Title   Hard truths about Chinese language policy and planning in Singapore
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The bilingual language policy of Singapore

1. The widely acknowledged chief architect of Singapore's language policy, Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore, frankly admitted in a 2009 interview carried in Petir that the most difficult policy was to teach bilingualism.

The bilingual language policy of Singapore

2. The ethnic or racial composition of Singapore over the period from 1824 to 2010:

Year	Chinese	Malays	Indians	Others	Total
1824	31.0	60.2	7.1	1.7	100.0
1871	57.6	27.6	10.9	4.0	100.0
1901	72.1	15.8	7.8	4.3	100.0
1931	75.1	11.7	9.1	4.2	100.0
1947	77.8	12.1	7.7	2.4	100.0
1957	75.4	13.6	9.0	2.0	100.0
1970	76.2	15.0	7.0	1.8	100.0
2000	76.8	13.9	7.9	1.4	100.0
2010	74.1	13.4	9.2	3.3	100.0

The bilingual language policy of Singapore

3. Characteristics of the bilingual policy of Singapore

   i. English is the dominant or master language;
   ii. Students begin to study CL2 as a subject right from primary one;
   iii. The Chinese language policy is linked to race - a child with a parent who is of Chinese ethnicity must study Chinese as his or her second language;
   iv. The study of CL2 is compulsory – students who fit the criteria must opt for Chinese and not any other languages as their mother tongue subject.

The bilingual language policy of Singapore

4. This talk draws extensively upon the views and comments of Lee Kuan Yew as set out in his memoirs and books. He played a pivotal role in shaping the language policy of Singapore. Hence his comments and writings provide a most invaluable window for us to take a glimpse at language policy making at the highest level in Singapore.

During the colonial era:
a laissez-faire policy

1. During the colonial era, the British government basically adopted a laissez-faire policy whereby each community takes care of their own language needs.

During the colonial era: a laissez-faire policy

2. "But when Stamford Raffles founded Singapore in 1819, he demarcated in his first town plan different areas in which the different races and even different Chinese dialect groups would live separately. The British then brought in large numbers of Chinese, Indians and Malays, all speaking their own tongues, and left them to their own devices." (Lee Kuan Yew 1998: 219)

During the colonial era: a laissez-faire policy

3. "Singapore never had one common language. It was a polyglot community under colonial rule. The British left the people to decide how to educate their children. The government provided a limited number of English-language schools to train people to be clerks, storekeepers, draughtsmen and such subordinate workers, and Malay-language primary schools for Malays. ....."

During the colonial era:
a laissez-faire policy

3. …..The Indians ran their own Tamil and other Indian-language schools or classes. The Chinese set up schools financed by successful members of their community, to teach in Chinese. Because the different races were taught their own languages, their emotional attachment to their mother tongue was deep." (Lee Kuan Yew 2000: 169-170)

1959 to 1965:
a brief interlude of trilingualism

1. There was a brief interlude from 1959 to 1965 when Singapore explored the path of a merger with Malaya and Malay was adopted as the national language.

1959 to 1965:
a brief interlude of trilingualism

2. "I decided that, whether or not it was practical, the only politically defendable policy was trilingualism, with Malay as the lingua franca and the future national language of Malaya, English as the language of international commerce and science, Mandarin as the mother tongue of the Chinese and Tamil, Hindi or Punjabi for the Indians." (Lee Kuan Yew 1998: 216)

1959 to 1965:
a brief interlude of trilingualism

3. However, once the merger with Malaya failed and Singapore became independent in 1965, the Singapore government quickly shifted gears to replace the policy of trilingualism with that of bilingualism.

Post-1965:
the rise of the bilingual policy

1. When Singapore became independent in 1965, the government restated that all four major languages (Chinese, Malay, Tamil and English) were recognized as official languages at the national level.

Post-1965:
the rise of the bilingual policy

2. "We realized English had to be the language of the workplace and 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.

Post-1965:
the rise of the bilingual policy

3. In reality, the English language occupies a dominant position in Singapore society, especially with respect to the fields of politics, economy, law, education, technology and administration. Within the educational system, English is not only the first language school subject of all Singapore students but also constitutes the medium of instruction for all science and humanity subjects.

Post-1965:
the rise of the bilingual policy

4. The rationale for the dominance of English in Singapore is twofold. Firstly, English occupies a political role as a neutral language to promote inter-ethnic communication and racial harmony. At the same time, English also fulfils an economic function since English remains the dominant global language in the fields of economy, business and trade, science and technology.

5. In contrast, the Chinese language fulfils a cultural function in respect of the Chinese community in Singapore. "The greatest value in the teaching and learning of Chinese is in the transmission of the norms of social or moral behavior. This means principally Confucianist beliefs and ideas, of man, society and the state." (quoted from Goh Keng Swee and The Education Study Team (1979))

Post-1965:
the rise of the bilingual policy

6. Lee Kuan Yew explained that the adoption of a mono-lingual policy in English would have caused Singapore to lose its cultural identity: "Becoming monolingual in English would have been a setback. We would have lost our cultural identity, that quiet confidence about ourselves and our place in the world." (Lee Kuan Yew 2000: 181)

Post-1965:
the rise of the bilingual policy

7. The bilingual policy was gradually implemented in Singapore. By 1987, over 20 years after Singapore became independent, all primary schools in Singapore teach English as the first language school subject and the mother tongue as a second language school subject.

A shift in the sociolinguistic landscape

1. The sociolinguistic landscape in Singapore is changing and becoming more diverse.

2. The trajectory of the gradual but continued rise and dominance of English is clearly charted by a survey conducted yearly by the Singapore Ministry of Education on the most frequently used home languages of Primary 1 students over the past twenty years.

A shift in the sociolinguistic landscape
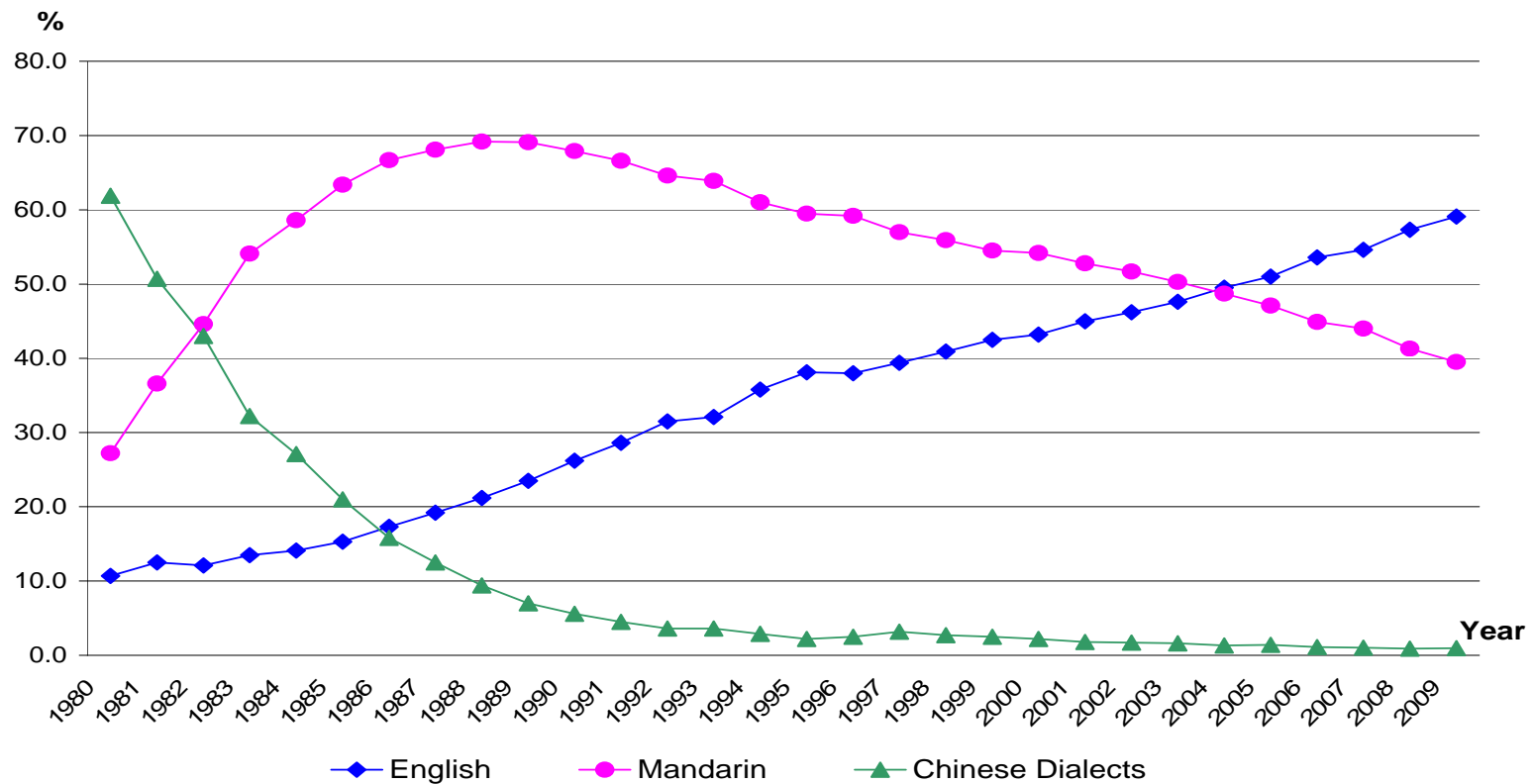
A shift in the sociolinguistic landscape

3. The survey clearly demonstrated that the household language of Chinese families is gradually shifting from Mandarin to English.

i. The percentage of students from Mandarin-speaking families increased from 25.9% in 1980 to reach the peak of 67.9% in 1990. The percentage then gradually declined from 55.4% in 2000 to 41% in 2010.

ii. The percentage of students speaking English at home rose from 10.3% in 1980 to 26.3% in 1990, and 59% in 2010.

Bilingualism across different generations

1. Against this backdrop of the dominance of English is the emergence of an intergenerational pattern change in bilingualism.

2. "Immigrant bilingualism tends to follow a specific generational pattern. Bilinguals of different generation have different proficiencies in English and in the heritage language." (Valdés 2001).

Bilingualism across different generations

Generation	Childhood		Adulthood
1st	HL monolingual A	→	HL dominant Ab
2nd	HL dominant Ab	→	English preferent aB
3rd	English preferent aB	→	English dominant Ba
4th	English dominant Ba	→	English monolingual B

Bilingualism across different generations

3. Prior to migration from the home country, many first-generation immigrants are monolingual in their heritage language. After migration to the host country, they then become incipient bilinguals who remain strongly dominant in their heritage language and yet at the same time, have just embarked on the initial stages of mastering English.

Bilingualism across different generations

4. For the second and third generation, the majority of these individuals will have acquired English quite well - they will be, if not English dominant, English preferent.
5. Many younger generations will continue to function in two languages in order to communicate with members of the parent generation.

Bilingualism across different generations

6. By the fourth generation, most individuals of immigrant background will have become monolingual English speakers. Only a few will retain some competence in the heritage language.

7. The end result is that schools have seen the emergence of a new learner profile – Chinese students who speak predominantly English at home, with minimal proficiency in Chinese.

The impact on Chinese language teaching

1. This underlying drastic shift in the sociolinguistic profile of students studying Chinese has partly driven the Singapore government to continually review the state of Chinese language teaching in Singapore and to further implement pedagogical reforms and innovations.

The impact on Chinese language teaching

2. During the period from 1992 to 2010, the government has carried out four significant reviews - led respectively by the-then Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong (1992), the-then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (1999), the-then Director-General of Education, Wee Heng Tin (2004) and Director General of Education Ho Peng (2010).

The rise of China on the learning of Chinese

1. The internal shift within Singapore in favour of an increased dominance of English is paralleled by a contradictory trend evidenced in the external rise of China as an economic powerhouse in the world.

The rise of China on the learning of Chinese

2. Over the years, the Singapore government's rhetoric indicates that the economic importance of mastering Chinese is growing; as noted by Lee Kuan Yew, "*All our people who do business in China know that if you can't speak Chinese, you're out*" (Han et al, 2011, p. 249).

The rise of China on the learning of Chinese

3. Chinese will continue to be taught in Singapore as a second language under the framework of the bilingual policy. Faced with an evolving generation of learners from varying language backgrounds, it is timely to explore and develop a sound pedagogical model that effectively addresses the challenges of teaching Chinese as a second language.

Challenges of CL Policy and Planning

1. The daunting challenge now is what could or needs to be done at the policy level to ensure that Chinese remains vibrant in the school and societal contexts so that a bilingual population could be maintained in the ensuing years.

2. The other equally pressing issue is the development of a new pedagogical model that targets the different learning profile of students coming from English-speaking homes.

A unique language lab & transit hub

1. Despite the prominence of English, Singapore still has a vibrant and diverse language ecosystem. In the field of CL teaching and learning, Singapore represents a unique language laboratory.

A unique language lab & transit hub

i. Its exploration and experience in teaching the student cohort who come *from English-speaking homes* would be of interest and relevance to educators and teachers hailing from the *English-speaking countries*.

ii. Its approach to teaching the student cohort who comes *from Chinese-speaking homes* would prove useful to *overseas Chinese communities*, such as Chinese heritage learners in the USA, UK and Australia.

A unique language lab & transit hub

2. In the midst of a growing global wave to learn Chinese, Singapore represents a unique transit hub for the teaching and learning of Chinese that is of interest and relevance to both educators and learners in the world.

Thank you