

SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER MR LEE KUAN YEW
AT THE LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF THE “SPEAK MANDARIN
CAMPAIGN” AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL
ON TUESDAY, 3 OCTOBER 1989 AT 3.00 PM

If, ten years ago, we had launched the Speak Mandarin Campaign, today our bilingual policy of English and the mother tongue would be in difficulties. Dialects would continue to dominate as the language of the home and of social discourse between Chinese. And the main dialect would have been Hokkien.

However after ten years of this trend becomes irreversible. Recent surveys show widespread understanding of and ability to speak Mandarin. Straits Times Press Research & Information Department Survey in 1989 showed that 85 per cent of the Chinese Singaporeans could speak Mandarin. The Labour Force Survey of Singapore 1988 by the Ministry of Labour showed 87 per cent. Mandarin used in restaurants: 72 per cent; in departments and supermarkets: 84-86 per cent; in food centres and coffee shops: 35-37 per cent (Research

Department Lianhe Bao). Of primary one Chinese pupils, 69 per cent have Mandarin as their first most frequently spoken language at home, 23 per cent English (Ministry of Education). Mandarin in HDB markets and food centres: 43-49 per cent (HDB survey); markets and food centres: 22 per cent (Ministry of the Environment) on SBS: 78 per cent; TIBS: 72 per cent. All surveys show the numbers up and increasing.

Chinese Singaporeans have now accepted Mandarin as the language of the home and of social intercourse. This is in spite of the dialect video tapes and Malaysian television dialect programs.

A big step forward would be for more people in the professions, in business, in industry and in the higher ranks of the Civil Service to be seen and heard to speak Mandarin. The social status of Mandarin will rise. This will not be easy to achieve, those in the upper echelons have a better vocabulary in English because their English is EL1 at tertiary level, whilst their Chinese is CL2 at 'O' or 'A' levels. But although their vocabulary may not be as wide in Chinese as in English for professional purposes, their Mandarin will be fluent enough for social purposes. If these people use Mandarin on public social occasions it will be an important advance.

Furthermore, the introduction of CL1 as an elective at 'A' levels at two Junior Colleges is a step towards retaining a core of students interested in maintaining a high level of literary appreciation. This can and should be encouraged also at University level. Our bilingual policy has made significant progress.

The Speak Mandarin Campaign in the next decade will have to fine-tune these improvements and consolidate the gains already made.

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Table I

THE CHINESE BY SPECIFIC COMMUNITY, 1957

Specific Community	Number	Percentage
All communities	1,090,596	100.0
Hokkien	442,707	40.6
Teochew	245,190	22.5
Cantonese	205,773	18.9
Hainanese	78,081	7.2
Hakka (Kheh)	73,072	6.7
Foochow (Hokchiu)	16,828	1.5
Henghua	8,757	0.8
Hokchia	7,614	0.7
Kwongsai	292	-
Shanghainese	11,034	1.0
Other and Indeterminate	1,248	0.1

Source: Report on the Census of Population of Singapore 1957, Summary Table 12-2

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Table II

SAMPLE SURVEY ON THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGES
SPOKEN AT MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT MARKETS AND FOOD CENTRES

Year	Dialects		Mandarin		English		Malay & Others	
	Customers	Hawkers	Customers	Hawkers	Customers	Hawkers	Customers	Hawkers
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
April 1979	89.0	89.3	1.2	1.2	3.0	2.7	6.8	6.8
June 1981	86.1	86.0	6.3	6.5	2.8	2.8	4.8	4.7
July 1982	91.7	91.6	6.9	6.9	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.6
June 1983	88.7	88.8	8.4	8.2	1.0	1.0	1.9	2.0
June 1984	84.4	84.6	11.3	11.2	1.4	1.3	2.9	2.9
June 1985	74.4	74.7	20.0	19.9	2.9	2.7	2.7	2.7
June 1986	70.9	70.6	23.2	23.7	2.3	2.1	2.6	3.6
June 1987	74.0	73.6	22.2	22.6	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9
June 1988	69.0	69.2	25.2	25.2	2.9	2.7	2.9	2.9
March/ April 1989	73.1	72.9	21.7	21.9	1.3	1.3	3.9	3.9

Source: Ministry of the Environment

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Table III

SAMPLE SURVEY ON THE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF
LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HDB MARKETS AND FOOD CENTRES

Year	Dialects		Mandarin		English		Others	
	By Customers	By Hawkers	By Customers	By Hawkers	By Customers	By Hawkers	By Customers	By Hawkers
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Aug 86	77.8	78.2	18.7	18.3	0.7	0.8	2.8	2.7
May 87	74.1	74.2	21.9	21.9	0.9	0.8	3.1	3.1
Jun 88	57.7	54.7	36.2	42.2	3.7	0.7	2.4	2.4
May 89	48.6	43.1	42.7	48.7	4.8	4.4	3.9	3.8

Source: Housing & Development Board

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Table IV

DISTRIBUTION OF PRIMARY ONE CHINESE PUPILS BY
1ST MOST FREQUENTLY SPOKEN LANGUAGE AT HOME
FOR YEARS 1980-1989

Year	Dialect	Mandarin	English	Others
1980	64.4	25.9	9.3	0.3
1981	52.9	35.9	10.7	0.4
1982	42.7	44.7	12.0	0.5
1983	31.9	54.4	13.4	0.5
1984	26.9	58.7	13.9	0.4
1985	16.1	66.7	16.9	0.2
1986	16.1	67.1	16.5	0.3
1987	12.5	68.0	19.1	0.4
1988	9.5	69.0	21.0	0.5
1989	7.2	69.1	23.3	0.4

Source: Ministry of Education

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RATIO OF MANDARIN TO DIALECTS USAGE IN PUBLIC PLACES

Public Places Language Dialects Year	Food Centres And Coffee Shops				Department Stores And Supermarkets				Chinese Restaurants			
	Mandarin		Dialects		Mandarin		Dialects		Mandarin		Dialects	
	Customer to Worker	Worker to Customer	Customer to Worker	Worker to Customer	Customer to Worker	Worker to Customer	Customer to Worker	Worker to Customer	Customer to Worker	Worker to Customer	Customer to Worker	Worker to Customer
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1985	10	10	90	90	73	76	27	24	49	52	51	48
1987	26	25	74	75	72	74	28	26	47	53	53	47
1989	37	35	63	65	84	86	16	14	72	72	28	28

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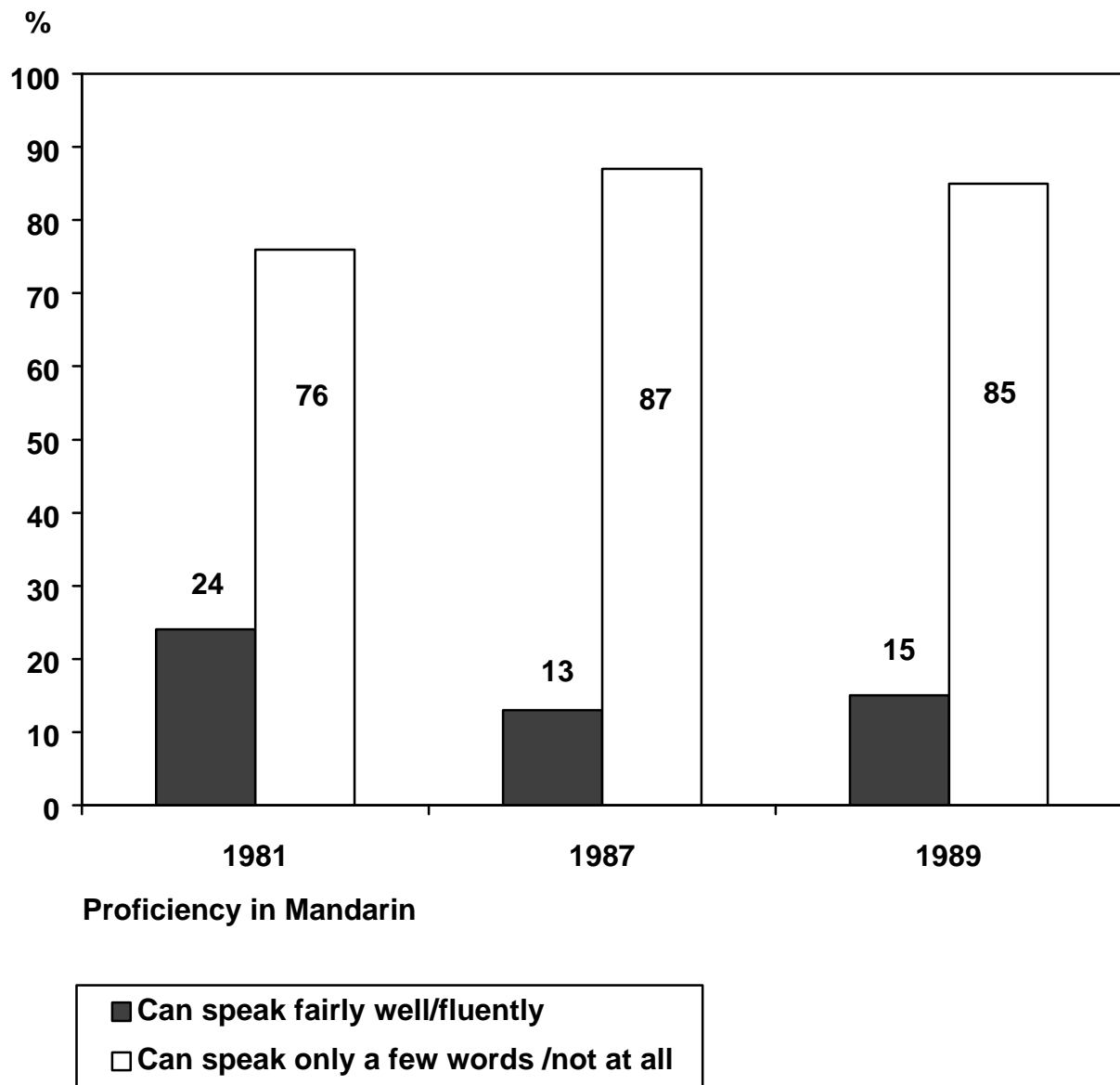
Source: Research Department, Lianhe Bao Limited

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Table VI

ABILITY TO SPEAK MANDARIN: CHINESE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC



Source: Surveys conducted by the Research and Information Department,
Straits Times Press (1975) Limited

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TABLE VII

TABLE 46
 PERSONS 10 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER IN SINGAPORE ABLE TO SPEAK MANDARIN BY RACE, SEX AND AGE
 (IN SPECIFIC AGE GROUPS)

AGE (in years)	TOTAL - ALL RACES			CHINESE			RACES OTHER THAN CHINESE		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
Total 10 and over ...	220,400	140,863	79,537	219,631	140,376	79,225	769	487	282
10-14 ...	55,943	32,056	23,887	55,817	31,995	23,822	126	61	65
15-19 ...	53,476	31,479	21,997	53,387	31,427	21,960	89	52	37
20-24 ...	36,745	22,960	13,785	36,657	22,904	13,753	88	56	32
25-34 ...	42,179	28,989	13,190	42,003	28,880	13,123	176	109	67
35-44 ...	19,991	15,232	4,759	19,850	15,126	4,724	141	106	35
45-54 ...	8,796	7,369	1,427	8,709	7,307	1,402	87	62	25
55-64 ...	2,597	2,227	370	2,551	2,197	354	46	30	16
65-74 ...	588	485	103	572	474	98	16	11	5
75 and over ...	85	66	19	85	66	19	--	--	--
RATE PER 1,000 ...	229	274	117	304	385	221	3	3	3

The following categories of persons are excluded from this table: --

- (i) Persons enumerated in Christmas Island;
- (ii) Non-locally domiciled Services personnel (Including United Kingdom-based civilians employed by the Services) and their families; and
- (iii) Transients by sea, i.e. persons in transit on board ships and with no place of residence in Singapore or the Federation of Malaya.

Source: Report on the Census of Population 1957