spiritual anchor for our children. Therefore in schools we teach the mother tongue because we believe that knowledge of our mother tongue enables us to preserve our roots and cultural identity. We also encourage our people to actively preserve their heritage for we believe that our racial, religious and language diversity is an asset which provides an anchor, and adds color and vibrancy to our lives. (Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law Aug. 1, 1999)

English is still promoted as the language of economic necessity in most policy statements. Foley notes that English has been not only the working language of colonial and modern governments in Singapore, but has also been the “pathway to membership of the elite” (2001: 12). Professional and technical jobs, by definition, require higher education; higher education in Singapore, as noted above, can only be obtained in English. In this way, English has a gatekeeping function which allows, or

prevents, continued education and, thus, future job opportunities (for the individual) and fulfillment of labor market needs (for the society). As a result, English has become the language of prestige and status in contrast to the government's discourse on symbolic capital associated with MTs.

Returning to recent syllabus reforms, MT syllabi have also been revised although for different reasons than those given for EL. In the case of MT, new syllabi to emphasize higher MT learning were introduced in 1999 and 'B' syllabi in each language came in 2004 for those students who had difficulty in the MT studies. The revised MT syllabi are justified through arguments that only a portion of the population can become highly proficient in both languages (English and MT). However, those who have difficulty with MT should not be held back educationally.

Students have different abilities and talents. There are many subjects to learn in school. Our students now spend a disproportionate amount of time learning Mandarin, at the expense of other subjects and their overall academic performance. A 1999 survey commissioned by the MOE found that Primary 5 students who were weak in Chinese spent almost twice as much time studying Chinese than Maths or English. A balance should be maintained so that our students can continue to receive a well-rounded education (PM Goh Chok Tong, March 21 2004).

In keeping with this argument, revisions to streaming policy were introduced in January, 2004: the upper two bands were joined to create a single 'stream'; plans were made to place students who needed additional assistance in a separate stream; a unified national streaming exam would not longer be used; instead, schools would

develop their own systems for placing students in the higher or lower streams (MOE 2004). Flexibility has been introduced in that students who fall into the lower stream for English and Maths can take the regular MT course rather than the simplified B Syllabus if their MT scores merit this variation. These changes are not enough to satisfy critics of streaming who would prefer that the system be scrapped all together (e.g. See 2004); however, they constitute radical changes in the educational policy not only for MT, but also for assessment.

Previously, students had to have high scores in all areas in order to take Higher MT. With the new policies, however, students who had high marks MT but only average grades in English and Mathematics will be able to study Higher MT. The government's current position is that those who can become highly proficient bilinguals should also attempt to become bicultural. For these few, MT is associated with economic capital.

... our bilingual education in English and the mother tongue gives our students Mandarin for social not business purposes. For deeper interaction, Singapore needs to nurture a few hundred students from each year's cohort to a higher level of Mandarin and a deeper appreciation of China's history and culture so that they can engage in China growth. Our multi-lingual background is changing as we become more of an international centre where English is the main language. (SM Lee Kuan Yew June 23, 2004)

Throughout this discussion, the government has been at pains to highlight that MT standards have not been reduced and the bilingual policy is still fundamental to the Singaporean educational system. In addition, the division between English, as the

language of economic development, and MT, as the languages of culture and heritage, is maintained in the policy discourse.

Let me reiterate that despite the recent changes made by MOE, the Government has not changed its longstanding bilingual policy or shifted its position on the mother tongue. Bilingualism and learning the mother tongue will remain the cornerstone of our education policy.

English is not our native language nor are English culture and customs, our culture and customs. But for practical reasons, and because we are a multi-racial society, Singaporeans accept English as our working language. To ensure that Singaporeans remain grounded in our ancestral Asian culture and values, we require our young to study their mother tongues in schools, be they Mandarin, Malay or Tamil. (PM Goh Chok Tong March 21, 2004)

Reconstructing the Linguistic Field

Bourdieu's concepts of capital and field provide a window for examining language policy discourse historically and currently. In Singapore, the political field has attempted to construct the linguistic field and use of linguistic capital within that field through policy discourse. In this discourse bilingualism is presented as the independent development of two linguistic codes which satisfy different capital needs. The policy link between economic capital and English has been overwhelmingly successful. Bourdieu's argument that "through the medium of the structure of the linguistic field, ... the structure of the space of expressive styles reproduces in its own terms the structure of the differences which objectively separate conditions of existence" (1991: 57) holds true: the medium of the structure of the linguistic fields

(in this case the languages and the various capital associated with them) reproduces *in its own terms* the structure of the differences. These differences are related to separate conditions of existence, different ways of *being* and conceiving that existence.

However, as English has come to fulfill more capital needs (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) it has begun to dominate the linguistic field and reduce the need for bilingualism in contrast to stated policies. The policy discourse has overlooked the permeable boundaries of fields: as the market develops, the value of capital can change as can perceptions of what constitutes capital. Social and political conditions have built up contexts in which English has become useful in new areas and, consequently, more highly valued. As a result, English has also developed symbolic capital through the status that accrues to financial success in capitalistic societies, despite governmental efforts to maintain symbolic and cultural capital in the MTs, with English acquisition as merely pragmatic. The new values associated with English have become part of the local linguistic landscape, inculcated into social, family, and individual *habitus*. Thus shifting values have also influenced, and altered, the structure of the linguistic field. While policy statements refer to the continued role of bilingualism in society, educational reforms indicate that high level proficiency in English plus one MT will be for the elites (as English, historically, was for the elites). The question is whether this move toward bilingual elitism will, in the end, act to preserve societal multilingualism.

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Appendix A: Major policy speeches and policy documents (listed chronologically)

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2004. Refinements to Primary School Streaming.

2004. Refinements to Mother-tongue Language (MTL) Policy.

Appendix B: Keyword combinations

language and (English education)

language and education and Mother Tongue

language and standard (including standards and standardization)

language and economy (including economics)

English and economy

Mother Tongue and economy (including separate searches for each Official Language)

language and economic development

Language and (new syllabus) (including separate searches for each Official Language)

bilingualism and (language policy)

bilingualism and (education policy)

bilingual and economy

language and heritage (including separate searches for each Official Language as well as 'Mother tongue' and heritage)