

Published in *Multilingualism and Language Contact in Urban Areas: Acquisition, development, teaching, communication*, edited by P. Siemund, I. Gogolin, M. Schulz, & J. Davydova. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 229–258. This is a post-review, pre-publication version that has not been copyedited. Please quote from the published version (<https://benjamins.com/#catalog/books/hslld.1.12lei/details>).

The management of multilingualism in a city-state: Language policy in Singapore*

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Abstract

Language policy in Singapore exists against a background of large diversity, a diversity that has been present in the city-state ever since its founding, and which is manifest both in ethnic and in linguistic terms. The government deals with this diversity in several ways: firstly in giving recognition to the three major ethnic groups (Chinese, Malays, and Indians) by assigning them an official language (Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil, respectively), and by endorsing English as the main working (and educational, administrative, governmental, etc.) language of the country. Further policies include the demotion of varieties without official status: specifically non-Mandarin varieties of Chinese and Singlish, the local English vernacular. This paper explores these policies and the reasons that motivated them.

1 Background

Singapore is an island-nation located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, in Southeast Asia, around 1°20' North of the equator, sandwiched between Malaysia to the North and Indonesia to the South. The size of the island is currently 710.3 km², a number that keeps increasing due to large-scale land reclamation projects. On this limited surface area, further reduced by 34.2 km² of parkland and nature reserves, as well as by several industrial estates and military bases, reside just over five million people in one of the most typical examples of a city-state: unlike Monaco (the only country with a higher population density than Singapore) and Vatican City, Singapore is fully independent politically and militarily from its neighbouring states — Monaco's and the Vatican's military defence are the responsibility of France and Italy respectively; Singapore has its own Armed Forces raised

*This chapter is based on a talk entitled “The management of multilingualism in a city-state” given on 29 March 2010 at the Excellence Cluster “Linguistic Diversity Management in Urban Areas” of the University of Hamburg. I thank the audience for useful discussion and comments. I also thank an anonymous reviewer for insightful suggestions on how to improve this chapter. Naturally, all remaining errors are mine.

by conscription. It also has its own currency, unlike the two other existing city-states, who used currencies pegged to those of their neighbours, and now the euro.



Figure 1: A map of Singapore, showing built-up areas. Based on a map copyright by ezilon.com

For its size, the nation has a disproportionate standing among its neighbours, both economically and strategically. It has the second-highest GDP per capita in Asia (IMF 2011), a highly educated population and workforce (UNDP 2010), and a first-world transport infrastructure and cityscape. With its location at the junction of the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea, Singapore is on one of the world’s busiest shipping routes. Its port is the world’s busiest (AAPA 2011) and generates substantial income. The city-state itself is highly urbanised (see Figure 1), organised into a central business district (in the “downtown core”) and several suburban “New Towns” housing the country’s population. The centre of the island still contains an area of primary rainforest, which is now completely surrounded by built-up areas.

Modern-day Singapore was founded in 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company. At the time of Raffles’ landing, the island was part of the sultanate of Johor, and had around 1 000 inhabitants, among which were some 30 Chinese (Turnbull 1996: 4). The location of Singapore was of interest to British mercantile interests: it was on the sea route from China to India and on to Europe, and it had strategic importance due to its

vicinity to Dutch colonies in Indonesia. It also lay close to the settlements of Penang and Malacca, established previously on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula.

Raffles secured British rule over the island via a treaty with the ruling Sultan, and quickly set to attract settlers and traders to the new port. The promise of a tariff-free port had its effect: by 1821 the population stood at 5 000 (including 3 000 Chinese) and the first census in 1824 reported 11 000. By 1860, that number had increased to 81 000, with the Chinese now representing two thirds (Turnbull 1996: 13–14, 36). The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had a further impact on the port city, which saw its importance on the shipping lane increase, boosted also by the production of rubber both on the island and on the Malayan mainland.

The status of Singapore as one of the world’s most important ports, which holds to this day, had an effect on the migrants that it attracted. Most moved to Singapore for the short term, many wanting to eventually return to China, India, or Europe, and some indeed did, or moved to elsewhere in Malaya. An overwhelming majority was male. The motivation for migration to Singapore was most often economic: the Chinese, who made up the largest group, came mostly from southern Chinese provinces (Fujian and Guangdong), where famines and political unrest made life difficult. The British, who administered Singapore from Calcutta until 1867, brought in a number of Indians from southern India, but also from Panjab, some as soldiers, others as clerks, civil servants, and teachers, yet others as indentured labourers. The Malays came from the surrounding Malay Archipelago, from the Peninsula but also from Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Borneo, among others. There were migrants from further away, too: there is a strong “Arab” (Middle Eastern) community still in existence, and, since the 1830s, a number of Armenians (famous today for their church off Armenian Street).

The three major ethnic groups are, nowadays, the Chinese (74.1%), the Malays (13.4%), and the Indians (9.2%). The remaining 3.3% are classified by census-takers in the category “Others”, and includes the Eurasians, usually considered “indigenous”, and anyone else not fitting the other three categories. Each of these groups differs in terms of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, as well as in the policies set forth by government planners. The following section 2 will explain the current situation of diversity in the city-state, both linguistically and ethnically. The management of this diversity is then explored in section 3, with a look at ethnic policies in section 3.1 and a more detailed analysis of language policy in section 3.2, including the use of various government-sponsored language campaigns.

2 Linguistic and ethnic diversity

From the very early days of the colony, in fact even before the arrival of the British, Singapore was home to peoples of different ethnic, cultural, religious, and, of course, linguistic background. This mix has had an important role to play in the emergence of modern Singapore’s cultural and linguistic landscape. It has also, since colonial times, prompted governments to regulate this diversity to greater or lesser extents. In this section, I try to elaborate on the notion and degree of diversity, whereas the aspect of management will be addressed in section 3.

Linguistically, the Constitution of Singapore stipulates, in its article 153A(1), that “Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English shall be the four official languages of Singapore”. It also says, in section (2), that “the national language shall be the Malay language”. This distinction between official and national languages is not uncommon (cf. Vanuatu: Bislama, French, and English are official, only Bislama is a national language, or the Philippines: Filipino and English are official, only Filipino is a national language), and in the case of Singapore, it is grounded in the constitutional recognition of the Malays as “the indigenous people of Singapore” (article 152(2)). What form this special recognition takes will be seen in section 3.2. Apart from this provision, however, the four official languages are constitutionally enshrined as being equal, as is also evident from article 53, which states that “all debates and discussions in Parliament shall be conducted in Malay, English, Mandarin or Tamil”. This theoretical equality is not always present in practice: parliamentary business is overwhelmingly carried out in English, and government websites are typically available only in English. Most importantly, all legislation is in English only. These points will be raised again when discussing the status of English in the country in section 2.5.

2.1 The Chinese and their languages

To begin with the currently largest population group, the Chinese, there is agreement among scholars (Turnbull 1996, Gupta 1994) that early migrants and settlers hailed from southern provinces of China — most predominantly Fujian and Guangdong. Some, and not the poorest, came from the pre-existing British settlements of Malacca or Penang (on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula). These “Straits-born Chinese” or “Straits Chinese” were typically of mixed Chinese and Malay ancestry, and called “Peranakans”. They initially spoke a creole form of Malay, Baba Malay (Pakir 1986), but were among the first to shift to English as their main language (Gupta 1994).

The Chinese from China were initially very much organised along “dialect lines”, i.e. on the basis of shared linguistic codes. Thus the Hokkien-speaking community would have their support network, their schools, and their associations, while the Cantonese-speaking community would have theirs, and so

“Dialect group”	% of Chinese ethnic group
Hokkien (Southern Min)	40 %
Teochew (Southern Min)	20.1 %
Cantonese (Yue)	14.6 %
Hakka	8.3 %
Hainanese (Southern Min)	6.6 %
Foochow (Eastern Min)	1.9 %
Henghua (Puxian Min)	0.9 %
Shanghainese (Wu)	0.8 %
Hockchia (Eastern Min)	0.6 %
Other Chinese	6.3 %

Table 1: Distribution of the Chinese population according to dialect group (data from Wong 2011).

on. As nation-building went ahead, and as the education system shaped up, these dialect groups got into ever-increasing contact, and certainly the Speak Mandarin Campaign had an important role to play in fostering a Chinese Singaporean identity rather than, say, a Hokkien Singaporean.

Nowadays, the Chinese, who make up 74.1 % of the population (Wong 2011), are divided by census-takers into ten sub-groups. These subdivisions of the ethnic group “Chinese” are called “dialect groups”. Table 1 gives the distribution of the Chinese population according to dialect group, taken from the 2010 census (Wong 2011).

It is important to bear in mind that these categories are meant to represent an ethnic affiliation, or at most an ancestry that is rooted in the Chinese areas where the respective “dialects” are spoken. These ten subgroups have various degrees of linguistic and ethnic homogeneity. The Yue languages, for example, are subsumed under “Cantonese”, whereas the Min languages are discriminated much more finely: there are Southern Min varieties (Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese), Eastern Min varieties (Foochow, Hockchia), and the Puxian Min variety Henghua (also known as Xinghua or Putian). Of the Wu languages, only Shanghainese is listed, whereas the Mandarin and non-Han groups are not on the list — with anyone considering themselves a member of these categories being left with “Other Chinese”. Thus the subdivisions themselves tell us something about the origins of the Chinese Singaporeans: they are predominantly from the south of China, with the Shanhainese being the northernmost named group.

The varieties of Chinese actually spoken in present-day Singapore differ in numbers from those listed in Table 1, used for “ethnic” affiliation. The 2010 census only lists four varieties of Chinese: Mandarin and the three “dialects” Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese. The General Household Survey of 2005 listed only Mandarin and “dialects”, without finer discrimination.

Variety	Total number of speakers	% of Chinese population	% of total population
Mandarin	1 211 505	47.7	35.6
Hokkien	238 843	9.4	7.0
Teochew	94 302	3.7	2.8
Cantonese	121 136	4.8	3.6
“Other dialects”	32 750	1.3	1.0
English	1 097 443	32.6	32.3
Total	2 795 979	99.5	82.3

Table 2: Absolute numbers and percentages for four named varieties of Chinese, the catch-all “other dialects”, and English (data from Wong 2011). The varieties here do not cover all those used by the Chinese population, which is why the total does not add up to 100 (some ethnic Chinese use Malay or other languages). In the final column, the percentage exceeds that of the Chinese population, because small minorities in other ethnic groups also use Chinese varieties.

	Mandarin	“Dialects”
1980	10.2 %	59.5 %
1990	23.7 %	39.6 %
2000	35.0 %	23.8 %
2010	35.6 %	14.3 %

Table 3: Usage of Mandarin and non-Mandarin varieties, for the whole population (data from Wirtz and Chung 2006, Wong 2011).

It can, therefore, be asserted that diversity has somewhat decreased over time: if the ethnic affiliations stated in the census are indicative of ancestral language, then there is strong evidence, in Table 2 alone, that the non-Mandarin varieties of Chinese have lost considerable ground among the Chinese population. Mandarin, which was spoken by a negligible proportion of the initial migrants, was used by close to half of the Chinese population in 2010. Further data, such as that in Table 3, confirms the trend: there has been a significant shift away from the “dialects” towards Mandarin. The Speak Mandarin Campaign, started in 1979, coupled with official language and educational policies, clearly have had a dramatic impact.

Few of the early immigrants came from Mandarin-speaking areas of China, and as such, the variety never had a broad native-speaker base in Singapore. This has changed in recent decades, however, as a result of the language policies pursued by the government; its main component, the Speak

Mandarin Campaign (further discussed in section 3.2.1), had an immense success, resulting in language shift away from the various non-Mandarin varieties of Chinese (the so-called “dialects”) towards Mandarin.

The Singaporean landscape of Chinese varieties looks currently as follows. In the General Household Survey 2005 (Leow 2006), 66.4% of Chinese-speaking respondents reported using Mandarin as the “language most frequently spoken at home”. Far behind are Hokkien (16.3%), Cantonese (8%), and Teochew (6.7%). As these numbers suggest, Mandarin is now the intra-ethnic lingua franca, whereas a generation or two ago, this role was fulfilled by Hokkien.

The variety of Mandarin used in Singapore is officially that of the People’s Republic China, partly evidenced by the official adoption of the simplified Chinese characters¹ — as opposed to the traditional set used in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. However, spoken Singapore Mandarin differs from Putonghua (Standard PRC Mandarin) in several ways: phonologically, there is typically an absence of retroflex consonants and of the neutral tone, and differences in grammar and vocabulary (Zhou 2002, 2009). There are also several discourse particles that have been transferred from Cantonese (Lim 2007), and which are found not just in Singapore Mandarin, but also in Malay and Singlish (see below).

2.2 The Malays and their languages

The diversity seen in the Chinese ethnic group cannot be said to be replicated among that segment of the population officially classified as “Malay”: for these 13.4% of the population, the census-takers provide four subgroups, Malay (68%), Javanese (18%), Boyanese (11%), and “others” (3%). The assignment to one or the other of these groups is left to the respondent: the census glossary has an entry that states that “ethnic group refers to a person’s race [and it] is as declared by the person” (Wong 2011: 161); however, this declaration dictates the official assignment to one of the four main categories (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Other, the so-called CMIO model). The lower degree of heterogeneity is also reflected in the languages recorded in the census as being main home languages: while there were four named varieties of Chinese, Malay is the only Austronesian language listed in the census. The 2010 census gives the total number of Malay speakers (all ethnicities) as 414 475, or 12.2% of the population.

Within the Malay ethnic group, the home languages with the largest number of speakers are Malay (82.7%) and English (17.0%), any other languages used are spoken by less than 0.1% of Malays (Wong 2011). A higher degree of homogeneity is one of the distinguishing features of the

¹This official selection of simplified over traditional characters is not strictly enforced (except in government publications). In public and private signage, traditional characters are easy to find, including signs mixing the two sets.

Malay ethnic group in other areas, too: 98.7% of the Malay population is Muslim, which is in stark contrast to the Indian and Chinese communities, which have 59.0% of Hindus and 43.0% of Buddhists as their respective largest religious denomination (Wong 2011).

The Malay language in Singapore can be considered the island's aboriginal language (as stated in the constitution), although the current official language, called *Bahasa Melayu*, was not spoken by the earliest Malay settlers, the Orang Laut, sea gypsies who spoke a closely-related variety, Duano. Under colonial rule, Malay was an important language, especially in the early days of the settlement, and it was taught to the mostly British civil servants (Turnbull 1996: 84). Malay became something of an inter-ethnic lingua franca, and remained so until the widespread teaching of English, which eventually took over that role. Nowadays, Malay is the third most widely spoken language, after Mandarin and English: it is used as the main household language by 13.2% of the population (Leow 2006).

The variations within the Malay language are much less dramatic than in the Chinese varieties or within the "Indian" languages: there is Bazaar Malay, which was used in its role as a lingua franca in early Singapore, and which exhibits significant Chinese admixture (Ho and Platt 1993: 8), but also Baba Malay, a Hokkien-based Malay creole pre-dating Singapore's founding and having emerged in western Peninsular Malaysia (Pakir 1986). Further Malayo-Polynesian languages present in Singapore, often included under the heading "Malay", are Javanese, Bugis, Boyanese (Madura), and others. Malay itself comes in roughly two shapes that are distributed diglossically: Standard Malay (Melayu Baku), taught in schools, and the vernacular, colloquial variety, which shows local pronunciation features.

2.3 The Indians and their languages

The "Indian" languages in Singapore cover Indo-Aryan as well as Dravidian languages: the majority Indian language is Tamil (also one of the four official languages), but strong minorities exist who speak other Dravidian languages (Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, etc.) or Indo-Aryan ones (Hindi, Panjabi, Gujarati, etc.). Early on, Indians were brought into the new settlement from the colonies in India and Ceylon (Ho and Platt 1993: 6), some as teachers, others as civil servants, yet others as soldiers. As the port city prospered, Indian businessmen arrived; more came as indentured labourers. At one point in the 1860s, the Indians formed the second largest ethnic group in the colony (Turnbull 1996: 39–40). This status was short-lived, as many had used Singapore as a transitory port to seek employment in the neighbouring Malay states, which were also under British rule.

The Indians now form the smallest of the three main ethnic groups in the country: they represent 9.2% of the total population (Wong 2011). The majority language, Tamil, comes in two diglossic forms, one taught at

“Dialect group”	% of Indian ethnic group
Tamil	54.2
Malayalee	7.6
Hindi	3.8
Sikh	3.7
Punjabi	1.6
Hindustani	1.4
Urdu	1.4
Gujarati	1.2
Sindhi	1.1
Sinhalese	0.9
Other Indians	23.2

Table 4: Census data (Wong 2011) showing the composition of the “Indian” ethnic group.

school and used for official purposes (Centamil), and one the (local) spoken vernacular, Koṭuntamil. The other Indian languages have various levels of official recognition: some are offered as L2 subjects in school, others are not. In the ethnic quarter of Little India, some public signage can be found that features English, Tamil, and Hindi.

This third “indigenous” ethnic group is, with the exception of the “Others”, the most heterogeneous. Though accounting for only 9.2% of the population, they are subdivided into eleven subgroups, listed in Table 4. In keeping with the terminology used for the other ethnic groups, these subdivisions are called “dialect groups” — an ironic misnomer, since the group contains speakers of languages from at least two unrelated language families, and also because the subdivisions themselves are defined in terms sometimes conflating ethnicity, language, geography, and religion. There is a distinction between Hindustani and Hindi and Urdu, where the first is a language group including the other two (Lewis 2009), and there is a category “Sikh”, which is in fact a religion.

As far as the linguistic composition of the Indian ethnic group goes, it is fair to say that like in the case of the Chinese, the initial migrants to Singapore likely spoke the languages typically associated with the groups in Table 4 (although the self-reported “dialect group” may not be the ancestral one). Unfortunately, the census groups non-Tamil “Indian” languages under a cover “other Indian languages”, which prevents closer analysis. Nonetheless, the numbers in Table 5 remain of interest. Here the data for 2000 and 2010 are presented, and show interesting trends: English has now overtaken Tamil as the most widely spoken home language among the Indian population. Similarly, Malay has lost some ground, perhaps to the “other Indian languages”, which now stand at 13.2%.

Language	% of Indian population, 2000	% of Indian population, 2010
Tamil	42.9	36.7
“Other Indian languages”	9.3	13.2
English	35.6	41.6
Malay	11.6	7.9

Table 5: Language most frequently spoken at home, Indian population (Leow 2001, Wong 2011).

This use of Malay by the non-Malay Indians is presumably an effect of religion: a good quarter of the Indian population is Muslim, a religion which, in Singapore, is strongly associated with the Malay population (see above), and as a consequence, with the Malay language — the language-religion interface has been addressed, *inter alia*, by Kang (2004: 155–156), who notes the different peer groups “Malay-speaking Indian Muslims” secondary school students interact with compared with “non-Malay-speaking Indian Muslims” (who use e.g. Urdu at home and Arabic for religious education). Obviously, both these groups share with, say, English-speaking Indian Hindus little more than the ethnic category “Indian”.

The diversity seen in the Indian community in terms of ethnic identity and number of languages spoken is higher than that seen in the Chinese community, where two thirds speak a Chinese language — about half of all Indians use an “Indian language” at home, including Tamil, but there is no data on the exact distribution of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages in the 13.2% non-Tamil languages. Finally, only the Malays themselves use Malay more often as a home language than the Indians.

2.4 The others

The category “others” is used in the official classification system to describe anyone not of Chinese, Malay, or Indian descent. By its very nature, the group is highly heterogeneous, and features ethnicities as diverse as Japanese and Caucasian. All together, they account for 3.3% of the total population. Table 6 below gives the details from the 2010 census. There are several things that can be said about the information in Table 6. Firstly, it should be noted that the Eurasian subgroup are traditionally regarded as indigenous to Singapore in the same way as the three main ethnic groups. The Eurasians are the descendants of early interethnic marriages, typically between Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and British men and Chinese and Malay women. They have their origin partly in Singapore, but also in the pre-existing Straits Settlements of Penang and Malacca (see e.g. Gupta 1994, Wee 2010). As such,

Ethnicity	% of “others” category, 2000	% of “others” category, 2010
Filipino	6.9	31.7
Caucasian	23.7	20.1
Eurasian	32.5	12.4
Arab	16.2	6.7
Thai	6.3	4.5
Japanese	5.4	3.9
Others	9.0	20.6

Table 6: Census data (Leow 2001, Wong 2011) showing the composition of the “Others” ethnic group.

they have had an impact on Singaporean history, politics, and linguistics right from the very start.

Secondly, the “others” group is the one that has seen the most dramatic internal changes in the past decade. The Eurasians, who represented a third of the group ten years ago, now only account for 12.4%. It should be noted, however, that in absolute numbers there has been no drop: there has even been a slight increase from 15 079 in 2000 to 15 581 in 2010. The Filipinos, on the other hand, who now form the largest subgroup, have increased their number more than tenfold (3 213 in 2000 vs. 39 918 in 2010) — these census numbers, reflecting only citizens and permanent residents, do not include the many domestic workers in Singaporean homes, of which 60 000–70 000 hail from the Philippines (2004 estimate, see Rahman et al. 2005), and other categories, such as overseas students. Among the possible reasons for this increase is a new category of employment pass, which allows bearers to apply for permanent residency and eventual citizenship, as well as the increasing demand for customer service workers with good knowledge of English, which Filipino immigrants tend to have (Beatriz Lorente, personal communication). The Philippine embassy estimates the total number of Filipinos in Singapore at around 170 000 (Lorente, p.c.).

In terms of language, it is clear that this highly heterogeneous group also displays a lot of variation. Some languages historically used in communities now classified as “others” are much less in use nowadays: there is still a handful of speakers of Kristang, a Portuguese-based creole associated with the Eurasian community (Baxter 1988), whereas the Middle-Eastern Arab community has mostly shifted to Malay or English. English is the most widely spoken language among the Others: the Eurasians, very early on, started to use English (Gupta 1994: 41), and modern migratory movements see many Caucasians hail from English-speaking countries such as Australia and the USA.

Language	% of “others” category, 2000	% of “others” category, 2010
English	68.5	62.4
Mandarin	4.4	3.8
Other Chinese	3.2	0.9
Malay	15.6	4.3
“Indian languages”	0.6	0.6
Others	7.8	28.1

Table 7: Language most frequently spoken at home by the “Others” ethnic group (Leow 2001, Wong 2011).

The comparison, in Table 7, between the languages spoken in 2000 and in 2010 shows a remarkable increase in the proportion of non-categorised languages (7.8 % to 28.1 %). This may well reflect the increasing internationalisation of the workforce, which relies both on well-educated professionals from around the globe and on less-skilled blue-collar workers (e.g. construction workers), many of whom may speak languages that do not easily fit into the five named languages and language families.

2.5 English in Singapore

English has been a main language of Singapore ever since the foundation of the modern city in 1819. As the language of the colonial power, it was the language of administration, of government, and of the élites. From the start, its native-speaker base was slim: the few British civil servants, soldiers, and businessmen were vastly outnumbered by the local Malays and the ever-increasing immigration from China. Nonetheless, the language was always perceived favourably, not least because of its connections with the ruling class and with upward mobility. While provision for education was initially poor, and English, therefore, remained remote from much of the population, slowly an education system was set up, mainly with Malay and English schools (Erb 2003: 20). Enrolment in the English-medium schools, however, increased steadily, reaching 50.4 % in 1962 (Platt 1975: 366). A generation later, in 1987, English became the sole medium of education for all schools — a legal step that followed the natural evolution of school enrolment: the last Tamil-language school, for example, had already closed three years before that because of a lack of pupils (Gupta 1994: 145–146).

English remained official after independence. It is nowadays undeniably the most important language in the country, being the language of education, politics, and the courts. Non-speakers are at a serious disadvantage. All legislation, for instance, is in English only. The 2010 census gives the proportion of users of English as the “language most frequently spoken at

	1980	1990	2000	2010
English	11.6 %	18.8 %	23.0 %	32.3 %
Mandarin	10.2 %	23.7 %	35.0 %	35.6 %
Other Chinese	59.5 %	39.6 %	23.8 %	14.3 %
Malay	13.9 %	14.3 %	14.1 %	12.2 %
Tamil	3.1 %	2.9 %	3.2 %	3.3 %

Table 8: Responses to census questions “predominant household language” or “language most frequently spoken at home”. Data for 1980 from Foley (1998: 221) citing Lau (1993: 6), for 1990 and 2000 from Leow (2001), and for 2010 from Wong (2011).

home” as 32.3%, which is 9 percentage points higher than in the 2000 census (see Table 8).

The English spoken in Singapore has been described (Gupta 1989, 1994, 2006) as coming in two diglossic forms: Standard (Singapore) English (SSE) and Colloquial Singapore English (CSE or “Singlish”). While this view of the linguistic situation has been criticised (cf. *inter alia* Alsagoff 2007, 2010, Leimgruber 2009), it is a useful conceptual tool, and particularly so since it is the approach taken by language planners, as will be explained below. Standard Singapore English is essentially identical to other varieties of Standard English around the globe, with local elements in semantics (e.g. *slippers* ‘flip-flops’, *to bathe* ‘to have a shower’, *to renovate* ‘to redecorate’, etc.), used in conjunction with local pronunciation norms. Singlish — the term is used neutrally by descriptive linguists as well as affectionately by (some) speakers and dismissively by planners — is an extensively described variety of English (see, for instance, Gupta 1994, Foley et al. 1998, Low and Brown 2005, Deterding 2007, etc.), featuring significant influence from the languages with which English came into contact, predominantly Hokkien and Malay. A stereotypical feature of Singlish, to name but one, is the use of monosyllabic clause-final discourse particles, thought to be derived from Cantonese (Lim 2007). They convey a large array of pragmatic and semantic meanings, explained elsewhere (e.g. Wee 2004). Example (1), from Leimgruber (2009: 56), shows their use, co-occurring with another feature of Singlish, a non-inflected third person verb.

- (1) Because she wants to sing mah. [. . .] She want to join to sing, so we just groom her lor.
 “It’s because she wanted a singing role, obviously. She wanted to join (the performance group), so naturally we had to groom her, you see.”

3 Management of diversity

These diversities — ethnic and linguistic — are managed in various ways. The kind of management I refer to here is of a top-down quality, taking the form of overt government policies and active involvement in language planning, in particular. This section will briefly explain the ways in which Singapore’s ethnic diversity has been the target of some of these policies, before focussing in more depth on the language policies in place.

3.1 Ethnic policies

The previous sections already hinted at the ethnic classification system used in Singapore to categorise the population. There are four categories: Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Other, the so-called CMIO model, which has its roots in the census classifications used by the colonial power (PuruShotam 1997: 30–33). These categories are called *races* more often than *ethnicity* or *ethnic group* in the Singaporean context: while the three terms can be found (the latter notably in the official census releases), with equal meanings, most official documents (e.g. Identity Cards, forms, registries) use *race*. Up until 2011, race assignment was simple: a child took on his or her father’s race. Thus, a child with a Malay father and a Chinese mother would automatically become Malay. Similarly, one could only become Eurasian if one’s father was Eurasian too; a Chinese father and a European mother would have had a Chinese child. (Eurasian, incidentally, is a racial sub-category of the category “Other” that can be officially registered, unlike sub-categories of the other three main categories. See Gupta (1994) or Wee (2010) for an account of the Eurasian’s special status for their relative size.) Since 1 January 2011, however, rules have been relaxed and parents are allowed to register their child under the race of the father, the mother, a suitable mixed category (e.g. Eurasian), or under a double-barrelled race (e.g. Indian–Chinese, without constraints on the order of the father’s or mother’s race). Crucially, as far as the government policies discussed below are concerned, only the first element of such a double-barrelled race is to be used. Also, parents with double-barrelled races are limited to transmitting to their children only the first element of their race (either the father’s or the mother’s, or both as a new double-barrelled combination) (ICA 2010, Kor 2010).

Under early colonial rule, individual ethnic groups were assigned to particular areas of the new city (Turnbull 1996, Gupta 2000). There was a Chinatown for the Chinese (later, additional areas were designated for individual dialect groups), a Little India for the Indians, a Malay district, and of course areas for the Europeans. Some of these survive to this day, albeit mostly as tourist spots of marketed ethnic authenticity, without the previously enforced ethnic segregation (Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Little

India, Arab Street, etc.). The current policy, quite unlike that of the 19th century, is one of ethnic integration.

The policy of promoting the peaceful co-habitation of the various ethnic groups was in part a result of racially motivated riots in 1964 and 1969. In recent decades these have been often evoked as the kind of conflict a multiracial society needs to avoid. To this effect, several initiatives were launched, one of which being an annual Racial Harmony Day (21 July, since 1997), which is celebrated nationally. Especially schools have themed activities, with pupils and teachers encouraged to wear ethnic dress. Racial harmony is also one of the “core events” of National Education, a subject introduced to all schools in 1997, whose chief aim is to “develop national cohesion” (MOE 2011).

Another government initiative is the Ethnic Integration Policy (EIP, see e.g. Lum and Tan 2003) run by the Housing and Development Board (HDB). The HDB is the statutory board that builds, administers, and maintains public housing in the city-state. 84.4 % of the 1 024 458 households in the country are HDB flats (Wong 2011), which the residents purchase at subsidised prices. In order to prevent ethnic enclaves from developing, the HDB began, in the 1970s (Sim et al. 2003: 297), to take into account the ethnic group of buyers when allocating new flats. This was then formalised into policy in 1989. As a result, percentages of a neighbourhood’s HDB flats are allocated for individual ethnic groups, and would-be buyers have to belong to a group whose quota has not yet been reached.

The emphasis on racial harmony is also to be found in the Media Development Authority’s Free-to-air TV Programme Code (MDA 2004). Here, in Part 2 “Racial & religious harmony”, broadcasters are urged to refrain from broadcasting “programmes which denigrate or are likely to offend the sensitivities of any racial or religious group”, “programmes which incite or are likely to incite racial and/or religious intolerance, or misunderstanding”, or any type of “racial and religious stereotyping”. More generally, “references to race and religion should be presented accurately and in a dignified and sensitive manner” (MDA 2004: 3) — that such stereotyping nonetheless occurs, as reported in Tan (2004b), is another matter.

Other initiatives exist (e.g. racial quota for school pupils, now abandoned (see Tan 2004c: 101)), many of which have been controversial (see inter alia Ooi et al. 1993, Gupta 2000, Sin 2002, Tan 2004c). A final one, which may warrant mention, is the special status of the Malay population. According to Singapore’s constitution, the government shall “recognise the special position of the Malays, who are the indigenous people of Singapore” (Constitution 1999: §152). This has historically translated into free education for the ethnically Malay population, although this is no longer the case. The main purpose of this special treatment was to even out disparities in education attainment. For a more comprehensive overview, see e.g. Tan (2004c: 102–104). The Constitution’s article 153 further requires “government to make

provision for regulating Muslim religious affairs”. This means that there is a whole body of law, governed by the Administration of Muslim Law Act, which is applicable solely to Muslims (and, by extension, to 98.7% of the Malay population, see section 2.2), and regulates issues as diverse as a syariah court, religious education, halal certification, marriage, conversion, property, and others. Furthermore, there is government support for a mosque-building programme, as well as a minister in charge of Muslim Affairs (Tan 2004a: 68–69).

Despite all these initiatives, and the omnipresence of the concept of “race” and its four main categories in the everyday Singaporean experience, it should be noted that race relations, though an important component of nation-building and of government policy, were deliberately left out of the mainstream political debate. In the words of founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, “we must never allow race, language, religion to dominate our politics” (Han et al. 1998: 81–83, quoted in Rappa and Wee 2006: 80). This was also in part a reaction to the racial affirmative action championed in Malaysia post-independence (aimed at bettering the position of the ethnic Malays), which was at the heart of Singapore’s move out of the Federation in 1965 (Rappa and Wee 2006: 78–79).

3.2 Language policies

Research on language policy in Singapore abounds (see inter alia Gopinathan 1977, Kuo and Jernudd 1994, Bokhorst-Heng 1998, Tan 2006, Wee 2006, Rappa and Wee 2006, Lim et al. 2010, Wee 2011b). The main tenets of the Singaporean language policy can be found in its official language policy and in educational bilingualism, the two being linked in several ways. Another connection is that between ethnicity and language: of the four official languages, three (Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil) are called “mother tongues”, and seen as inextricably linked to the three main ethnic groups (Chinese, Malay, and Indian, respectively), with some recognition that Tamil does not fulfil this role as well as the other two, due to the larger linguistic heterogeneity in the Indian community (see section 2.3).

Before elaborating on the distinction between “official language” and “mother tongue”, a brief note on the additional category of “national language” (briefly mentioned in the introduction) is in order. Article 153 of the Constitution, which lists the official languages, additionally enshrines Malay as the national language. The reasons for this are partly historical, as a remnant in part of British policies regarding the “indigenous” Malays and in part of Singapore’s brief membership in the Malaysian Federation (1962–1965), and partly political, both domestic, as a token recognition of the Malays’ indigenous status, and foreign, as a recognition of the language’s importance in the region and its official status in the three main surrounding countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei) (Rappa and Wee 2006: 82–83).

In practical terms, however, this special status is limited to specific domains: Malay is used for the national anthem, the country's motto *Majulah Singapura* 'onwards Singapore' featured on its coat of arms, standardised drill commands in marching bodies (in the army or in marching bands), and the designations of most military and civil orders and decorations. Outside of these domains, Malay does not enjoy additional privileges, and is, essentially, on a level playing field with the other mother tongues: it is an L2 in the education system, it features alongside the other three official languages on currency, and enjoys print and broadcasting media roughly commensurate with its population size.

I return, now, to the distinction between "official language" and "mother tongue". A useful explanation of the importance of the mother tongues in Singaporean language policy is given in Alsagoff (2007: 34–37). Language, in government policy, is always referred to "in utilitarian, pragmatic terms, divorced from emotional ties", where English, the only non-mother tongue official language, is framed as "cultureless" in that it is "disassociated from Western culture" in order to prevent corrupted Western values and to heighten its status as a "global rather than a Western language" (Alsagoff 2007: 36). This cultural voiding of English also serves to present it as "ethnically neutral", not belonging to any of Singapore's ethnic groups. This is important, because following this argument of policy-makers, no single ethnic group is advantaged or disadvantaged in terms of access to an economy that is largely based on English, a language Alsagoff (2007: 36) says is "characteris[ed] [...] as the 'workhorse' of economic capital".

This framing of English as "cultureless" is in contrast to the mother tongues, which are seen as "repositories and mediums of local culture and identity" (Alsagoff 2007: 36). Wee (2003) presents the government's policy as a narrative which instrumentalises, on the one hand, the utilitarian English as facilitating economic advancement, maintaining a regional competitive advantage, etc., and, on the other, the traditional mother tongues as "preserving ethnic cultural traditions" (Wee 2003: 211). Lee Kuan Yew's perspective is given here, to illustrate the reasoning behind the policy (from a speech given in 1984 to a Chinese audience, quoted in Bokhorst-Heng 1998: 252, cited in Wee 2003: 214):

English will not be emotionally acceptable as our mother tongue [...] Mandarin is emotionally acceptable as our mother tongue. It also unites the different dialect groups. It reminds us that we are part of an ancient civilisation with an unbroken history of over 5000 years. This is a deep and strong psychic force, one that gives confidence to a people to face up to and overcome great changes and challenges.

Therefore I can state that its psychological value cannot be overemphasised. Parents [...] want their children to retain tra-

ditional Chinese values in filial piety, loyalty, benevolence, and love. Through Mandarin their children can emotionally identify themselves as part of an ancient civilisation whose continuity was because it was founded on a tried and tested value system.

Of particular interest in this quote is the reference to the different dialect groups, which are “united” by Mandarin. The linguistic diversity within the Chinese population, discussed in section 2.1, has in fact been greatly reduced by the increased usage of Mandarin: the Speak Mandarin Campaign, launched in 1979, has resulted in a dramatic language shift away from the dialects towards Mandarin, with the sometimes perverse effect of rupturing communication between children and grand-parents (Gupta and Yeok 1999). The idea, therefore, that the “mother tongue”, which may not be the family’s native language at all, somehow enables cultural and traditional grounding, needs to be put into perspective. Wee, for example, points out that the wisdoms of the “ancient civilisation[s]” referred to by Lee may not have been the prime preoccupation of the “typical Chinese migrants [. . .] given their relative lack of education, and the heterogeneity of the Chinese languages spoken by them” (Wee 2006: 350). On the other hand, Mandarin plays now an increasingly strong role as an ethnic lingua franca within the Chinese community, or at least as a strong second language, and enjoys high levels of vitality in the speech community, not least because of its status in the education system.

The education system is characterised by bilingualism (Pakir 1991, 2001, Dixon 2005), in which English is the medium of education, and the mother tongues subjects taught as L2s.² Here too, the rationale for bilingualism is given in terms of the roles, or domains, of English and the mothers tongues, respectively: “Children must learn English so that they will have a window to the knowledge, technology, and expertise of the world. They must know their mother tongues to enable them to know what makes us what we are” (Tony Tan, minister for education in a 1986 parliamentary speech, quoted in Pakir 2001: 342). The standard procedure is for children to learn the mother tongue associated with their particular ethnic group: Mandarin for the Chinese, Malay for the Malays, and Tamil for the Indians. The Indians, however, have a larger array of languages that can be taken a mother tongue: Tamil, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Panjabi, or Urdu (MOE n.d.). This standard assignment, however, is not compulsory, and many pupils (i.e., their parents) register for a mother tongue that is not the one associated with their official “race” (per the rhetoric above). The bilingualism policy, being “the most difficult policy” to implement (Lee Kuan Yew, quoted in *The Straits Times*

²In the so-called “Special Assistance Plan” (SAP) schools, part of the curriculum is taught in the mother tongue. Admission to SAP schools is highly competitive and only those with high marks in the mother tongue are accepted. SAPs currently only exist for Mandarin.

18 November 2009, quoted in Wee 2011a: 209), is also constantly subject to calls for improvement and to musings by the policy-makers on how things could have been done better (see e.g. the discussion in Wee 2011a).

3.2.1 The Speak Mandarin Campaign

Among the several government campaigns in place in Singapore, the Speak Mandarin Campaign (SMC, 讲华语运动), launched in 1979, has a comparatively long and sustained history (Bokhorst-Heng 1999, Wee 2006). Every year, the campaign starts with a speech by a government official (Wee 2006: 350), and has a particular theme and catchphrase. These vary over the years, but usually promote Mandarin and demote the dialects (cf. the 1979 slogan 多说华语, 少说方言 ‘Speak more Mandarin, speak less dialect’), explain the logic behind the campaign (1983: 华人讲华语, 合情又合理 ‘Chinese [Singaporeans] speak Mandarin, [it’s] both sensible and reasonable’), or emphasise the cultural element of the policy (1991: 学习华语认识文化 ‘Learn Mandarin and know [your] culture’). More recent foci have been on the benefits of Mandarin (1998–1999: 讲华语, 好处多 ‘Speak Mandarin, [it has] plenty of advantages’) and on the younger target audience (2006–2007: 华语COOL ‘Mandarin [is] cool!’, 2007–2008: 讲华语, 你肯吗? — Speak Mandarin. Are you game?, 2010: 华语? 谁怕谁! — The Chinese challenge) (Zhou and Wu 2006, Speak Mandarin Campaign 2011: passim).

The campaign is hard to miss. Apart from the coverage in news media, there are adverts in MRT trains, on buses, and generally in public spaces, exonerating the virtues of Mandarin or featuring the year’s campaign slogan. “T-shirts with the same slogans are worn by students. Advertisements supporting the campaign appear on television, radio and in the cinemas.” (Bokhorst-Heng 1999: 244) Free Mandarin classes are offered for the elderly, *The Straits Times*, the main English daily, carries a daily Mandarin vocabulary section, and some schools organise “speak Mandarin day(s)” for their Chinese students. There are also clear guidelines of what varieties of Chinese are allowed in the media: Part 12 of the TV Programme Code (MDA 2004: 10–11) stipulates that “all Chinese programmes [...] must be in Mandarin”, but “dialects in dialogues and songs” are allowed if “the context justifies usage and [if they are] sparingly used”. Exceptions listed are interviews in news programmes, where dialects are allowed if provided with subtitles or voice-overs, or references to local food items (specifically “*bak kut teh*, *char kway teow* and *ang gu kuey*”). In addition to the prohibition of dialects, the Code also prohibits “sub-standard Mandarin (characterised by poor syntax or use of vocabulary, poorly pronounced Mandarin or mixed with many dialect terms)” (MDA 2004).

The various themes addressed in the official campaign speeches have varied over time (see e.g. Wee 2006). An important development, however,

was the emphasis on the potential economic, rather than merely cultural, value of Mandarin:

The Chinese learn and speak Mandarin not only because it is the common spoken language of the Chinese community, representing our roots, but also because the economic value of Mandarin is increasing, particularly after China has started its economic transformation. . .(Ong Teng Cheong, second deputy prime minister, 1985, quoted in Wee 2006: 352)

As highlighted by Wee (2006: 352), this has had consequences beyond simply increasing the attractiveness of Mandarin for the Chinese ethnic group. In adopting a rhetoric wherein Mandarin is “viewed as a resource for economic advancement”, linking it to the single ethnic group of the Chinese, as done in the mother tongue policy outlined above, means that it “potentially compromises the relationship of parity across the three official mother tongues” (Wee 2006: 352). One consequence was that Mandarin has become increasingly sought after by non-Chinese Singaporeans who do not want to miss out on the economic promises of the new market.

The effects of the campaign, coupled with the educational policies mentioned above, have been twofold: firstly, there has been a massive decrease in the number of speakers of the so-called “dialects”, the non-Mandarin varieties of Chinese. Secondly, the number of speakers of Mandarin has increased. Census data may again be used to show this shift: reprinted here in Table 9 is the data from Table 3, which shows, for the past four censuses, the percentages of households where Mandarin and dialects are the main language. On the one hand, the number of households where dialects are spoken has moved from a majority position to one close to that of the households using Malay (12.2%). This is a considerable shift, partly explained by demographic factors (elderly speakers who used dialects in 1980 having been replaced by younger generations using Mandarin thirty years on), by the shift in some families from dialect to Mandarin, and by the reduced likelihood of multi-generational households. On the other hand, the number of households where Mandarin is spoken has increased from a minority position of 10.2% in 1980 to over a third of all Singaporean households.

As for all census data of this sort, these numbers have to be treated with caution: respondents’ answers may be skewed by the expectations of the census-takers or those of the language planners, or simply by the aspirations of the respondent/speaker. At a deeper, more methodological level, the main problem is that code-switching is all but ignored. Arguably, though, the phrasing of the question (“*main* home language”) at least ostensibly recognises the presence of more than one language. To what extent the respondents are aware of which one of their languages is the main one, or indeed how much effort is put into identifying the individual varieties involved

	Mandarin	“Dialects”
1980	10.2 %	59.5 %
1990	23.7 %	39.6 %
2000	35.0 %	23.8 %
2010	35.6 %	14.3 %

Table 9: Usage of Mandarin and non-Mandarin Chinese varieties, for the whole population (data from Wirtz and Chung 2006, Wong 2011).

and their relative frequency, remains, of course, unknown. Nonetheless, this numerical evidence is the most readily available, and it shows a clear shift away from the dialects. This shift does not mean, however, that the dialects have lost all legitimacy in Singapore: there is “at the grassroots level a strong sense of attachment”, and there are still church services held in Hokkien and Hakka (Rappa and Wee 2006: 92–94), for example.

3.2.2 The Speak Good English Movement

The other language campaign launched by the Singapore government in April 2000 is the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM). Its target is not to be found in the mother tongues or in the dialects of Chinese that are the subject of the SMC, but in Singlish. Singlish, as briefly introduced in section 2.5, is the local variety of English, which features lexical admixture primarily from Hokkien and Malay, grammatical substrate influence mostly from Chinese, and a phonology not unlike that in other Asian Englishes (reduced final consonant clusters, devoicing of final stops, neutralisation of length distinction in vowels, absence of reduced schwa-type vowels); the variety has been widely described elsewhere (see e.g. Gupta 1994, Foley et al. 1998, Lim 2004, Low and Brown 2005, Deterding 2007). This variety has been seen as detrimental to Singapore and Singaporeans, in particular because it is seen as hampering proficiency in Standard English. English, in its standard form and as the official and working language of the country, is seen as a major competitive advantage in a global economy. In his launching speech in April 2000, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong made both these points:

The ability to speak good English is a distinct advantage in terms of doing business and communicating with the world. This is especially important for a hub city and an open economy like ours. If we speak a corrupted form of English that is not understood by others, we will lose a key competitive advantage. My concern is that if we continue to speak Singlish, it will over time become Singapore’s common language. (SGEM 2011)

Wee (2011b: 79–83) analyses in more detail how the government is effectively unable to see any good in Singlish. Co-existence of Singlish and English is not an option. The paramount economic importance of English to the country’s survival in a competitive regional and global economy is such that proficiency in Standard English is the prime objective, which is seen to be hampered by knowledge of Singlish. Any considerations of emotional or identity-building properties inherent in the “uniquely Singaporean” Singlish are irrelevant and “whatever merits it may have as a marker of a Singaporean identity must be jettisoned in favour of the global economic value associated with the standard variety” (Wee 2011b: 79).

As for the SMC, the focus on the yearly SGEM can be captured by the slogans used: while the first one (2000–2004) “Speak well. Be understood” combined a prescriptive view with a pragmatic (communicative) one, others (e.g. 2005–2006 “Speak up. Speak out. Speak well”, 2008–2009 “I can”) focused on the additional benefits proficiency in English could bring, whereas yet others (e.g. 2007–2008 “Rock your world!”, 2009–2010 “Impress. Inspire. Intoxicate”) have no reference to language at all. The current slogan (2010–2011) “Get it right” reverts to the prescriptive element found in the first half of the 2000 launching slogan.

The stance of the government towards Singlish is much stronger than that towards the non-Mandarin varieties of Chinese. The quote by Goh above highlights the main concern: that Singlish comes to hamper Singaporean’s command of Standard English, which is key to Singapore’s economic success. Given the perceived importance of economic growth and global connectedness for the survival small city-state, Singlish is, therefore, seen as a direct threat to the nation itself. Thus, while a diglossic view would regard Singlish as a perfectly viable vernacular, used among Singaporeans and existing side by side with the standard, used in communication with non-locals, for the policy-makers “co-existence is not an option” (Rappa and Wee 2006: 95). The argument is that there are in fact few Singaporeans who are comfortable in code-switching between Singlish and the standard: there is a correlation between standard English proficiency and education (Platt 1975, Pakir 1991, Poedjosoedarmo 1995) which results in some sectors of the population having access only to Singlish. These are at a disadvantage, especially in education, where English language skills are relevant for academic achievement. This attitude is further evidenced by the collapsing of Singlish and ungrammatical English into the one and same category. The TV Programme Code’s section on language draws on grammar and pronunciation in its definition of three types of English seen to exist in Singapore:

Standard English, which is *grammatically correct*, should be used for programmes such as news, current affairs and info-educational programmes. Local English, which is *also grammatically correct* but *pronounced with a Singaporean accent* and which may in-

clude local terms and expressions, could be used for programmes like dramas, comedies and variety shows. [...] Singlish, which is *ungrammatical local English*, and includes dialect terms and sentence structures based on dialect, should not be encouraged and can only be permitted in interviews, where the interviewee speaks only Singlish. The interviewer himself, however, should not use Singlish. (MDA 2004: 10, my emphasis)

What ought to be done in the case of an interview with a speaker of a non-Standard non-local English variety, however, is not addressed. It is also interesting to note that Singlish is defined as “includ[ing] dialect terms”, which can indeed be the case, and “sentence structures based on dialect”. The choice of *dialect* is revealing in that they, like Singlish, have little prestige in government rhetoric. The syntax of Singlish, of course, has a lot in common not just with Hokkien and other Chinese “dialects”, but also with Mandarin (an official and promoted language) and, of course, with English — being, as it is, a variety of English.

The SGEM itself takes the form of language-related activities in schools, themed broadcasts in the media, readings organised by the National Library Board, an “Inspiring Teacher of English Award”, and a website (SGEM 2011) that provides, inter alia, lists of “Commonly mispronounced words”, quizzes with Singlish sentences to be rendered in Standard English,³ and links to providers of adult language classes. As for the SMC, banners and posters adorn public places, sporting the year’s slogan, or otherwise exonerating readers to speak “good English”.

It is more difficult to assess the success of the SGEM than that of the SMC. While in the case of the latter, census data on home language use (i.e. Mandarin vs. dialect), even with the caveat discussed in the previous subsection, does offer some impression on the shift from dialect towards Mandarin. Such data is not available from the census, where English is recorded as a single language, without being further subdivided into varieties.

³The quizzes also offer (sometimes peculiar) explanations why the answer is correct or wrong. The example in (i) below, from SGEM (2011: lingo bingo #17), gives a statement in Singlish (with a post-AP *one* acting as a pronominal with *bus* as its antecedent, see e.g. Bao 2009), and two possible substitutions. The second is marked as wrong because of the redundancy in calling *red* a *colour*. This is followed by a comment that English usually “get[s] rid of the redundant words”

- (i) What is the correct way to ask this question? [sic]
“This bus is red colour one.”
V This bus is red.
X This bus is red in colour.
“Red” on its own already means it is a colour. This means when you say “red colour”, the word “colour” is redundant. In English, we usually get rid of the redundant words.

	1980	1990	2000	2010
English	11.6 %	18.8 %	23.0 %	32.3 %
Mandarin	10.2 %	23.7 %	35.0 %	35.6 %
Chinese dialects	59.5 %	39.6 %	23.8 %	14.3 %
Malay	13.9 %	14.3 %	14.1 %	12.2 %
Tamil	3.1 %	2.9 %	3.2 %	3.3 %
Others	1.7 %	0.8 %	0.9 %	1.1 %

Table 10: Language most frequently spoken at home. Data for 1980 from Foley (1998: 221) citing Lau (1993: 6), for 1990 and 2000 from Leow (2001), and for 2010 from Wong (2011).

What *is* obvious from census data is an overall shift towards English as a main home language (see Table 10). However, this development (21 percentage points in thirty years) also takes into account shifts towards English away from the mother tongues. This shift has been ongoing for some time, motivated by the economic promises of proficiency in the working language, but also by parents’ concern for their children’s performance at school, where English is a core subject that needs to be passed for promotion each year. Such a shift is not the intent of the SGEM, as its target are not the mother tongues (needed for cultural grounding, as explained above), but solely Singlish. Thus, while there is a sense in which English as a main home language is progressing, there is little information on what kind of English this is — is it the standard championed by the SGEM, or the Singlish it seeks to eliminate? Given the increasing numbers of speakers, it seems likely that all types of English are represented, including the Singlish spoken side by side with Standard English by those who master both.

Singlish seems unlikely to go in the near future. Like the Chinese dialects, there is some level of support in the population for the variety, not least because it is the one uniquely Singaporean code, which can be used for purposes of identification with fellow Singaporeans. There are differences, however: whereas the Chinese dialects can boast, in some cases, a long literary tradition (notwithstanding the comments by Wee (2006) above about the “lack of education” of the early migrants), this is not the case for Singlish, for which “there is no denying that [it] carries little or no prestige” (Rappa and Wee 2006: 96). It is also worth noting that an attachment to Singlish is often voiced by “well-educated Singaporeans who can code-switch” (loc. cit.) between it and the standard. Examples can be found especially online, with satirical websites and blogs (TalkingCock.com 2010, mrbrown.com 2011) and even a Speak Good Singlish Movement page on Facebook (SGSM 2011).

4 Conclusion

The ever-present diversity in Singapore, both in terms of ethnic composition of the population and in the languages spoken in the country, have been managed in various ways, some of which were presented in this chapter. It seems reasonable to argue that the size of the city-state has had a deep impact on the perceived strong need to manage and to regulate, in a top-down fashion, this diversity. By way of comparison, Switzerland (also relatively small compared to its neighbours), which also boasts four official languages (German, French, Italian, Romansh), has a history of clear territorial separation of its language communities. Unlike Singapore, the situation is one of co-existing monolingualism, where few French speakers are conversant in German and vice-versa. The same is true in terms of official status of the four languages: in French-speaking areas, French is official, German is not. In German-speaking areas, German is official, French is not (this is true except in a minority of bilingual polities, e.g. the cities of Fribourg/Freiburg and Biel/Bienne). Since there is comparatively little contact between geolinguistic areas, there is less bilingualism than in Singapore. In the case of the city-state, speakers of the various ethnic and linguistic groups live side by side and have to interact, which results in a higher level of visible diversity. Additionally, the presence of English as the ethnically neutral language used in school, the economy, and government, further unites the population, and at the same time enforces bilingualism — bilingualism between English and some other language(s), rather than between the languages of the various ethnic groups.

Overall, it can be said that the policies in place in Singapore have had outcomes more or less in line with those expected by the government. The ethnic integration policy in public housing is an ongoing project to mix the various ethnic groups, and, as reported in Sim et al. (2003), has succeeded to even out the most obvious majorities in some areas. The Speak Mandarin Campaign has seen a dramatic success, no doubt because it was coupled with the educational policy of providing Mandarin L2 classes for Chinese pupils, but also because of its removal of “dialects” from the media. The Speak Good English Movement, on the other hand, also being an ongoing campaign, has not succeeded in its aim of completely replacing Singlish with “good English”; it remains to be seen what its long-term effects will be.

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