

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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Release No. 69/OCT

04-2-89/10/27

89-OCT-14

SPEECH BY MR CH'NG JIT KOON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AT THE PRESENTATION OF PRIZES TO WINNERS OF THE CHILDREN'S CHINESE STORY-TELLING CONTEST AT THE TANJONG PAGAR COMMUNITY CENTRE ON FRIDAY, 27 OCTOBER 1989 AT 8 PM

The decade of efforts we have put in for the Speak Mandarin Campaign has produced remarkable results. That Mandarin has taken root in the Chinese community in Singapore and has become the spoken language of many people in their daily life is now a fact.

A decade ago, Mandarin was only occasionally heard among the Chinese-educated in their conversation. But after years of promotion, the use of Mandarin has spread to every corner and stratum of society in Singapore. What we need to do now is to step up our efforts to further widen the use of Mandarin.

A survey shows that 85 out of 100 ethnic Chinese Singaporeans speak Mandarin. But unfortunately the frequency of the use of Mandarin is not high, though there is a marked improvement in the frequency of use at certain functions. For example, the survey shows that a decade ago, only one per cent of the customers and hawkers at markets and food centres under the Ministry of the Environment conversed in Mandarin. The percentage has now increased to 22 per cent. Although we should be happy with such an improvement, the situation is still far from what is possible especially when there are 85 per cent Chinese Singaporeans who can speak Mandarin and the percentage of hawkers who have the ability to use Mandarin has increased from 83 per cent in 1986 to 98 per cent in 1988. (See annexes for the sample survey on the ability of hawkers to speak Mandarin).

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Why are dialects used more than Mandarin at hawker centres when so many people and hawkers can speak Mandarin? In my opinion, there are two reasons: (1) misconception and (2) habit.

In the past, most hawkers were either uneducated or lowly educated. Therefore, in the eyes of the public, hawkers spoke little or no Mandarin. But times have changed. With three decades of government efforts in providing universal education and active promotion of the bilingual education policy, even a hawker would have received a number of years of education and studied the Chinese language and learned to speak Mandarin. Moreover, with the promotion of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, many people, including hawkers, have learned to speak Mandarin as a result of environmental influence. However, many people still have the misconception that hawkers are unable to speak Mandarin. For this reason, they continue to converse with hawkers in dialects, as they did in the past. Secondly, as many people have been speaking dialects at hawker centres for decades, they find it difficult to switch to Mandarin.

In order to create a Mandarin speaking environment, we should realise that hawkers do speak Mandarin and give up the habit of using dialects at hawker centres. As long as we take the initiative to speak Mandarin, most of the hawkers will respond in Mandarin. With conscious and concerted efforts, Mandarin will certainly be more widely used at hawker centres.

Mandarin can also act as a means of communication. The report on the Labour Force Survey of 1988 shows that more than 530,000 people above the age of 15 are conversant with the Chinese language

only. They account for 26 per cent of the workforce. The report also points out that among those aged above 15, there are some 200,000 who are literate only in English, and most of them are Chinese, including English-educated professionals. These people are bound to come into contact with one another in their work and in everyday life. As one party speaks no English and the other party no Mandarin, they have no alternative but to lapse into dialects. But there are many dialects spoken in Singapore. It would be difficult for people to learn the many dialects to keep in touch with their Chinese-speaking counterparts. Adopting Mandarin as the common Chinese language will solve this problem.

If people will set aside a little time and put in some effort to learn Mandarin, it will help them in their work as well. Many professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, accountants, architects, engineers, investment consultants and share brokers, have clients, both local and foreign, who are ethnic Chinese and who speak no English. Owing to the constraints in dialects, there is difficulty in expressing many of the technical terms in dialects. These difficulties can be overcome by the use of Mandarin.

Moreover, in recent years, realising that there are many non-English speaking Chinese in the business sector in Singapore, some statutory boards have held seminars and lectures in Mandarin to help them in their business operation and management. These seminars and lectures are also useful for the English-speaking professionals and businessmen who wish to expand their services to their Mandarin-speaking clients.

In short, Mandarin has far greater utility value than dialects. We should therefore persist in our efforts to promote the use of Mandarin so that it will become more effective as a language of communication.

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建屋发展局属下巴刹和食物中心
各年龄组别小贩讲华语能力抽样调查
Sample survey on the ability to speak Mandarin by
age group of hawkers at HDB markets and food centres

小贩年龄组别 (岁数) Age group of hawkers (years)	21 - 30				31 - 40				41 - 50			
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1986	1987	1988	1989	1986	1987	1988	1989
讲华语能力 Whether able to speak Mandarin	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
会讲华语 Able to speak Mandarin	100	90	100	100	98.8	94	98.7	97.3	90.4	92.9	95.7	97.8
不会讲华语 Unable to speak Mandarin	-	10	-	-	1.2	6	1.3	2.7	9.6	7.1	4.3	2.2
总和 Total	100 (14)	100 (10)	100 (8)	100 (5)	100 (83)	100 (83)	100 (77)	100 (37)	100 (136)	100 (140)	100 (138)	100 (89)

小贩年龄组别 (岁数) Age group of hawkers (years)	51 - 60				以上 61 and above				总体 Overall			
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1986	1987	1988	1989	1986	1987	1988	1989
讲华语能力 Whether able to speak Mandarin	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
会讲华语 Able to speak Mandarin	85.4	83.5	83.7	100	53.7	56.4	59.8	97	83.2	83.2	85.5	98.3
不会讲华语 Unable to speak Mandarin	14.6	16.5	16.3	-	46.3	43.6	40.2	3	16.8	16.8	14.5	1.7
总和 Total	100 (130)	100 (115)	100 (110)	100 (70)	100 (95)	100 (87)	100 (92)	100 (33)	100 (458)	100 (435)	100 (425)	100 (234)

资料来源：建屋发展局
Source: Housing & Development Board

TABLE 7
PERSONS AGED FIFTEEN YEARS AND OVER BY AGE, LANGUAGE LITERATE IN AND SEX

LANGUAGE LITERATE IN	TOTAL			AGE GROUP (IN YEARS)														
				UNDER 20			20 - 29			30 - 39			40 - 49			50 & OVER		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
TOTAL (100%)	2037169	1002873	1034296	246409	126029	120370	554885	272777	282107	511504	249723	261731	312163	152328	159835	412008	196355	215653
NOT LITERATE (11.1%)	226206	54212	171994	1635	992	643	8043	3271	4772	19626	5818	13808	39493	7695	31798	157408	36436	120972
ENGLISH ONLY (9.8%)	199422	107325	92096	8794	5148	3646	46732	20323	26409	79883	40277	35766	40512	24054	15458	27401	16784	10617
CHINESE ONLY (26.1%)	531559	274439	257119	20135	9679	10456	98577	49547	50030	148641	68127	80514	122795	62048	60727	140410	89018	51392
MALAY ONLY (3.2%)	64454	26329	38125	1904	1019	885	9679	4129	5550	16945	4612	12333	13835	4370	9464	22092	12099	9993
TAMIL ONLY (0.7%)	15470	6890	8580	768	334	434	1770	483	6297	2654	483	2972	3855	1126	2359	7293	4665	2628
ENGLISH AND CHINESE ONLY (33.7%)	687654	359538	328115	163656	83329	80326	268541	137554	138187	159072	87163	11900	57229	34962	22977	28447	20430	8011
ENGLISH AND MALAY ONLY (10.9%)	221461	125745	95716	38742	19974	18768	88397	45713	42583	55580	31637	23942	21771	14861	6810	16971	13458	3511
ENGLISH AND TAMIL ONLY (2.5%)	50191	27669	22521	7909	4156	3754	19760	10644	9116	11554	5791	5764	5657	3288	2359	5309	3788	1529
OTHER TWO OR MORE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES (1.7%)	34774	19170	15604	3512	1609	1904	10832	4853	1979	9652	5389	4263	5630	3593	2038	5148	3727	1421
NON-OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ONLY (0.3%)	5979	1555	4424	54	-	54	1555	161	1394	1796	536	1260	1046	402	643	1528	456	1076

Source: Report on Labour Force Survey of Singapore 1988