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Author(s)	Vanithamani Saravanan
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Dr. Vanithamani Saravanan, School of Arts, Nanyang
Technological University, National Institute of
Education, 469, Bukit Timah Road, Singapore, 1025. Fax: 4698433

Tamil Linguistic Minority Rights in Singapore: A Case of Cultural
Assimilation or Subtractive Bilingualism?

1.1 Singapore's Bilingual Policy

The Singapore educational system became a major instrument of the government's social engineering policies when Singapore became independent states (Wilson 1974). The historical legacy was one of English language schools and vernacular schools divided along political, cultural and linguistic orientations. Their divisive effects on the population had to give way to a national system of education.

This educational process started in the sixties and continued with periods of adjustment and accommodation, till the eighties. The rationale given by the government for its policy decisions (and for changes spread over many decades) is that linguistic policies had to be based on a pragmatic evaluation of an educational system that addresses the needs of the nation. These policies it is argued have been designed to bring about communicative integration across a diverse set of ethnic, linguistic and cultural communities.

Government policy makers argue that it is unrealistic to prescribe equality of use of the four official languages in all public domains. In 1987 English was established as the main medium of education. By this time the government began a debate on the cultural influences of 'westernisation and deculturalisation through consumerism, permissiveness and liberalism.'

These trends argued the government were to be corrected through a bilingual education policy with four official languages, with children acquiring cultural identity through their mother tongues. In effect therefore policy decisions contributed to a changing sociolinguistic environment, where English had become the main working language, and main language of education.

Mother tongue learning was introduced with the objectives of maintaining ethnic and cultural traditions. Policy makers then decided on the exclusive use of Mandarin in the place of other Chinese languages or 'dialects' as they are called by the government, i.e. Hokkien, Cantonese, and Teochew for Chinese; following China's example of selecting literary Chinese, that is, Mandarin as the dominant cultural language for the Chinese.

The Malay language was selected for the Malay population, a prestigious language of the region, rather than Javanese, Boawanese (mainly speakers of Indonesian descent) and Arabic; Tamil for the Indians rather than other Dravidian languages (Malayalam, Telugu) or the North Indian languages, (Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, or Urdu).

As a result of this social engineering, patterns of language use in the Chinese, Tamil and Malay linguistic communities as well as in the sub-groups of minority linguistic communities over the years have changed, some linguistic groups in the various Chinese, Indian and Malay speech communities have experienced different levels of language shift.

It must be pointed that have been no legal pressures on any ethnic group to give up its language, the pressures are essentially economic and cultural in nature (cf Coulmas 1991).

It may be argued that the general acceptance of such policies is characteristic of rational choice-making given the few options one has in a small but developed country. English education has been extremely advantageous not only to the Indians but to all the other communities in the country. The role of ethnic languages on the other hand is guided by the objectives of the bilingual educational policy; mother tongue learning is used to establish links between language and culture.

The government has argued that support for all the Chinese dialects would lead to an inefficient and irrational use of resources for a multiplicity of languages and that in fact the use of high status Mandarin would add to the cohesiveness and cultural identity of the Chinese.

The political discourse that the government has used is to rationalise that nation building is to build upon the social and cultural strength of multi-lingual, multi-ethnic communities and part of the process is to actively promote social cohesion, homogenising disparate linguistic and ethnic communities into a nation. Kuo and Jernudd (1994) describe this policy as 'pragmatic multilingualism'.

Politicians who assume the role of language planners see language management issues less as issues of linguistics per se but more as changing power relationships, access to resources, and management of human resources. Kuo & Jernudd (1994), Gopinathan, (1994) describe this approach as proactive intervention to support non-linguistic goals. The presence of bilingual social brokers has helped to create a level of communicative integration across the various multilingual speech communities.

Language planning and hence language management at the national level is used as part of a larger process, to be used for the needs of nation building, to be subsumed as an integral part of nation building processes. Chua (1995) argues that the formulation of race, language, and culture, for multiracial identity was introduced by the government as part of its ideological framework for national policy.

This ideological approach is used to frame policy decisions to reduce language and dialect differences. Chua quotes former prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew in 1971, summing up his thinking on the role of Mandarin for Chinese Singaporeans.

'We must give our children roots in their own languages and culture, and also the widest common ground through second language. Then we shall become a more cohesive people, all rooted in their traditional values, cultures and languages; but effective in English, a key to the advanced technology of the West'. (Lee Kuan Yew, St Times 29 April 1971) ¹

The focus of government policies is currently directed towards the creation of a supra ethnic national identity, with the transition from separate ethnic identification to a national identity.

1.2 Language and Economics

The link between language planning and language management of economic resources have been observed by other researchers. (Coulmas 1991:8-23) argues that it is because languages are economically significant that they are susceptible to influences from economic development, that a language is an instrument with practical utility, and that language shifts are never in the direction away from greater utility. He concludes that language shift may come about as a result of pressures that are essentially economic and cultural in nature.

Coulmas, (1991) goes on to describe Singapore's educational system as an efficient educational system, where Mandarin, Malay and English have been adapted to modern communication requirements, where individual bilingualism is institutionalised and widespread, where the city state's multilingualism is used for economic activity and social integration.

1.3 The place of English in Singapore

English has been the dominant language of trade, international business relations, science and technology, and mass tourism, but currently Chinese and Malay and marginally Indian languages are being increasingly used for trade and business activities.

English has established itself as the dominant language of education, social interaction and inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic communication amongst Singaporeans. The prestigious status and multi-functions of English is one of the factors that has contributed to the decline of community languages, such as Tamil amongst the Indians in Singapore.

The formulation of language policies allowed for the rapid emergence and later strengthening of English as the major language of administration, commerce, education and consequently enhanced the social status of English. The use and spread of English across the population has contributed towards developing a national identity, above and beyond the ethnic and sub-ethnic levels. English has taken the place of Bazaar Malay for inter-ethnic communication.

The extensive use of English and the shift to English amongst the various communities has resulted to some extent to a de-ethnification of the communities notes (Gopinathan 1994 and Batens-Beardsmore 1994). But in order to balance the spread of English the government introduced ethnic mother tongue learning (in the early 50s) with the objectives of maintaining ethnic and cultural traditions.

Chua (1995) a sociologist, in his critique of the ideology and discourse of the ruling party in Singapore, the People's Action Party (PAP) rejects the depoliticisation thesis proposed by other academics and argues that one of the expressions of PAP ideology is that of pragmatism. Singaporeans are persuaded and encouraged to accept particular policy decisions as they are pragmatic.

What are the implications of such pragmatic linguistic policies for the majority Chinese and minority Indian linguistic communities, such as the Tamils (6% of the population) in Singapore. The use of English which has extended as a prestige language not only amongst the Indians but all other ethnic communities has permeated all formal, informal, and personal domains.

I would like to begin first, with the place of Chinese in Singapore, as some of the policy decisions have parallels to the Tamil and Malay languages in Singapore.

2.1 Language Shift or Language Revival: the Place of Dialects and Mandarin in the Chinese Community

There has been considerable reaction and criticism on the place of Mandarin by Chinese-educated groups, former Nantah graduates, and the Chinese Teachers' Union and Chinese cultural groups. One of the issues taken up by these pressure groups was the falling standard of Mandarin in schools.

To counter the arguments presented by the Chinese educated on the dominant status of English and the lower status of Mandarin, the government launched an annual 'Speak Mandarin' campaign. This was in order to assist Mandarin acquisition and the use of Mandarin amongst Chinese Singaporeans. During the 1995 Speak Mandarin campaign government officials discussed various measures to raise the status of Mandarin to a higher level, establishing norms and standards to prevent it from becoming a low level 'patois' used only in everyday discourse.

The policy decision to select Mandarin as the common language of communication among the Chinese people has led inevitably to the decline in the use of Chinese dialects, the mother tongues of many Chinese speakers, except for a generation of Chinese educated Singaporeans who have switched to Mandarin as mother tongue, home language and for social interaction.

The emphasis on Mandarin in the domestic, home and social domains has in turn affected the choice of language code amongst the individual, the familial setting and everyday use and choice of language. Chinese dialects have been replaced by Mandarin over the media, radio and television and entertainment. The campaign which began in phases introduced Mandarin as home language use, as language of societal interaction and later as language of communication and transactions during counter service at government departments.²

The rationale provided by the government was to use a linguistic tool as part of nation building, to unify the Chinese community through Mandarin, strengthen their cohesiveness, cultural identity and language claims of the Chinese-educated Singaporeans. Chinese-educated groups are positive about this linguistic gain and support for Chinese language and culture.

The focus of current policy statements observes (Gopinathan, 1994) has shifted from politics to economics. Chinese is being promoted as a language of communication with the Chinese in East Asia, China and Taiwan. Once associated with China and the Chinese communist ideology, the Chinese language has been de-politicised. This economic interest has led to increased interest in Chinese across the region with more Malaysians, Thais, Japanese, South Koreans and learning and using the language; 20,000 Malays and Indians are enrolled in Chinese schools in Malaysia.

It has been remarked that the 'Speak Mandarin' campaigns may become irrelevant one day once the generation of *hua xiao sheng* (Chinese educated) distinction disappears and Chinese Singaporeans become bilingual and conversant in Chinese and English. The movement to promote Chinese would then become a civic movement. It would be a movement from the bottom-up rather than a top-down movement.

Currently there is accommodation to the use of Chinese dialects' for example, in the acceptance of the use of Cantonese in Hongkong and Hokkien in Taipei for business contacts and business deals. Dialect heritage clans, for example, like the Teochew clan association (there are 400,000 Teochew speakers in Singapore) have support for their cultural activities (its been reported that the annual 'Hungry Ghosts Festival' sees the use of Teochew). This allows the government to ward off criticisms from dialect clan associations and dialect speakers on the lack of support for dialect language and culture activities.

It would be one sided to discuss the hegemonic place of English in Singapore without referring to governmental, institutional and community language and culture activities to support the revival and spread of Chinese language and culture, and at a smaller scale, Malay and Indian language and cultural activities.

It must be acknowledged that the impetus came from the Chinese community who had lobbied for government intervention and support. While the institutional support has led to a language shift from dialects to Mandarin, dialects are still maintained in the community and in home domains especially amongst an older generation of speakers.

What are the implications for other languages spoken in Singapore? I would like to consider very briefly the place of Malay language in Singapore.

2.2 The Malay language in Singapore

The Malay language will continue to have both instrumental and integrative value as a dominant regional language and as lingua franca in Indonesia, Malaysia (Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak) and Brunei. But as more Malays in Singapore move toward becoming part of the mainstream social and economic structure, there will be some amount of shift from Malay to English reports Bibi Jan (1994).

More and more English educated Malays speak English at home hoping to improve their children's academic performance. At the school level English, mathematics, and science are all core subjects taught in English and used to measure academic achievement. Academic achievement is strongly and closely correlated to English proficiency. What is true of the Malay community is also true of the Chinese and Indians in Singapore.

3.1 The Tamil Language in Singapore: A case of Subtractive Bilingualism?

In this section I shall analyze and discuss the sociolinguistic implications arising out of these language policy decisions for the Indian community in Singapore. The Indian community consists of 11 sub-groups, with the Tamils 63.9%, Malayalees 8.6% and Sikhs 6.7% of the Indian population. Tamil-speaking Indians are a linguistic minority in Singapore. But Tamil is not a minor language.

It serves as a standard, national language for 45 million mother tongue speakers of Tamil in India. Similarly Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Gujurati, Malayalam and Telugu are languages which have strong historical, political, and literary prestige in India. But speakers of these languages who are part of small ethnic groups in Singapore are linguistic minorities in Singapore.

A brief note on the historical background of Tamil education is given below. With self-government in 1959, Tamil was given equal status with English, Chinese and Malay. In the sixties student intake in Tamil schools declined as was the case of other vernacular schools, Chinese and Malay. In 1982 the last Tamil secondary school closed down as parents decided to shift from vernacular schools to English medium schools. But Tamil, Mandarin and Malay continued to be taught as second languages since 1951.

Despite its official and institutional language status, Tamil is in decline across the generations in Singapore. English has assumed an increasing role as a medium of intra-ethnic communication (Census 1970, 1980, 1990, Mani and Gopinathan 1983, Saravanan 1994, 1989, Ramiah 1991, 1993). Tamil does not have the status and economic significance that English, Chinese and Malay have in Singapore (Mani and Gopinathan, 1983), in the region and internationally.

This lead Mani and Gopinathan (1983) to argue whether the linguistic behaviour of the Indian community was beginning to display a case of subtractive bilingualism (Lambert 1980).

Lambert's 1980 concept of additive bilingualism is of speech communities that add a second socially relevant language to their language repertoire without leading to a lesser achievement of the higher prestige language. Subtractive bilingualism on the other hand implies that minority groups, because of national educational policies and social pressures are forced to 'subtract out' of their basic language or mother tongue in order to develop minimal competence in a national or prestigious international language. Such groups are "penalised" because a second language can be substituted for the mother tongue and linguistic dominance can be switched to an essentially second or foreign language. Lambert uses the term penalised to characterize a community that opts to subtract out of its linguistic heritage.

In what sense would it be appropriate to characterise the linguistic behaviour of the Indian community in Singapore as subtractive bilingualism - given the current sociolinguistic situation?

To begin the discussion I would like to consider the kind of institutional support the government has provided to support Tamil language education?

Compared to 1970, when 13000 students were studying Tamil as a second language in about 98 schools, the figure has increased in 1995 to 18000 studying Tamil as L2 and 100 at L1 level with English in 249 primary and secondary schools.³

It is no more true that the "loss" reported by Gopinathan and Mani (1983) in the learning of school based Tamil is taking place in the education system or that the "loss" results from a lack of opportunity to learn Tamil as there are increased facilities all round at school, and at community level to acquire language and culture.

One counter argument to refute the loss in terms of numbers is the current situation where there has been an increase in facilities to support mother tongue education in the eighties and the nineties; school based learning of the language has been strengthened over the years.

Furthermore institutional support is provided through teacher training courses. The curriculum development division for Tamil language writes, and produces both print (textbooks and workbooks) and audio-visual materials. This division was set up in 1984 and in 1993 it introduced new syllabi that adapts current approaches in applied linguistics.

In the nineties the broadcasting unit extended its hours of radio and television programmes in all languages, (though recently there has been a drastic cut back on locally produced programmes and the station is now inundated by programmes from India). The advances of information technology in Singapore has seen the advent of the Tamil language in the world wide web network.

The annual Mandarin language and cultural activities-campaign has spread to the various language and cultural organisations, with the objectives of continuing efforts at raising and maintaining cultural awareness and identity.. With the support of government agencies language and cultural activities are organised in all languages, Indian communities speaking Tamil, Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali have community centred activities ranging from cultural festivities to playwriting, national lyrics writing and poetry writing competitions. There is increased participation from all the communities.

The government's language, culture, race equation is to assign mother tongue language and culture appropriate to each community. ⁴ All children of Tamil speaking parentage are expected to acquire Tamil as a second language. Government policies emphasise the need to preserve and strengthen each group's identification with its culture as it has argued that loss of competence can lead to loss of ethnicity and culture. ⁵

What then is the current socio-psychological behaviour of the community towards Tamil? What are some of the perceptions that Singapore Indians have of themselves?

3.2 Language Attitudes to Tamil

In order to discuss the socio-psychological behaviour of Tamil speaking community we need to look at the phenomenon of diglossia in the Tamil language. The speech community uses two varieties, a high variety and a low variety; the low variety, the Spoken Tamil variety, Tamil monolingualism is largely spoken by those with little formal education, traditionally associated with low socio-economic status, workers in the plantation and construction industry, and factory workers.

Tamil does not have the status and significance that English, Chinese and Malay have in Singapore. The choice of language code whether Tamil or English is related to a large extent to educational background, whether one is Tamil-educated or English-educated, the distinctive socio-economic classification and the distinctive life styles that go with the background.

The high variety or Literary Tamil is used in all formal contexts, in education and in the media. Spoken Tamil is used in the domains of home, friendship, playground and peer group interaction, and is used frequently in Tamil movies and television programmes from India. Peecu Tamil or Spoken Tamil is widely regarded as a stigmatised variety by elitist Tamil educated writers in India, and this attitude is prevalent in Singapore too.

I have argued in (Saravanan 1994) that a prescriptive, formal, variety of Tamil has done little to encourage children and students who have had a formal education in Tamil for 10 to 12 years to use the language that they have acquired within a competitive educational system (cf. Kaplan, 1994:11).

Many years of a school based language experience is based on a prescriptive approach, on formal notions of grammar based approaches to language teaching and learning; one that requires a mastery of literary texts, mastery of formal registers in reading and writing skills. Many attend tuition and remedial classes, completing practice worksheets tediously as preparation towards competitive examinations at the end of each school term and year. This creates antipathy towards the language.

Most students retain their passive receptive/perceptive skills of reading. There is little functional use of Tamil outside the classroom and a mixed code of English and Tamil, which is natural in a bilingual context is used in social and cultural settings as shown by several studies (Saravanan 1994.)

I shall report on two studies on attitudes to Tamil that have been completed. The studies provide current evidence on the attitudes of Indian children and the Indian community toward their language and cultural heritage.

An attitudinal survey on affective linguistic behaviour (N = 220 Tamil secondary students (Saravanan 1995) obtained the following results: responses showed that 94.7% had pride in speaking the language. It showed that the community and school culture especially has established positive attitudes to Tamil language and culture. On the other hand the respondents were realistic in their responses to the prestige, status and usefulness of English, rating English higher than Tamil; 24% said that Tamil has prestige in Singapore, and 29% said that Tamil is a modern language.

A second study on the attitudes of adult Tamil speakers (N=395) in Singapore by Govindasamy (1995) between age 20 to 50 with 74% with secondary or tertiary education (a largely middle class sample) reported the following findings: the vast majority (95.4%) said that they were proud to be able to speak in Tamil and proud to retain their cultural heritage. 70.4% said that they could appreciate Tamil literature and culture by reading English translations.

On the other hand 79.2% said that they preferred to speak in English even in situations where they could speak Tamil as most Tamils were bilingual in Tamil and English. This shift to English was supported by the finding that 88.1% felt that it was less prestigious to speak Tamil, with 70.9% saying that there was more status in speaking English than Tamil (cf. Coulmas, 1984).

What the survey shows is a middle class response as they have benefited from an English language education. The shift to English by Tamils seems inevitable as a familiar pattern emerges, economic elitism and social elitism related to English education keeps expanding and providing more economic and social opportunities.

4.1 Discussion

It therefore may be counter argued that given some of the positive attitudes to Tamil language, the linguistic phenomenon of "subtractive bilingualism", the language "loss" reported in the last two decades has been arrested to some extent. While there has been a shift to English by some groups in the community, it is not a simplistic case of a total cultural assimilation to an English or western culture by such groups. It is a complex set of language behaviour patterns given the multilingual, multicultural setting.

What more does the community need to do to maintain the Tamil language? The community has to be more proactive in creating and using the opportunities provided given the multilingual, multicultural setting.

What is required from Tamil educators is a less formal linguistic approach and one that increases the cultural and social contexts and uses of the Tamil language in Singapore. What the language needs is a culturally vibrant environment, young writers and artists who are allowed to explore the language without being confined to norms and standards imposed by an exonormative source, that is, looking to South India for its models and norms. Young speakers need language as a socially meaningful experience, one that is relevant, through which to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

A sociolinguistic response to maintaining a bilingual Tamil- English and bicultural heritage is to relook at how bilingual and bicultural approach can support such minority languages. Tamil speaking Singaporeans need to develop and accept a medium, a Singapore Tamil variety, similar to Singapore English which can be used to express their thoughts and creativity, rather than be constrained by norms and standards set in India by elitist groups.

Tamil educators need to accept a sociolinguistic setting and context that is relevant to life in Singapore. Some writers are already arguing for a variety that promotes Tamil as a language that is capable of responding to a modern lifestyle, of living and growing in a city state and not one that is seen to be only traditional and folk-bound.

4.2 Language, culture and identity

What then is the identity of bilingual Singaporeans?

I would argue that it is a bilingual, bicultural identity evolving through a multilingual, multicultural base, of a language repertoire that includes both Singapore English and a combination of other languages, Tamil, Malay and Mandarin. The English language will have its place in the social context of Singapore. Inter-ethnic communication at the discourse level displays an indigenisation of Singapore English that has been evolving as a result of contact with other languages, through the users and uses of English at all levels of the population. Singaporeans in turn now talk about a language, Singaporean English, that gives them a means to display their Singaporean identity and culture (cf Coulmas, 1988) .

The surveys for Chinese and Indians show that Singaporeans are bilingual and bicultural. A Singaporean identity has evolved through Singaporean English and its many related varieties. Singapore English is not an impoverished or inadequate language. In fact it has given Singaporeans a way of expressing their Singaporean identity, in communication, in the arts, ranging from playwriting, song writing, to poetry writing, television programmes and musicals.

The first survey on attitudes of Indian school children (Saravanan 1995) was used to find out their responses to their sense of identity. They had to respond to three categories: whether they wanted to be classified by linguistic, ethnic or national identity. The responses showed that 48.6% wanted to be identified as Singaporeans first, only 22.9% wanted to be identified by ethnicity or as Indian Singaporeans and 25.7% by their linguistic community or as Tamil Singaporeans.

Given the dominant place of English which is not only in Singapore but a globalization process that is taking place world-wide, Singaporeans many would argue take a pragmatic approach. Recently there were remarks as to what an English dominated media can do to dominate Asia. ⁶

Some of the language shift experienced by the various sub-groups has come about as a result of pressures that are economic in nature. The desire to belong to a mainstream, middle class population that is socially and economically mobile has resulted in a shift in language use patterns. Singapore Indians accept a pragmatic approach to the linguistic formula, they accept the dominant place of English in Singapore and in the education system.

Despite the institutional support for Tamil, middle class Indians are aware that educational achievement is based on curricula that is taught through English. Indian parents accept the dominant economic and social status of English in Singapore. Similarly the Malays who show the least shift or decline in the use of Malay in the community, accept the place of English. The internationalism associated with the English language and the belief that an English education in the hard and applied sciences gives one an edge over others in career prospects makes an educational system based on the English language attractive (cf Coulmas, 1991).

It has been observed that periodic policy adjustments to language policies have been made to accommodate and renegotiate with the various ethnic communities (Gopinathan 1994). There is ongoing debate as to whether some of the approaches used by policy makers are appropriate. ⁷ Policy makers would constantly need to accommodate the various strands, the linguistic, ethnic, cultural diversity in the country. This accommodation has to be governed by accommodations in the political ideology, accompanied by policy shifts in the language, cultural, educational, social and economic spheres.

Endnotes

1. Goh Chong Tong (1991) made the following remarks: the dominance of English over Chinese in Singapore has already been settled by history, the market and force of circumstances. English will be the common language of Singaporeans and the principal language of commerce and official communication. This is a reality. Given that this is how do we preserve values, unless the English educated Chinese are taught and instilled with core Chinese values, cultural individualism will force out Confucian dynamism as Singapore's value system (Speeches vol 15 1991 July 26, 1991).

Similarly Mahathir the prime minister of Malaysia speaking on the need to revive the learning of English said that if Malaysians did not make earnest efforts to master English, (in 1971 instruction in English was phased out to bolster national identity), Malaysia's progress would be affected. He stated that they were short of scientists and could not keep pace with translating all scientific knowledge. ST times June 2, 1996

2. On the other hand the effectiveness of the revival efforts for Mandarin may be seen in the decline in the use of dialects. Several surveys and reports on language use amongst the Chinese (source: Straits Times 14 June 1993, and Pakir(1992) give the following trends and patterns. Chinese dialects fell sharply from the 1980's (65%) to (4%) in 1992, the use of Mandarin went up from 26% to 65% in 1992.

Fewer and fewer people reported using Chinese dialects at home, work and transactions. Dialects have been completely replaced by English and Mandarin in schools. Fewer grandparents (31% in 1993 compared to 42% in 1991) spoke in dialects to their grandchildren. In 1993 it was reported that 53% spoke in Mandarin and 16% in English. The survey also showed that in schools, English (rose by 13% to 53%) has replaced Mandarin (down by 8% to 46%) as the language most often used by Chinese students in school.

In the 1990 MOE Survey of 6 years olds (N = 38,259), it was reported that 34.6% of 6 year olds named English as their main home language compared to the (National average = 20.3%), and 43.8% named English as the second most frequently used home language

3. Ironically as Gopinathan (1994) observes the Indians are encouraged to be multilingual. Recently the government allowed for community run classes in Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali and Urdu. Again one can interpret this decision not only in terms of an expression of strengthening language and culture links but to cater for a growing Indian expatriate population. This is part of an economic equation, that is, encouraging expatriate Indian communities to expand their business and investment, to take up residence and to settle their families in Singapore. Currently 1000 Indian pupils studying Malay or Mandarin have been encouraged to switch to community run weekend Indian language classes.

4. Ironically some Singaporeans have questioned a language policy that does not in fact allow them to study a second language of their choice, that is, Indians and Malay parents wanting their children to take Mandarin, as it has more economic value or Malay as it is used in the region rather than Tamil, and Chinese parents wanting their children to take up Malay rather than Chinese. In the seventies a small group of Indians including Tamil speaking Indians did opt for Mandarin and Malay as against Tamil as a second language for their children in school.

5. Educational reports (Sinda 1993) on underachievers in the Indian community show that underachievement is all round, in English, mathematic and science. Few of the underachievers do exceptional well in Tamil.

6. Lee Kuan Yew, the Senior Minister of Singapore made the following remarks in a 'Cultural Tide is Rising for Asia'. He stated that as East Asia develops there will be a reaffirmation of Asian culture, Asian tradition and Asian values. He said "The western media has saturated our tv, radio and print

media; American cartoons, documentaries and CNN bring the world into our sitting rooms. As East Asia develops and its people master the media, Asian cartoons, documentaries and commentators will interpret the world from an Asian perspective. Singapore's lifestyles and its political vocabulary have been influenced by the West. In 20 years this will shift, as East Asia produces its own mass products and coins its own political vocabulary." (1995 Speeches vol 19.1:)

7. The government's active promotion of Mandarin aimed at eliminating dialect differences has led some to suggest that this is an attempt to sinicise the population, that is, to produce a Chinese nation. But this ideological argument may be counter argued. As Chua (1995) observes reinventing the traditional, linguistic cultures would mean reinventing the various racial cultures. This poses a dilemma for the government, whether a move towards reidentifying separate ethnic and linguistic cultures may prove detrimental to the social integration of Singapore as a nation. ⁸

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