

Chapter 1

“Effective Bilingualism in Singaporeans, English-Chinese, is not more than 3 to 5%; passable bilingualism is another 20 to 30%. The rest will have average level English, with low level Chinese, or vice-versa (average level Chinese and low level English).”

Comment by Lee Kuan Yew on 3rd May 2005 (Chua 2005: 141)

Introduction

The above quote seems to suggest that *effective bilingualism* is not an easy task to achieve and thus constitutes the smallest percentage in Singapore. It is without doubt that ‘effective bilinguals’ are also good language learners since they would be skilled in using two languages. However, how do we measure ‘effective bilingualism’? Who are these good language learners and what are their language learning strategies? This chapter begins by stating the purpose of this study, and follows with a brief introduction to the historical background of linguistic situation in Singapore. Bilingualism and bilingual education will also be discussed in order to provide an understanding on the Singapore educational system. And with English as the dominant language in school and society, this will have an effect on the Chinese language education. Hence, this study shall focus on students’ Chinese language learning in Singapore, particularly on their language learning strategies.

1.1 Purpose of Study

The aim of this study is to achieve an understanding on the Chinese language learning strategies of students in Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools. These schools will be further described when schools at the secondary level are introduced later. These SAP students are studying both English and Chinese as first languages, and they are selected for this survey in order to identify their patterns of language learning strategies. It is hoped that this would help us understand students who are learning in a dominant English environment like Singapore.

Taking into consideration the changes that were introduced or will be introduced in the teaching and learning of the Chinese language in Singapore schools, the purpose of this paper is to study the contextual influences on Chinese language learning and by focusing on learning strategies, it also hopes to achieve the objective in identifying the patterns of language learning strategies of SAP students in the Singapore context.

According to the 2004 Report of the Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee (CLCPRC), it reveals the language shift of younger students based on an annual survey of parents at Primary One (P1) registration. It shows that the number of P1 students who are using English as a home language had increased from 36% in 1994 to 50% in 2004. In view of this, the committee had stated, “The way we teach our MTLs (Mother Tongue Languages) in school must respond to and anticipate changes in the environment. In particular, the teaching and learning of CL (Chinese Language) in our schools must take into account the shifts in language use among our

students, and the greater availability of technology tools in CL” (Report CLCPRC 2004: 1).

In such a case, there is a need to understand the environment in Singapore in order to be able to effectively respond and anticipate the changes. The following questions are put forth in order to achieve the objectives of this study. .

- 1 What are the language backgrounds of SAP students in Singapore?
- 2 What are their language attitude and motivation towards English and Chinese in Singapore society?
- 3 How do the contextual factors in Singapore influence the Chinese language learning strategies of SAP students?
- 4 What are the characteristics and patterns of Chinese language learning strategies of SAP students?

A sociolinguistic approach is used for this study and we shall have an overview of the linguistic situation in Singapore in the following section.

1.2 Brief Historical Background of Linguistic Situation in Singapore

According to *Singapore in Figures 2010*, the statistics at the end of June 2009 indicates that Singapore has a total population of nearly 5million, out of which there are approximately 3.7 million Singapore residents (citizens and permanent residents) and 1.3million non-residents. And the ethnic distribution shows that Chinese is the majority group (74.2%) followed by Malay (13.4%), Indians (9.2%) and others (3.2%). The four official languages are English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Due to historical reason, Malay is the national language of Singapore.

In 1819, when Sir Stamford Raffles (1781-1826) first founded Singapore, there were 120 Malays and 30 Chinese living on the island (Okumura, Guo & Eta 2006: 38). In 1824, the population of Singapore was 10,683, of which 60% were Malay and 31% Chinese. The first official census was completed in 1860 and prior to that, the population of Singapore was based on head count and the survey was carried out by the police officers. In 1867, 65% of the population was Chinese and the numbers had reached 55,000. While the census in 1887 shows that the Chinese population was 54,572, the Malay population was 26,148. Until the present, the Chinese population remains the majority group in Singapore

Within the Chinese population, there are various dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainan being used. The government seems to regard the linguistic heterogeneity situation among the Chinese as dividing rather than uniting the community. Thus, Chinese language (or Mandarin) was given the role of symbolizing Chinese culture and binding the diverse Chinese ethnic groups. The Indian ethnic group which forms the minority of the population also shows no linguistic homogeneity. Besides Tamil, there are other non-Tamil languages such as

Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Panjabi and Urdu. And these non-Tamil languages are learned as second language under the Singapore education system.

In 1959, Singapore became a self-governing state within the Commonwealth and then, Malay language was declared as the “national language”. As part of a political strategy to merge with Malaysia, Malay was given the main focus in the language policy of Singapore and thus, its language status was elevated through various implementations by the government. When the People’s Action Party (PAP) came into political power, the First Five-Year Plan had already proposed a bilingual education. However, during this period, Malay language was emphasized as the common language within Singapore bilingual education. That is to say, PAP basically supported schools of different mediums (English, Chinese and Tamil-medium schools) but made all schools to teach Malay as a second language.¹

And in 1963, Malay language was given more emphasis when Singapore became part of the Federation of Malaya. This was meant for the objective of integration based on a unified national consciousness. However, the differences in language policies made the effort became more difficult. In the language policy of Malaysia, Malay is recognized as the sole national language and sole official language and thus, it is the basis for national identity and national integration. On the contrary, the situation in Singapore is different because other ethnic groups besides the Malays have to be taken into consideration. As such, the language policies led to fundamental differences that were related to cultural and ethnic issues between the Federation of Malaya and Singapore. This could be one of the reasons that led to separation from the Federation and independence of Singapore in 1965.

Even though Singapore gained independence in 1965, Malay language was still the focus in the multilingual policy of Singapore. Yet, this was not without problems, particularly with the Chinese who are the majority group in the society. Also, since Singapore had separated from the Federation, there seemed to be no reason for putting an emphasis on the Malay language. Taking into consideration the unity of various ethnic groups, the political situation of nation building and the future economic development of the country, the language policy of Singapore had taken for a change. As a result, the new language policy after independence was to state “Malay as the national language while English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil are made the four official languages”. And the bilingual education in Second Five-Year Plan would henceforth put an emphasis on English and the learning of mother tongue from the different ethnic groups.

In 1966, mother tongue was made a compulsory and examination subject and all students had to take it at the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) (Shanmugaratnam 2003, 23 Nov). Bilingual education during this period would refer to the teaching and learning of English and Mother Tongue in schools. The functional role of English sees its use in accessing necessary technologies and knowledge that are relevant for economic development. On the hand, mother tongue has a cultural role to bind language in relations to the traditional culture of each ethnic group.

¹ Guo, Zhen Yu. “*Yu Yan Zhen Ce He Yu Yan Ji Hua*” in Yu Wei Li, “*Xin Jia Po She Hui He Yu Yan*”.

In 1968, the objective to achieve bilingual education was made clear when the parliament declared that students in non-English medium schools would study Mathematics and Science in English, and in English medium schools, more opportunities will be given to mother tongue of each ethnic group in order for students to gain proficiency in second language. Furthermore, the allocation of marks was given the same weight to first and second languages in order to encourage second language learning (Shepherd 2003:123-124). The first and second languages in the earlier bilingual education were thus not standardized but given the rapid economic development and the increasing numbers of English medium schools, it led to an eventual disappearing of Chinese schools. Ang (2001: 340) noted that “the process of replacing them with national-type schools, where every Chinese child learned English as a first language and Chinese as a second language” was taking place in 1987.

In sum, the four languages (English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil) have their roles in Singapore society. Malay remains as the national language, English and Mother Tongues are the cornerstone of bilingual education policy of Singapore.

1.3 Bilingualism and Bilingual Education

Singapore educational system consists of 6 years primary school education and 4-5 years secondary school education. Before entering the university, there is a 2 years junior college education (See Appendix A). Bilingual education; that is the teaching and learning of English and mother tongue begins at the kindergarten level. Almost all kindergartens will have an English teacher and a mother tongue teacher allocated to each class, so that children will be able to learn English and their mother tongues according to their respective ethnic group (Okumura, Guo & Eta 2006: 17). In order to understand bilingualism and bilingual education in Singapore, there is a need to seek a prior understanding on the term ‘bilingualism’ and ‘bilingual education’.

1.3.1 The Concept of Bilingualism

‘Bilingualism’ as William F. Mackey (1962) had pointed out, is the possession of two languages with the same abilities, yet in actual fact, the concept has shown diverse meanings. According to Bloomfield (1935), bilingualism is the ‘native-like control of two languages’. On the contrary, Haugen (1969) had defined it as the ability “to produce complete meaningful utterances in other language”.

The meaning given by Bloomfield brings about the problem of defining the term ‘native speaker’. According to Davies (2003:1), native speaker refers to “people who have a special control over a language, insider knowledge about ‘their’ language”. However, he also said that this ‘common-sense view alone is inadequate and needs the support and explanation given by a thorough theoretical discussion’. Indeed, in the case of a Singaporean who thinks he or she is a native speaker, the meaning of ‘native speaker’ could be perceived differently by an American. Culture and customs in individual societies bring about particularities in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, thus

resulting in English varieties. Although a Singaporean and an American could claim themselves as English native speaker, some communication problems can still be inevitable.

On the other hand, Haugen's definition seems to imply that simple greetings like 'Hello' or fixed phrases like 'How do you do?' are regarded as 'complete meaningful utterances'. However, this language production does not seem to be able to meet the needs of various situations in a complicated social relationship. In such case, it is obvious that they are also not referred to as 'native speaker'.

In addition to this, in its broadest definition, the concept of bilingualism has encompassed 'passive knowledge' that is related to written language. Diebold (1961:111) explains bilingualism as 'contact with possible models in a second language and the ability to use these in the environment of the native language'. However, this also depends on the individual's occupation and the ability to use the language in different situations. For instance, it would be difficult to say whether a tour guide or a researcher is an 'effective bilingual'. A tour guide can be seen as effective when he or she is buying things at the supermarket, whereas a researcher may be effective when engaging in some scholarly discussion. In any cases, defining 'bilingualism' appears not only difficult but at times ambiguous.

1.3.2 Individual bilingualism versus Societal Bilingualism

The phenomenon whereby a person uses two or more than two languages is called 'individual bilingualism', and in the case of 'societal bilingualism', 'diglossia' occurs. The 'classic diglossia' as defined by Ferguson (1959:435) is quoted as below.

"Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any section of the community for ordinary conversation."

In Ferguson's definition, there are two varieties of the same language, each having a role to play depending on the degree of formality. In formal situations such as giving a speech or writing religious texts, the High-variety (H-variety) is used. The Low-variety (L-variety) is used for informal situations such as daily conversations with family members. To illustrate this, the following shall discuss English and Chinese in Singapore.

In Singapore, English and Chinese (or Mandarin) follows the standard of British English and Peiking Mandarin respectively. The H-variety for English is Standard Singapore English and for Chinese (or Mandarin), it is Standard Singapore Mandarin. And the L-varieties are Colloquial Singapore English and Colloquial Singapore Mandarin. H-variety is taught in school but it can be

acquired through the L-variety. That is to say, before entering the school, a child would have already acquired basic language abilities through the L-variety; that is simple and easy to understand. After that, he or she would learn the standard pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar; in other words the H-variety in school.

Referring to Cummins's (1979) theory, the Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills require the use of L-variety and the Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency would need the H-variety. For a person who uses the H-variety, it is easy for him or her to switch to the use of L-variety but it would be difficult for someone who uses the L-variety to switch to the use of H-variety.

Certainly, the H-variety has a higher prestige and language status as compared to the L-variety. However, for affective reasons, there are more people who choose the L-variety. As such, the L-variety is often used in Singapore movies, dramas or songs in order to depict lives that are more realistic and closer to Singaporean citizens. One example is the popular Singapore comedy 'Phua Chu Kang' who is also the main character of the TV drama. He is a construction worker who uses Singlish; L-variety of English. The show was so popular that it caught the attention of former Prime Minister (PM) Goh Chok Tong. In a National Day Rally on 22nd August 1999, former PM Goh criticized the show and attributed it to the declining standards of English in Singapore. There was also a worry that children were influenced by the use of Singlish from the TV drama. As a result, a scene was created for 'Phua Chu Kang' to go school and learn the Standard English. This was seen as an effort to encourage young learners to learn proper English and use English in the international society (Srilal 1999).

Similar to Singlish, Chinese or Mandarin in Singapore also has its colloquial form that could pose difficulties for understanding. This is reflected in the following that was quoted from a news article (Lu 2006).

一个新移民留学生说：“我第一次到小贩中心去吃饭，他们明明是讲华语，可是我一句也听不懂。”

(A newly immigrant student said, "It was the first time I went to the hawker centre for meal and they were obviously speaking Mandarin. But I do not understand a single word.")

小贩问我：“吃的吗？”，奇怪了，我不来吃，我来做什么？

(The hawker asked me, "To eat?". That was strange, if I did not come here to eat, what I was here for?)

“后来听新加坡同学解释后，才知道原来他的意思是：你要在这里吃还是打包？”

(After listening to a Singaporean student's explanation, then I got to know what he <the hawker> had actually meant; that is 'are you here to eat or take out?'.)

The L-variety of English and Chinese in Singapore may seem difficult for English or Chinese speaking foreigners to comprehend. Hence, Singapore government had also emphasized the use of H-variety through campaigns such as Speak Good English Movement and Speak Mandarin Campaign.

Based on the definition of diglossia by Ferguson, English and Chinese in Singapore each have its own H and L varieties. Fishman (1967) expanded the discussion and pointed out ‘extended diglossia’ that refers to multilingual societies where H and L varieties are not related. Referring to Figure 1.1, one can use the H-variety and L-variety of English, but it is also possible for one to use the H-variety of English and the L-variety of Chinese. Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew who is English-educated, narrated his experience in mastering Hokkien for political purposes. As he had said, “So, every National Day rally I would speak in Hokkien because that got the biggest audience”. (Chua 2005: 29). In such a formal situation, the Chinese dialect was used instead of English.

	High-variety	Low-Variety
English	Standard Singapore English	Colloquial Singapore English
Chinese	Standard Mandarin Chinese	Colloquial Singapore Mandarin Dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka etc.
Malay	Standard Malay	Bazaar Malay Baba Malay
Tamil	Standard Tamil	Colloquial Tamil Other Indian Languages

Figure 1.1 Diglossic situation in Singapore
Adapted: Zhu 2001, also in Okumura, Guo & Eta 2006

In the case of Singapore, there is the co-existence of bilingualism and diglossia in the society. However, this relationship seems to be rather an unstable one. English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil are four official languages with their individual varieties. And the bilingual policy proposed that one should learn English and a mother tongue language. Yet, there is an increasing phenomenon of language shift towards English. For the Chinese ethnic group of students, encouraging them to study Chinese language and ‘*Keep Mandarin Alive*’ - a phrase that I would borrow from Chua (2005) - might be seen as an interventional effort to prevent a situation of diglossia without bilingualism.

Language policy has a role to play in preventing language shift and promoting language maintenance. Although the objective of bilingual education in general aims to develop the children in achieving bilingualism, it does not seem necessarily to apply in all situations, as we shall see in the following that discusses the types of bilingual education.

1.3.3 Types of Bilingual Education

Figure 1.2 shows the different types of bilingual education and their aims in language outcomes. The outcomes seem to reflect the kinds of language policies that have taken socio-cultural, political and economic factors into consideration.

There are various objectives in the types of bilingual education. Lambert (1977) had identified additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism. The former means the addition of a second language to the mother tongue without replacing it. This is in contrast to subtractive bilingualism that implies the learning of a second language not only causes a decline in first language ability, it also poses a negative effect on mother tongue and its culture. As shown in Figure 1.2, the strong forms of bilingual education are additive bilingualism whereas the weak forms are subtractive bilingualism.

The typology of bilingual education can be classified into three categories as shown below.

(1) **Null** type of bilingual education. All children have to learn the language of the majority and monolingualism is the aim in language outcome. Examples of such program are submersion (structured immersion), submersion with withdrawal classes/ Sheltered English/ Content-based ESL and segregationist.

(2) **Weak** type of bilingual education. All children are allowed to use their home language for a short period of time before being able to completely use the language of the majority. Examples of such program are transitional, mainstream with foreign language teaching and separatist.

(3) **Strong** type of bilingual education. Regardless of the children's abilities, the aim is to achieve bilingualism, biliteracy and cultural pluralism. Examples of such program are immersion, maintenance/heritage language and mainstream bilingual.

Here, the concept of 'process' and 'product' are used to understand the above categorization. It seems that these concepts are not emphasized in the 'null' type of bilingual education. This is because students from language minority group are made to learn the language of the majority when they entered the school. They have to study together with students from the language majority group and no support seems to ensure their 'language survival'. In other words, the aim of the language outcome is monolingualism for those who have succeeded. And for those who are limited to their language of the minority, they are placed in a disadvantage position under the educational system.

MONOLINGUAL FORMS OF EDUCATION FOR BILINGUALS				
Types of Program	Typical Type of Child	Language of the Classroom	Societal and Educational Aim	Aim in Language Outcome
SUBMERSION (Structured Immersion)	Language Minority	Majority Language	Assimilation/ Subtractive	Monolingualism
SUBMERSION with Withdrawal Classes/ Sheltered English/ Content-based ESL	Language Minority	Majority Language with 'Pull-out' L2 Lessons	Assimilation/ Subtractive	Monolingualism
SEGREGATIONIST	Language Minority	Minority Language (forced, no choice)	Apartheid	Monolingualism
WEAK FORMS OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR BILINGUALS				
TRANSITIONAL	Language Minority	Moves from minority to majority language	Assimilation/ Subtractive	Relative Monolingualism
MAINSTREAM with Foreign Language Teaching	Language Majority	Majority Language with L2/FL lessons	Limited Enrichment	Limited Bilingualism
SEPARATIST	Language Minority	Minority Language (out of choice)	Detachment/ Autonomy	Limited Bilingualism
STRONG FORMS OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR BILINGUALISM AND BILITERACY				
Types of Program	Typical Type of Child	Language of the Classroom	Societal and Educational Aim	Aim in Language Outcome
IMMERSION	Language Majority	Bilingual with initial emphasis on L2	Pluralism and Enrichment. Additive	Bilingualism & Biliteracy
MAINTENANCE/ HERITAGE LANGUAGE	Language Minority	Bilingual with emphasis on L1	Maintenance, Pluralism and Enrichment. Additive	Bilingualism & Biliteracy
TWO WAY/DUAL LANGUAGE	Mixed Language Minority & Majority	Minority and Majority	Maintenance, Pluralism and Enrichment. Additive	Bilingualism & Biliteracy
MAINSTREAM BILINGUAL	Language Majority	Two Majority Languages Pluralism	Maintenance, Pluralism and Enrichment. Additive	Bilingualism & Biliteracy

Figure 1.2 Typology of Bilingual Education
Source: Baker, Colin (2006) pp. 215-216

Note: L2=Second Language; L1= First Language; FL= Foreign Language

Next, referring to the 'weak' type of bilingual education, the mainstream with foreign language teaching can sometimes produce effective bilinguals, and thus it can be seen as a 'strong' type of bilingual education. I would argue that the difference between 'weak' and 'strong' types of bilingual education lies in the emphasis on 'process' and 'product'. In contrast to transitional or separatist program that focuses on 'process', those that emphasize on 'product' would focus on the aim of the language outcome. That is to say, if the objective is 'bilingualism and biliteracy', then the 'process' is considered and planned in order to achieve that objective.

The above mentioned types of bilingual education are targeted at students from both language majority and minority groups. In the case of Singapore, Chinese students are the majority group, and Malay and Indian students are the minority groups. In whichever case, English is the neutral language that they have to learn. The objective of bilingual education is to develop proficiency in English and mother tongue of one's own ethnic group. This program can be seen as a 'strong' type of bilingual education. Moreover, seeing bilingualism and biliteracy as the language outcome ('product'), more creative language pedagogies are often proposed and necessary language educational reforms are implemented ('process')

A person who uses two languages is called a bilingual. However, the term 'bilingual' when applied to education, can refer to a planned policy, program or the outcome of a linguistic situation. Low and Brown (2005: 45) had pointed out that 'according to bilingualism theorists, a bilingual education means that two or more languages serve as the medium of education, and are used for the purposes of teaching content-matter subjects. For example, Mathematics may be taught in the second language. If the second language is merely taught as a separate subject, then this is still, strictly speaking, considered a monolingual programme but which contains other languages in its curriculum'.

Based on the definition, in its strictest sense, there are doubts as to whether the educational system in Singapore can be called a 'bilingual education'. This is because only one language is used as the main medium of instruction; that is English. It is used in the classroom to teach Mathematics, Science and other subjects whereas Chinese, Malay and Tamil are used only in mother tongue lesson and taught as a subject. This is similar to the situation in Japanese junior high school where English is taught as a subject. In such case, it is called a foreign language teaching. As such, can we say that both Singapore and Japan are having a bilingual education system?

The answer is certainly negative because of an obvious difference between the two. In Singapore, Chinese, Malay and Tamil are generally used in daily lives. Whereas in Japan, students do not have much opportunity to use English once they are out of their classroom. English in Japan is merely a language limited to the classroom. As such, Singapore and Japan differ in their objective of language education. Based on the concept of 'process' and 'product' mentioned earlier, I would say that Singapore aims to achieve the 'product' of 'bilingualism and biliteracy' while Japan focuses more on the 'process' than 'product'. Hence, even though Chinese, Malay and Tamil are taught as a subject in Singapore and English is taught as a subject in Japan, both are said to have different types of bilingual education. In other words, Singapore has a 'strong' type of bilingual education and Japan has a 'weak' type of bilingual education; if it was to be called a 'bilingual education'.

In addition to the above, how do we understand the ‘bilingual education’ in Singapore? It is important to know that ‘bilingual education’ has different definitions due to the differences in contexts of individual countries. From a narrow perspective, the definition is limited to the school context whereby a program uses two or more than two languages as medium of instruction in language teaching and learning. In other words, it is an educational design that uses two languages to teach the curriculum subjects. Based on this definition, the meaning of ‘bilingual education’ would not be applicable to Singapore’s educational system. However, if the language teaching and learning are placed in the societal context, it can be argued that it is a type of ‘bilingual education’. That is to say, if there is a social function of language outside the school, then Singapore educational system is a type of ‘bilingual education’ that aims to achieve the outcome of ‘bilingualism and biliteracy’.

Although English and mother tongue are emphasized in the Singapore bilingual education, the dominant use of English in school and society has caused a language shift phenomenon. Chinese is the language of the majority group, and the language shift towards English has raised some concerns over its implication on the cultural function of mother tongue. In the next section, we shall discuss the Chinese language education and issues that Singapore is facing.

1.4 Language Shift and Singapore Chinese Language Education

Pakir (1991) had referred to the characteristics of Singapore’s bilinguals as ‘English-knowing bilingual’. This term was first used by Kachru (1982:4) to mean the bilingual’s use of English and another language. According to Pakir (1991: 167), it is seen as the learning of ‘first language (English) and a second language (mother tongue of individual ethnic groups, such as Chinese, Malay and Tamil)’. That is to say, ‘English is mainly used in education, and second language is learned in class whereby Chinese, Malay or Tamil is taught as a subject’; that is mother tongue subject. If we assume that ‘mother tongue is literally just that, the language of the mother and is based on the normal enough view that children’s first significant other is the mother’ (Davis 2003: 16), then why would mother tongue be formally taught in school? And if we again assume that ‘first language is the language (‘tongue’) you learned from your mother, biological or not’ (Davis 2003:17), then why would this mother tongue be relegated to a second language position? We shall discuss this by looking at the case of Chinese language and its relation to language shift.

1.4.1 The Phenomenon of Language Shift

As we had briefly mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that introduced the linguistic situation in Singapore, the objective of its bilingual education and language policy had become obvious after gaining independence in 1965. During the 1960s and 1970s, the rapid economic development and spread of English-medium education had helped to strengthen the dominance of English in the society. In the early years of independence, the languages designated as first and second languages continued to differ in schools. However, in 1967, the yearly event to promote Malay as the national language was discontinued and in 1968, non-English medium schools had begun to use English to teach Science and Mathematics subjects. Corresponding to the rapid

economic development in Singapore, English has inevitably become the dominant language. Moreover, English is also preferred as the ‘lingua franca’ in communication among different ethnic groups. It is a language with prestige and seen as a mean for gaining job opportunities and social mobility.

On the other hand, the government also shows concern on the Chinese language, in terms of communication, culture and education. In other words, Chinese language is regarded as having a role to bind the Chinese ethnic group of different dialects and facilitate a smooth communication among them. It is also seen as cultural ballast to Westernization and cultural preservation of Asian values. In education, proposals have been made and reforms have been implemented in order to encourage Chinese language learning. There was an effort to bring about a language shift from dialects to Chinese and currently, there is a response to the language shift from Chinese to English. In order to discuss this, we shall first look at what Beardsmore (2001: 85) had noted in the quote below.

“Since 1979, when English became the main medium of instruction, Singapore has been undergoing massive language shifts away from a multiplicity of languages which affect all ethnic groups. Parallel to the shift to English as the major language of inter-ethnic communication, secondary language shift has occurred from so-called dialects towards Mandarin among the Chinese population.”

Doubtless to say, there is indeed a language shift towards English. However, based on Figure 1.3, we may also argue that that the first language shift occurred from dialects to Chinese, and the second language shift from Chinese to English, if we were to explain how language shift has taken place over a period of time. This phenomenon of language shift can be divided in the following.

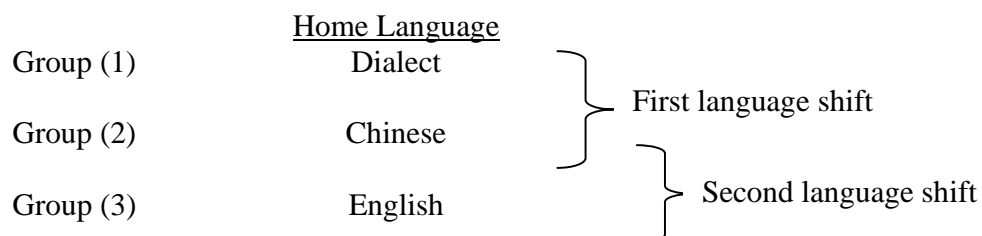


Figure 1.3 Two stages of Language shift

First language shift can be seen from Group (1) to Group (2). Children in Group (1) speak dialects as their home language and learn English and Chinese in schools. While English has a ‘high status’, it would not be easy for those have been using ‘low status’ dialects to change their language habits into English. As such, even though English is necessary for upward social mobility and used mainly in school curriculum, it does not seem to exert much influence in causing a shift from speaking dialects to English. On the contrary, it would be easier to cause a shift from dialects to Chinese. The ‘Speak Mandarin Campaign’ in 1979 could have also made its contribution in this.

As shown in Figure 1.4, 50.3% of the Chinese population speaks dialects in 1990 and the figure drops to 30.7% in 2000. In contrast to this, 30.1% of them speak Chinese in 1990 and 45% in 2000. According to Shepherd (2003: 218, 226), the aim of the Speak Mandarin Campaign from 1979 to 1989 was to ‘replace dialects with Mandarin as the common language of the Chinese’ whereas from 1990 to 2000, the focus had changed from ‘Less Dialects’ to ‘Knowing Your Culture’; that is Chinese culture. This slogan was targeted at those English-educated Singaporean Chinese. Although ‘Speak Mandarin Campaign’ has helped in spreading the use of Chinese as home language, it does not imply that the newer generation will necessarily continue to do so. To the newer generation, English certainly has its practical value and social prestige and thus, it is leading towards a second language shift from Chinese to English. The slogan ‘华语 Cool!’ (‘Mandarin Cool!’) was used in 2006 Speak Mandarin Campaign in order to give it a positive image and aim to change people’s attitude towards the language. For instance, television games shows and performances had invited celebrities to help spread the message that ‘Mandarin is cool’, and the targeted audience was those English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans, particularly those in the ‘post-65 generation’ (PMC Media Release 2006).

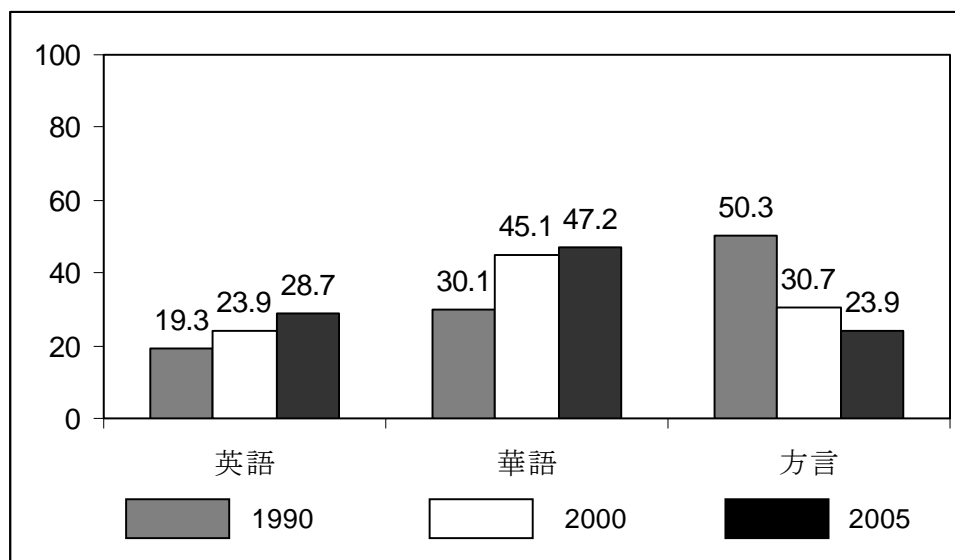


Figure 1.4 Resident population aged 5 years and over by languages most frequently spoken at home (Comparison for the year 1990, 2000 and 2005)
Source: Statistics Singapore

Ranking \ Year	(1)	(2)	(3)
1990	Dialects	Chinese	English
2000	Chinese	Dialects	English
2005	Chinese	English	Dialects

Figure 1.5 Changes and Ranking Order of Home Languages

From Figure 1.5, Chinese as a home language was in the first position in 2000 and 2005. However, dialects had already been relegated to the last position in 2005, while English had been placed in the second position. ‘Speak Good English Movement’ was started in 2000, and because English is an international language and the working language in Singapore, its importance and value are not only emphasized in the bilingual education but also generally recognized by the society. As such, even though Chinese as a home language is used, English is positively perceived in general. Thus, if it has taken 10 years for home language to shift from dialects to Chinese, it is likely that it would take another 10 years for home language to shift from Chinese to English. As reported, the figures showing the use of English as a home language by students entering Primary One have been increasing. In 1994, it was 36% and in 2004, it was 50%. The figure rose to 51% in 2005 (MOE Press Release 2005, July 12). Referring to Figure 1.3, Group (3) uses English as home language and if this trend continues, it would be called a second language shift.

1.4.2 Singapore Chinese Language Education

In schools, *Hanyu Pinyin* (Chinese phonetic) was implemented in 1973 to facilitate Chinese language learning. However, the findings from a study led by former Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee in 1978 showed that the outcome of bilingual education was unsatisfactory. While the main languages in school were English and Chinese, there were 85% of Chinese students who spoke only dialects, without speaking English and Chinese at home. In addition to this, another survey was conducted on Primary 3 students based on their examination results in 1979. According to the findings, it showed that students from English and Chinese medium schools, who were speaking only dialects at home, did not score well in their first and second languages (Goh et al. 1979:2, Ang 2001: 344). The government took this findings seriously and put in effort to change the language habits of Singaporean Chinese through ‘Speak Mandarin Campaign’. As Ang (2001: 345) had noted, “In the initial years of the campaign, the objective was to replace the use of dialects with Mandarin in order to help reduce the difficulties which children face in learning Mandarin in our schools”.

And in 1980, the streaming system was introduced at Primary 3 level. This system differentiated students according to their academic results; in other words they are put into different course based on their academic abilities. For a normal bilingual course, students at Primary 3 level who had attained good results were able to continue another 3 years for the completion of primary school education. However, for those who failed, they had to continue another 5 years before they could take their Primary School Leaving Examination. During this time, Chinese was referred to as ‘Second Language’ and not ‘Mother Tongue’. This was changed along with the proposal to have formal streaming implemented at Primary 4 level instead of Primary 3.

Based on the suggestion in the report called ‘Improving Primary School Education’ released in March 1991 by the Ministry on Education, it called for the separation of students into three different courses according to their academic performances in English, Chinese and Mathematics. The three courses were EM1 (English and mother tongue at first language level), EM2 (English as first language and mother tongue at second level level) and EMO (English as first language and mother tongue at oral proficiency level) (Gopinathan 2001: 32). EMO was later renamed as EM3 and ME3 (Mother tongue as first language and English at oral proficiency level) was also introduced.

The latter, as Gopinathan (2001: 33) had pointed out, was ‘to alleviate fears among Chinese parents that their children would be penalized because of their weakness in English’. However, it was obvious that parents were more driven by pragmatic concerns, in the hope that a good command of English would give their children better economic and employment prospects, hence there was no one who chose ME3 course (Shepherd 2003: 138) .

In view of the above, referring Chinese language as ‘mother tongue’ and not ‘second language’ can be seen as effort to change one’s language attitude towards the language. When the term ‘second language’ is used, it seems to put lesser importance on the language relative to the term ‘first language’. However, when the term ‘mother tongue’ is used, it is considered as having a sense of emotional attachment to a particular language. Yet, this is not implied in Singapore’s language policy, and it is also not the language in which one first remembered or learned. Rather, the term ‘mother tongue’ is used to show one’s group belonging; in other words the belonging to an ethnic group.

There was also a deliberate effort to change the use of terms at the secondary school level. A committee led by former Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong in July 1991 recommended that CL1 (Chinese at first language level), CL2 (Chinese language at second language level) and CL3 (Chinese at basic level) be changed to ‘Higher Chinese, Chinese and Basic Chinese’ respectively. It is obvious that the numberings are deleted to show the ‘ranking order’ of these courses. This is similar to the case at the primary level whereby the terms ‘EM1, EM2 and EM3’ were used. Although the new terms were meant to elevate the language status of Chinese, the terms ‘EM1, EM2 and EM3’ were generally used for administrative purposes, thus this not only hindered the change for a better language attitude towards Chinese but also caused possible psychological effects on students coming from the three different courses.

This streaming system was eventually phased out. In order to encourage Chinese language learning, a ‘differentiated approach’ was proposed (CLCPRC 2004: 4). After EM1 and EM2 were merged in 2004, EM2 students could opt to offer Higher Chinese.² In the past, Higher Chinese was meant for EM1 students only. And with the implementation of Subject-based Banding from 2008, the EM3 stream was also replaced. Taken the example given in a Press Release by the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE Press Release 2006, 28th Sept), it explained that “if a student is weak in English and Mathematics, he can choose to take English and Mathematics at the Foundation level while taking Mother Tongue Language (MTL) and Science at the Standard level”.

While the primary schools have 3 levels; foundational, CL and HCL, the secondary schools have 5 levels; Basic CL for Normal Technical students, Normal Academic CL, CL ‘B’, CL and HCL (See Appendix A for Singapore Educational System). A Normal stream student would take 5 years to complete the secondary school education and an Express stream student would take 4 years. With a ‘differentiated approach’, a student from Express stream can choose to study one of the three levels; that is CL, HCL or CL ‘B’ (Shanmugaratnam 2004, 24 Nov). The CL ‘B’ syllabus was proposed by the Chinese Language Review Committee, chaired by then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in 1999. It was designed for students who have exceptional difficulties coping with CL. In 2001, it was implemented in schools from Secondary 3 level. And in January 2004, it was introduced from Secondary 1 level (Shanmugaratnam 2004, 24 Nov).

² http://www.moe.gov.sg/about/yearbooks/2005/flexibility/refining_streaming.html

There are other changes and recommendations which are not mentioned. Here, the discussion is limited to the issue of ‘second language’ and ‘mother tongue’ at Primary and Secondary level which is considered relevant to the focus of this study. From the discussion on language shift and Singapore Chinese language education, it can be argued that the earlier emphasis in Chinese language education was to bring about a language shift from dialects to Chinese and later proposals was regarded as a response to the language shift from Chinese to English. Chinese language was called ‘second language’ because in the early period of Singapore’s bilingual education, there were schools of different mediums of instruction. Its status as a ‘second language’ became obvious after 1987 when all schools became English-medium, and in 1991, along with the proposed Primary 4 streaming, it was stated clearly as the ‘mother tongue’ of Chinese ethnic group.

Referring to Figure 1.5, the period from 1990 to 2000, shows that Chinese has replaced dialects as the home language. While this seems to suggest that Chinese has become the ‘mother tongue’ which Lee Kuan Yew, the then Prime Minister, had hoped to achieve. In 1981, he said, “Without Mandarin the mother tongue in place of the dialects, our policy of bilingualism will not succeed” (Ang 2001: 345). Hence, the term ‘mother tongue’ appeared in the 1991 proposal seems to be appropriate because even though dialects were mostly used in 1990 (50.3%), the percentage could have been higher in the 1960s or 1970s, and an early proposal to make Chinese as mother tongue might not be convincing. The Speak Mandarin Campaign in 1979 had also made a contribution in this. The change in focus from ‘Less Dialects’ to ‘Knowing Your Culture’ from 1990 to 2000, that was targeted at those English-educated Singaporean Chinese, highlighted the cultural value of ‘mother tongue’. From Figure 1.5, even though English was not mostly used as home language as shown from 1990 to 2000, the fact that the slogan was targeted at English educated Singaporean Chinese, shows that this group is indeed increasing. And in 2005, English has replaced dialects and gaining more use as a home language, and if English becomes more dominant, Chinese as a home language is likely to be replaced. Thus, the term ‘mother tongue’ can also be seen as a response to a language shift from Chinese to English. The main concern is how students learn the Chinese language or ‘mother tongue’, in current language situation whereby English is getting more dominant. In other words, what would be their ‘language learning strategies’?

1.5 Contribution and Significance of the Research Study

This study was motivated by a number of proposals and changes recommended in the latest report by Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee in 2004. Agreeing with the following quote from the report,

“Understanding how languages are most effectively learnt and recognizing the changes in the social environment now and in the future have significant implications for the teaching and learning of CL.” (CLCRPC 2004: 4-5)

The ‘social environment’ would mean the importance of context and how it would affect language learning. English and Chinese in the educational system sees the emphasis of the former than the latter, since Chinese is taught and learnt as a mother tongue subject and not used as a medium-of-instruction. Also, given the complexity of linguistic situation, Chinese may or may not be a mother tongue to some students. Hence, there is indeed a need to call for an ‘understanding how

languages are most effectively learnt'. And this also highlights the need to understand students' language backgrounds, as Prime Minister Lee Hsieng Loong had pointed out below.

“you have to understand what his background is and use his background in order to bridge the gap and teach the language which he is learning more as a second language than as a Mother Tongue. I think that if you use the same approach for both groups of students, you are going to have a problem and if you do not distinguish between students who are strong in language abilities and those students who are weak in language abilities, you are also going to have a problem” (Lee 2010, 11 May) .

The purpose of understanding language background as suggested above is to propose a differentiated approach in teaching. In a multilingual environment, the targeted group of SAP students for this study comes from different language backgrounds, and they are studying English and Chinese as first languages. Does this language education in school correspond to the students' language background, and thus bring about effective language learning? What would be their language backgrounds and how do they learn their mother tongue; that is Chinese? With a focus on language learning strategies, it is hoped that the findings could enable us to understand how these students learn. It would not only contribute to the field of language learning strategies, but also to Singapore Chinese language education with a learner-focus approach.

In the next chapter, a literature on language learning strategies will be reviewed and the importance of studying contextual influences on language learning strategies will be highlighted. It is hoped that this will show the contribution and significance of this study. Chapter 3 will illustrate the research methodology, with the design of research introducing Singapore secondary schools and the Special Assistance Plan program, since the latter is related to the selected group of students. The data collection procedures will also be explained. This is followed by a report on research findings in Chapter 4, and a discussion on its findings and implication in Chapter 5.