LANGUAGE AND IMAGINING THE NATION IN SINGAPORE

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

Language and Imagining the Nation in Singapore

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1998

This thesis is about the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation, with a particular focus on Singapore. The view I put forward is that we need to think of this relationship as being discursive. “Discourse” allows us to focus on the dynamic process of this relationship, embedded in real historical, socio-political and economic moments. Singapore offers a particularly interesting analysis. On its own, the national language plays only a peripheral role in the nation; however, language and language ideologies are no less central to the imagining of the nation than elsewhere. Language ideologies concur in very significant ways with the particular image of the “ideal society” that the government leaders seek to achieve. In particular, we see language intricately involved in the nation’s attempt to understand itself and itself in relation to the world. On the one hand, there is the need to locate itself globally, as an international hub
of trade, commerce, information technology, tourism and so forth. On the other, there is the need to authenticate itself locally. The story thus becomes one of balancing authenticity in the imagining of the nation in and through language ideologies.

Much of this balancing authenticity has occurred by means of the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* and the policy of “English-knowing bilingualism”. The policy of bilingualism is premised on the role of English to meet the pragmatic needs of the nation (globalisation, economics and technology, inter-ethnic communication), and the mother-tongue languages (Mandarin, Malay, Tamil) to meet the cultural needs of the nation. Two main dichotic arguments have been given: dialects versus Mandarin, and English versus Mandarin. How these debates have been argued, the language ideologies inherent to these debates, and their implication in the imagining of the nation is the topic of much of this thesis. Paradoxes, voices of resistance, and challenges to these ideologies and the government’s response are examined as part of these language ideological debates.

One of the most accessible places to see this discursive construction of language ideologies is in government leaders’ speeches as published in largest daily newspaper, *The Straits Times*. Thus, in order to see the ways in which these ideologies are constructed and their interaction with the imagining of the nation, much of this analysis is anchored on such speeches. I suggest that textual analysis is a useful means by which to establish a premise for comparative analyses of “nationalisms” in their various manifestations around the world.
To Jimmy,
who gave the tangible and emotional support I needed to complete this endeavour
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Of the whole Ph.D. experience, what I have looked forward to the most is writing this page. And not just because it signals the end of this very arduous journey. But rather, because it provides me the opportunity to thank the many people who have journeyed with me in varying capacities. So often over the course of my degree, I felt like Alice in Wonderland:

"Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?" Alice asked the Cheshire Cat.
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
"I don't much care where" — said Alice.
"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.
"— so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.
"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

True, I have walked long enough, at least for the moment. But, what the Cat did not mention is that, in addition to walking long enough, what is more important is who is walking with you. In this sense, I disagree with novelist Saul Bellow who once said: "You're all alone when you're a writer." I have not been alone.

As I look around me, I see my parents who have always believed that I could learn to ride my bicycle in one day (they know what that means!). I am deeply grateful for their prayers, love, care packages, telephone calls, letters, and encouragement that followed me as I went around the world. Wanda, Miriam (!), Pat, and Darlene – how could I have ever survived without your humour and love? Your enthusiasm kept me going! Ivy, you were a lifesaver with your steady flow of parcels and letters. And Tammy, you’re an inspiration!

And then, around me, I see my friends. It is difficult in this limited space to mention them all and to highlight the ways each person propelled me on. However, I want to take this moment to mention a few. Gabriella: you beat me to
it! Thank you for walking with me, and for always believing that the end was near (in a good sense!). Kristine, thank you for navigating me through OISE bureaucracy, for your smiles that always dissipated my anxieties. My friends in St. Thomas, Toronto, Singapore and at NUS, thank you for laughing with me, encouraging me, advising me, and keeping me sane! Chris and Lori, Linda and Rudy, Jack and Lina, thanks for your tangible assistance in terms of printing, transportation and delivery, and for your unwavering enthusiastic support. Lionel, Sunita and Huang Hoon, a special thanks for your meticulous and honest appraisal of my work. Nisha and Nina, thanks for “holding my hand” in the vital hours! And Ping, thank you for your invaluable advice and encouragement, and the focus you brought to my work.

Also around me I see the many people who so willingly assisted me in obtaining the data and information I needed: Suai Dia, at the Times House Library, Ms Ng at RELC, Ms Chia at Parliament House Library, MP Dr. Ong Chit Chung and his PRO Nancy, Yeong Yoon Ying at MITA, Mr. Tay, Sunadi, and the librarians at NUS – thank you! I must also thank Singapore Airlines for their very generous tolerance of my way-too-much-luggage as I took my files, data, and books around the world.

And then there is Dr. Monica Heller, who had the unenviable task of reading and re-reading the many rougher versions of this work, and whose comments, insights, high standards, and guidance brought this work to fruition. I am deeply, deeply grateful for the way you have challenged and stretched me, for your enduring patience, and for letting me learn. I am also indebted to my committee members, Dr. Shuichi Nagata and Dr. Normand Labrie, for their invaluable insights and comments that helped shape this work.

I end this on a very personal note to thank the one to whom this work is dedicated, Jimmy. How can one ever thank enough the person who had to endure the emotional swings and outbursts of stress that come with such a project? It would be an understatement to say I could never have done this without you. Your steadfast commitment to me and to my dreams, your inspiration and encouragement, and your constancy all made this possible.
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<td>Annual Departmental Reports</td>
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<td>ARDE</td>
<td>Annual Report of the Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>AWSJ</td>
<td>Asian Wall Street Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>Brigadier General</td>
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<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>Business Times</td>
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<td>CL1</td>
<td>Chinese medium; and as a subject at a 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; language level</td>
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<td>CL2</td>
<td>Chinese Language taught as a 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; language</td>
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<td>CLRC</td>
<td>Chinese Language Review Committee</td>
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<td>CPF</td>
<td>Central Provident Fund</td>
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<td>DPM</td>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister</td>
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<td>EL1</td>
<td>English medium; and as a subject at a 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; language level</td>
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<td>English Language taught as a 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; language</td>
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<td>EM1</td>
<td>English and mother-tongue at the 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; language level</td>
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<td>EM2</td>
<td>English medium, mother-tongue at the 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; language level</td>
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<tr>
<td>EMO</td>
<td>English medium, oral mother-tongue</td>
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<td>EM3</td>
<td>English medium, mother-tongue at the 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; language level</td>
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<td>FEER</td>
<td>Far Eastern Economic Review</td>
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<td>GCE &quot;A&quot;</td>
<td>General Certificate Examination, Advanced level</td>
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<td>GCE &quot;N&quot;</td>
<td>General Certificate Examination, Normal level</td>
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<td>GCE &quot;O&quot;</td>
<td>General Certificate Examination, Ordinary level</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GRC</td>
<td>Group Representation Constituency</td>
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<td>Language Elective Programme</td>
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<td>LET</td>
<td>Language Exposure Time</td>
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<td>Lee Kuan Yew</td>
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<td>LWC</td>
<td>Language of wider communication</td>
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<td>Mother-tongue medium; English at the 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; language level</td>
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<td>MITA</td>
<td>Ministry of Information and the Arts</td>
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<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
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<td>New Education System</td>
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<td>Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements</td>
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<td>PSLC</td>
<td>Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council</td>
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<td>Primary School Leaving Exam</td>
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<td>Primary School Proficiency Exam</td>
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<td>RELC</td>
<td>Regional Language Centre (formerly Regional English Language Centre)</td>
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<td>RP</td>
<td>Received Pronunciation</td>
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<td>RCS</td>
<td>Radio Corporation of Singapore</td>
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<td>RTS</td>
<td>Radio and Television Singapore</td>
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<td>SAP</td>
<td>Special Assistance Plan schools</td>
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<td>SELP</td>
<td>Supplementary English Language Programme</td>
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<td>SIM</td>
<td>Singapore International Media</td>
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<td>Singapore Television Twelve Pte Ltd</td>
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<td>TCS</td>
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<td>UMNO</td>
<td>United Malay National Organisation</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL LANGUAGE:
IMAGINE THAT!

1.1 Preamble

In around B.C. 1143, the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim. In order to distinguish friend from foe, the Gileadites devised a code. When a person attempted to cross the river, they would be asked to identify themselves as being an Ephraimite or Gileadite. If the person said "Gileadite", their identity would be further tested by their pronunciation of the word "Shibboleth". Correct pronunciation was evidence of a true Gileadite, and the person would be allowed to cross the river. Mispronunciation was evidence of an Ephraimite. Thus, if the person said, "Sibboleth" instead, he was captured and killed (Judges 12:5,6). In his book entitled The Meeting at Telgte, Günter Grass (1981) brought together a fictional meeting of Germany's leading intellectuals and poets in 1647 (although it parallels a real meeting of German poets and writers after WWII). Germany had just been through the most destructive war it had ever known. Everything was in ruins, including their language. There was a "general outrage at the mutilation of the German language, in whose impressionable soil the French, Spanish, and Swedish campaigns had left their hoof and wheel marks" (1981:26). This group of poets believed the honour of the nation lay in words and in the wielders of words. The poets alone "still knew what deserved the name of German". In their view, High German alone "should be developed into an instrument of ever-increasing refinement, which would succeed - where
sword and pike had failed - in sweeping the fatherland clean of foreign domination” (1981:28). Discussions were held concerning “How might the so-called natural language”, which one of the poets “disparaged as a ‘purely mystical concept,’ be nurtured... and so develop into a national language?” (1981:21). With many “ardent sighs and tears” they “knitted the German language as the last bond; they were the other, the true Germany” (1981:67). At Telgte, “language had given promise of scope, supplied glitter, taken the place of the fatherland” (1981:29).

What these two stories have in common is their link between language and the nation. In the first, the link between language and national identity was assumed. In the second, because of this link, language was seen as the essence of national restoration. This relationship between language and the nation is something common to many nations around the world and at various times. Particularly since the French Revolution and German Romanticism, language has been perhaps the most common (although not only) catalyst in the moulding of the nation and of national identity. Assertions such as the following are not uncommon: “A land qualifies as part of the Arab patrimony if the daily speech of its inhabitants is the Arabic language” (Izzeddin, 1953:1); “A national language is a bond of national union” (Webster, 1919, cited in Fishman, 1972b:62); “And you German alone, returning from abroad, Wouldst greet your mother in French? O spew it out, before your door. Spew out the ugly slime of the Seine. Speak German, O you German!” (Herder, cited in Edwards, 1985:24); “Without a language, the nation disappears” (Malaysian poet, undated). Indeed, so pervasive is this relationship between language and nationalism that it has come to be taken for granted and is seen as commonsense.

Yet, it is precisely because this relationship between language and nationalism is taken as “commonsense” that some serious questions emerge. Why language? What is it about language that links it to nationhood? How has this relationship come to be accepted as commonsense by nations and governments around the world? And how can we begin to find ways of thinking about this relationship and about these questions? These questions were fleshed out personally as I noticed my own “nationalistic” response to an American teenager’s declaration as the ViaRail train approached Toronto that “in Canada they have American and French on all their signs”. And while overseas, I found myself needing to
distinguish my language as being Canadian English, as distinct from American English, and to identify myself as being from English-speaking, rather than French-speaking Canada.

When we bring this relationship between language and nationalism to multilingual Singapore, these questions become even more potent. Hobsbawm argues that in places like South East Asia, the national liberation movements “were in theory modelled on the nationalism of the West”. But in practice, “the states they attempted to construct were... generally the opposite of the ethnically and linguistically homogeneous entities which came to be seen as the standard form of the ‘nation-state’ in the West” (Hobsbawm, 1992: 169). This statement seems to suggest that one can expect a “national language” to be very much part of Singapore's nationalistic endeavours to create national identity, forge national unity, and so on. However, apart from a very brief period in Singapore's history, when Singapore was positioning itself for merger with the Malayan peninsula in the early 1960s, there was very little talk of a national language. Indeed, very soon after the nation achieved full independence, all mention of a national language was actually taken out of the constitution. Neither does Singapore have a language institute, such as Malaysia’s Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Language and Literature Agency) and Maktab Perguruan Bahasa (Language Institute), or Indonesia’s National Centre for Language Development. Instead, the four official languages are guided by exoglossic norms, following the norms that are established at international centres of language development and management (notably Malaysia, India, Britain, and China).

Yet, “language” has been no less central to Singapore’s nationalist agenda than it has been in other places and times. One observer has compared Singapore to Belgium in that both countries can be described as “small in size, big on language” (Beardsmore, Business Times 15 Nov 1991). Not only is Singapore “big on language” because of its extreme linguistic diversity, but because issues of language are evident in virtually all aspects of life: race, religion, education, mass media, law, economics, politics, international and regional relations, and so on. Ironically, unlike in many nations where language is used to define a unique national identity, in Singapore language has been used as a way to root identity in other cultures and nations associated with their languages. And so the questions raised earlier become even more piercing. If we cannot talk about a national language in the
nationalist agenda, and yet language plays a central role in this agenda, clearly their relationship and questions raised about this relationship need to be re-evaluated.

In this thesis, then, I will explore ways in which we can think about the relationship between language and the nationalist agenda, or as I prefer to call it, the imagining of the nation, with a particular focus on Singapore (I will discuss what I mean by "imagining the nation" later in this chapter). Singapore's attempts to define itself and itself in relation to the world are characterised by contradiction and tension. On the one hand, it seeks to position itself globally and at the crossroads of "the East" and "the West". On the other hand, it needs to authenticate itself locally. The former image is captured in the description of Singapore being "more Western than the West", and as the regional tourist "hub", medical "hub", information "hub", and so on. The latter is captured in Singapore's Tourist and Promotion Board's slogan that Singapore is "instant Asia". In a rather curious twist, Singapore's leaders have actually used the contradiction as a way to legitimise their imagining of the nation both nationally and abroad. The story thus becomes one of the "balance of authenticities", usually framed as crisis management. The overall image of the nation is one of control, non-emotive, steady, efficient, always prepared and well planned, and all powerfully imagined through the operation of powerful discourses such as pragmatism, meritocracy, multiracialism, vulnerability and "Asian values".

What is of interest is how Singapore's leaders have sought to resolve this tension ideologically and through language planning and language ideologies. For, while language is not the only area in which this ideological formulation occurs, it is an extremely important one. Most importantly, the language ideologies the government has developed concur in significant ways with their particular view of the nation. This ideological relationship between language and the nation is most evident in the bilingual policy. Bilingualism in Singapore means English plus one's official mother tongue (Malay, Mandarin, Tamil). The need for English has been argued on the premise that it meets the pragmatic needs of the nation, positioning Singapore within the global economic network. It also allows the space for multiracialism, as it provides a necessary common medium of communication without denying anyone their "mother tongue". And English, leaders argue, gives everyone an equal chance in climbing their way up the social ladder. The
mother tongue languages are for the purposes of identity and cultural roots. However, at the same time, the presence of the English language makes Singaporeans vulnerable to social decadence and Westernisation. Hence, the divide between languages is no longer just for functional purposes, but positions the mother tongue languages as the answer to the failings associated with English. In tying the meanings of these languages together, the presence of both is legitimated. Furthermore, the needs of authenticity are met. For, by being bilingual, the leaders are able to show their ability to control the imagining of the nation. They are able to take the necessary risks, opening Singapore up to the world and positioning Singapore in the world, while at the same time protecting its identity as an Asian nation.

One of the most accessible places to see this discursive construction of language ideologies is in government leaders' speeches as published in the main English-language newspaper, The Straits Times (hereafter ST). In many ways the mass media construct the audience for government leaders. Leaders are always aware (and ensure through press releases) that their speeches will appear in the mass media. As an English-language paper, the ST is particularly important in this respect; it has the widest circulation and is read by all ethnic communities (unlike the ethnic-specific Tamil, Mandarin and Malay papers). And it is from such speeches that citizens, business and community leaders, and ministries take their cue for subsequent action and thought. Thus in order to understand the ways in which this global-local tension is set up and the ways the leaders have attempted to resolve it, I will focus on key speeches given by government leaders, and as published in the mass daily press, the ST. Because language and educational policies are virtually synonymous in Singapore, this analysis will also consider the implementation of language policy and ideology in the schools, and how the schools too are implicated in the imagining of the nation.

By examining the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation in Singapore, we will thus be able to understand how and why Singapore has been imagined the way it has. We will be able to understand some of the paradoxes that are evident in this imagining. For example, we will begin to understand the paradoxically simultaneous launching of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, aimed to promote the presence and strength of Mandarin within the Chinese community, and the closing of Chinese-medium Nanyang (also known as
will begin to understand the apparent contradiction in the conversion of all schools to English medium, when at the same time the government launched into an extensive outcry against the influences of decadence brought into Singapore through the English language. And we will begin to understand the ironic promotion of Asian values and condemnation of Westernisation by leaders who are among the most Westernised of all in Singapore, and many of whom have only a very rudimentary grasp of Mandarin.

Secondly, this study of Singapore will suggest ways in which we can understand the relationship between language and the nationalist agenda in general. In particular, we will begin to see the relationship as discursive, bonded together by shared ideology, operating within the same discourses in the imagining of the nation. Finally, this study of Singapore will suggest how we might use discourse analysis as a means by which to explore the process of the relationship between language and the nation. The particular choice of syntax, argumentation structure, of voices and genre and other grammatical and narrative features of a text are all important elements in understanding and seeing the discursive construction of ideology. It is hoped that this study will encourage similar studies of the imagining of the nation in other contexts. The aim of such comparative studies would not be to look for generalisations, but rather, to account for differences and to explore the dynamism of the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation as it exists in the world.

In this introductory chapter, I will attempt to explore some of these preliminary questions in greater detail, as well as to lay out some of the theoretical premises of this thesis. I will first situate this discussion historically in the eighteenth-century French Revolution and German Romanticism. This period’s legacy comes in two ways. In the first place, it was this period that popularised the formulation “one language = one nation”. This equation continues to dominate nationalist concerns around the world, even in post-colonial multilingual contexts. This is not to say that such nations necessarily hold the “one language = one nation” model as their goal. However, it often does provide them with a basis from which to legitimise their particular language policies and language ideologies. Most notably, in such contexts multilingualism tends to be constructed as a problem to be solved in order to accomplish nation building.
This takes me to the second aspect of the period’s legacy. It was also this period that most explicitly used language ideologies to bring forward the ideals of nationalism and nationhood. The legacy here is thus the relationship itself and the notion that language ideologies can further the ideals of nationalism, rather than particular characteristics of the relationship. What is important in understanding this legacy is to note that, while leaders around the world often use the “one language = one nation” equation to problematise language diversity, they most often go further to use language ideologies to “solve” the “problem”. Most often, the language ideologies they develop concur in significant ways with their particular view of the nation. This second focus thus takes us beyond a functionalist problem-solving analysis to one that considers how leaders actively construct their own view of language and of nationhood, and of the relationship between the two.

In general terms, the literature on the subject falls into two broad categories – categories that loosely follow the demarcation of this two-pronged legacy. The first is the sociology of language approach pioneered by Joshua Fishman (1968a; 1972a,b; et al., 1968). This approach tends to focus on the spread of the “one language = one nation” formulation and the problems it causes for (mostly) post-colonial nations whose multilingual situations are the antithesis of the “one language = one nation” model. The second is the more recent work done by anthropologists taking a political and economic approach with a focus on ideology. It is the analyses provided by this second group that allows us to begin to think of the ideological dynamism of the relationship between language and nationalism.

This discussion will take us to the next three sections where I attempt to unpack some of the issues raised and establish the framework that will guide my discussion about nationalism and language. The purpose of these sections is to see the relationship between the two as ideological and discursive, grounded in socio-historical and political specificity. In order to flesh out some of the questions addressed in this discussion, and in order to set the stage for this thesis, I will then look more closely at the question of language and nationalism in Singapore. After providing a “bird’s eye” view of Singapore’s complex linguistic landscape, I move on to talk about how the relationship between language and the
nation in Singapore has been discussed in the literature, and about what questions have been raised and what questions remain. Having outlined the key theoretical premises and questions that will guide my discussions in this thesis, I will close this chapter with a brief synopsis of how I will develop these themes and attempt to answer these questions.

1.2 Nationalism and Language: Grégoire’s and Herder’s Legacy

1.2.1 The Legacy

According to Edwards (1985), for any student of language and nationalism, the period of the French Revolution and German Romanticism is an “essential chapter in the history of the topic”. Indeed, most serious scholars do start with this period, and provide a detailed analysis of Grégoire’s (1750-1831) and Herder’s (1744-1803) views of language and how those views interacted with their views about the nation (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Barnard, 1965, 1969; Gellner, 1983; Grillo, 1989; Hobsbawm, 1992; Scaglione, 1984; A. Smith, 1971, 1973). Take for example Fishman’s formulation: “Language equals nationality and nationality equals language; the slogan reverberates far beyond its initially European boundaries” (1972b:48). Similarly, Anderson explains the purpose of his focus on the period this way: “I will be trying to argue”, he says, “that the creation of these artefacts [nationalism, nationality, etc.] towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became ‘modular,’ capable of being transplanted... to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations” (1991:4). Grillo (1989) talks about how Herder’s views of “barbarous speech, barbarous language” continue to inform language and social differentiation in Britain and France today. And in his analysis of language policy in Nigeria, Akinnaso (1989) concludes: “With nearly four hundred indigenous languages, a powerful colonial language and two other exogenous languages, and a pervasive pidgin that is being creolised in some parts of the country, Nigeria’s language policy will remain a very far
cry from ‘one nation, one language’” (1989:146). Such arguments are not uncommon in the post-colonial world. This is not to say that “one nation, one language” was ever the goal of such nations (McKay and Wong, 1988). However, such a model is frequently held as the “ideal type” and a way to both problematise language diversity and to legitimise post-colonial language policy.

However, I want to take the legacy left by revolutionaries and philosophers such as Grégoire and Herder and their contemporaries further. What I see as their particularly potent legacy is the way in which they discursively brought together language and the nation. It was the way or, using Anderson’s (1991) words, the style by which they “imagined” the nation, rather than just the particular image, that is their inspiration and legacy. Glyn Williams suggests this aspect of the eighteenth century’s legacy when he makes it his goal to “make explicit the inherent logic which holds statements about language and society together in a ‘taken for granted’ manner” (1992:1; see also Crowley, 1996). Although they expressed different views about the nation and about language, and although German Romanticism reacted quite strongly against the rationality of the French Revolution, both movements brought together their particular views about the nation and about language. This is their legacy. It is in this sense that I take Edwards’ comment that:

The linkage of language with identity and with nation is in large part a product of the German Romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries... It was in German Romanticism that the notion of a Volk and the almost mystical connection between nation and language were expounded so fervently in modern times (1985:23,13-14).

In the same way, nationalist and government leaders and linguists around the world today bring language and the nation together, and use this relationship to bring forward their notion of an “ideal” nation. Thus, in addition to looking at how specific eighteenth-century ideas about this relationship have continued to characterise much of the rhetoric about language in the imagining of the nation, I also want to consider the use of language within the nationalist agenda as a way to imagine the nation. And so, it is with these two foci that I wish to consider the legacy of the eighteenth century.
Speaking of the French Enlightenment, Glyn Williams (1992) notes how its philosophers imagined the nation in terms of egalitarianism, democracy, and a rationality fostered by universal education. In their view, the state could eliminate any factors that might hinder progress, such as ignorance, inequality, economic exploitation and religious superstition. The state was thus the custodian and guarantor of social cohesion and harmony. The philosophers saw language as a central feature of this social order and internal cohesion. In part, there were pragmatic considerations. As Grillo puts it: "This is not to accept the Revolutionary premise that a nation must inevitably have a single, common, national language. But the problem of political unity posed by the end of the monarchy had to be solved, and the concept of the nation as unified, homogeneous, socially, culturally and linguistically, provided one way of solving it" (1989:42). Furthermore, the choice of monolingualism was linked to considerations of how to best spread the Revolution's ideals. The revolutionaries eventually opted for monolingualism on the grounds that it would best facilitate equal access to the benefits of the Revolution.

The ideologies that emerged about the French language were linked in substantive ways to the Revolutionary values, and ultimately served to legitimise the Revolution's language policies (Higonet, 1980). This was particularly evident in the views put forward by Grégoire, especially in his 1794 report to the National Convention on "The need and the means to eradicate the patois and to universalise the use of the French language". In his report, he argued that: "Unity of language is an integral part of the Revolution. If we are ever to banish superstition and bring men closer to the truth, to develop talent and encourage virtue, to mould all citizens into a national whole, to simplify the mechanism of the political machine and make it function smoothly, we must have a common language" (cited in Grillo, 1989:24). He considered the existence of a multitude of languages as a hindrance to the free flow of communication, and to social cohesion and political efficiency. These were the keys to national development. As such, a single language of reason was necessary to consolidate the state. All other languages spoken within the state must be subordinated to the interests of the language of reason (i.e., language of the state). Language was seen by the revolutionaries as a method: "To reform language, to purge it of the usages linked to the old society and impose it in its
purified form, was to impose a thought that would itself be purged and purified" (Bourdieu, 1991:47).

That common language was to be French. The Revolutionaries latched on to an increasingly popular view concerning the "myth of the clarity of French" (Swiggers, 1990:114), captured in Rivarol’s (1784) phrase: "Ce qui n’est pas clair n’est pas français". French was presented as the ideal and only language by which everyone could have equal access to education, and ultimately, enlightenment. French would facilitate political instruction, knowledge of the law, communication, and commerce. Intellectual, political and moral improvement would all come from speaking the common national language. Of course, as Bourdieu argues in his 1980 essay *The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language* (1991:43-65), it is important to note as well that members of the upper class had everything to gain from the policy of linguistic unification. Such a policy would favour those who already had the language in their repertoire and disadvantage those who did not. In effect, then, the policy gave the upper class a *de facto* monopoly of political power.

As in the French Revolution, language was central to the ideology of eighteenth-century German Romanticism. Johann G. Herder and his contemporaries (e.g., Johann Fichte and Ernst Arndt) believed that the progress of civilisation depended upon the accumulation of knowledge. In line with such thinking, language was seen to be a collective depository of the experience and knowledge of past generations; language was a representation of the collective memory of its speakers. Language was thus seen to be the centre of knowledge about the world in that it conditions and sets limits on thought: "Each nation speaks in the manner it thinks and thinks in the manner it speaks" (in Barnard, 1965:56).

These views led such philosophers to argue for language as the primary means by which to create nationhood and to establish a group’s identity as a homogenous unity. "Has a nationality anything dearer than the speech of its fathers?" Herder once asked (1783). He goes on to say, "In its speech resides its whole thought domain, its tradition, history, religion and basis of life, all its heart and soul... With language is created the heart of a people" (cited in Fishman, 1972:1). Speaking of Herder’s views, Glyn Williams says, “Language creates or helps to create representation of the world, something that is impossible without language... Similarly, language constitutes the people and is thereby the basis of collective identity, but the
language also creates the nation and the nation is identified with the language” (1992:31). Those sharing a particular historical tradition grounded in language were identified by Herder as a Volk or nationality. Out of such views come Herder’s often-quoted statements: “Without its own language, a Volk is an absurdity, a contradiction in terms” (cited in Barnard, 1965:57).

Embedded in the “one language, one people, one nation” formulation was the tendency to treat language as a feature of social order and internal cohesion (G. Williams, 1992). Herder, for example, assumed that a higher measure of social cohesion would result from the conscious and deliberate fostering of a common language. Not only did language constitute the people and thereby become the basis of collective identity; language also creates the nation. That is, Herder believed that ignorance, inequality, and economic exploitation were stalling the progress of his contemporary civilisation. The way to alleviate such hindrances was through fostering a common linguistic medium. To this end, in 1787, Herder established the “Institute of German National Enlightenment”, to explicitly further economic and social progress through language.

What we see in both the French Revolution and German Romanticism, then, is a very strong sense of the ways in which language can be implicated in and can implicate the imagining of the nation. During this period, language and the nation were ideologically linked in very important ways such that the former embodied the essence of the latter. This view of course creates tension when applied to multilingual nations, where the notion of one language embodying the essence of nationhood is virtually untenable. The result is that multilingualism tends to be problematised. What becomes of interest then is how individual nations attempt to “solve” this “problem” of multilingualism, and how they legitimise their decisions about language. Language ideological debates play a central role in this legitimisation process and in the process of attempting to imagine a nation other than (but not necessarily divorced from) the “one language = one nation” model.

1.2.2 Ways to Understand this Legacy

The literature dealing with these various aspects of the eighteenth-century’s legacy is huge, and certainly cannot be covered in total here. Very loosely, it can be divided into two
broad camps: the first, what I call the "Fishman-type" sociology of language; and the second, more recent attempts to take a political economic approach with a focus on ideology. In my discussion of this literature, it will become apparent that the latter approach provides much greater possibilities for understanding the ideological dynamism of this relationship between language and nationalism and as it operates within various socio-economic and political contexts. Not only does this section suggest how we may understand the eighteenth-century's legacy, but it also foregrounds my later discussion in this chapter about the "worldliness" of language (section 1.4).

Fishman and his colleagues were among the first to systematically consider the relationship between language and the nationalist agenda. Their particular focus was on attempting to develop broad theoretical frameworks typologies by which to describe the relationship. Fishman's (1972b) analysis of Language and Nationalism, his edited volume on Advances in the Sociology of Language (1972a), and his earlier collection in 1968 with Ferguson and Das Gupta on Language Problems of Developing Nations are particularly important in this respect. In the latter volume, Kloss devotes a chapter to the notion of a "language-nation typology" (1968:69-85); Rustow attempts to develop a typology for "language, modernisation and nationhood" (1968:87-105); and Fishman develops a contrastive model (which has been difficult to substantiate) to define "linguistically homogeneous and linguistically heterogeneous polities" (1968:53-68; see also Pool, 1972:213-230). In each of these, there is an attempt to find universals in the relationship between language and nationalism around the world and through time, most often noting the spread of (in Anderson's words, 1991) a "modular-type".

While this approach has laid important groundwork for research on the topic, the search for generalisations has unfortunately resulted in a lack of focus on the historical, social, political and economic contexts within which the relationship between language and nationalism operates. Hroch goes as far as to say it is "conceptual confusion" to focus just on the spread of the ideas of 'nationalism' when considering the nation-building process in Europe (or elsewhere). For, he argues, "the diffusion of national ideas could only occur in specific social settings" (1993:4). That is to say, there needs to be a consideration of the real material circumstances within which "nationalism" is defined and
enacted. The analyses offered by Fishman and his colleagues are thus useful mostly for their generalised *descriptive* analysis, while their explanatory contribution remains weak.

Perhaps even more importantly, this search for descriptive generalised typologies has resulted in a lack of focus on ideology. This is evident in two ways. In the first place, language tends to be seen as a "symbol" of nationalism or nation-ness. For example, Fishman talks about how a national language is frequently invoked (along with a national flag, a national ruler, a national mission, etc.) "as a unifying symbol" (1968a:6). Jernudd and Das Gupta (1971) repeat this theme in their analysis, arguing that a national language is more than its functional purposes for government and education. It is the symbol of people's identity as citizens of that nation (see also Haugen, 1966b). Kedourie takes a similar view of language as it relates to nationalism: "Language is the external and visible badge of those differences which distinguish one nation from another" (1966:64). Glynn Williams' (1992) critique of functionalism can be applied here as well. That is, the notion of language as "symbol" is problematic in that it suggests a functionalist tendency to see language as a mirror of society. As Anderson also rightly points out, "It is always a mistake to treat languages in the way that certain nationalist ideologues treat them - as *emblems* of nation-ness, like flags, costumes, folk-dances, and the rest. Much the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect particular solidarities" (emphasis mine; 1991:133).

Secondly, the lack of focus on ideology has tended to limit the scope of analysis to the functionalist concerns of language planning with respect to the establishment of the national language, especially in multilingual nations. This may be, using Kloss's (1969) categorisation, either "status planning" (the allocation of languages/varieties to given functions such as medium of instruction, official language, the medium for the mass media, etc.) or "corpus planning" (coining new terms, reforming spelling, adopting a new scripts, etc.) or both (see also Edwards, 1985; Ferguson, 1970; Gonzalez, 1978; Haugen, 1966a; Nadkarni, 1978; Trudgill, 1983). This focus is evident in many of the contributions to Fishman's 1968 volume by various scholars writing about language problems in specific nations. For the most part, the focus of these chapters was based on a functionalist problem-solving model: on the attempts by leaders of multi-lingual nations to solve the challenges of
multilingualism to the desired implementation of the "one language = one nation" model. Their analysis was primarily concerned with the actions and language-planning decisions of these leaders, with very little discussion about what they thought about language, about language ideologies and about how the ideological construction of language may interact in important ways with the ideological construction of their nation.

However, while important, the functional concerns of language planning in multilingual nations is only part of the story. It is not just language planning decisions (themselves deeply ideological; Bokhorst-Heng, 1998) that need to be considered, but also how the broader spectrum of language ideological debates feature into the imagining of the nation. That is, what is of interest is how language ideologies are used to substantiate the problematisation of language diversity, and how language ideologies are used to further the ideals of the nationalist agenda in that particular nation. Furthermore, this functionalist focus on language planning tends to position the various languages only in relation to the national or official languages, and as a problematic challenge to the successful appointment of these officially recognised languages. Again, while this is important to understanding the challenges facing language planners and nationalist leaders, analyses need to also consider how these other languages and their meanings are positioned within the imagining of the nation. The issues are rarely functional alone; they are more often deeply political and deeply ideological.

In this respect, Fishman’s (1972b) analysis of language and nationalism, and of the impact of nationalism on language planning, brings us slightly forward. In the first section of his book, Fishman identifies recurrent components of nationalism in various nations, signalling out national unity and authenticity ("purity, nobility of the beliefs, values and behaviours that typify the community of reference" 1972b:8) as being the most common. In the second section, where he looks at the impact of nationalism on language and language planning, he returns to these same themes. For instance, he talks about how nationalists went beyond their functional dependence on the vernacular languages to communicate with the masses to identify authenticity with that particular language (1972b:40–44). This authenticity, he says, was largely achieved by presenting a particular language as the link to the "glorious past". He then goes on to talk about how nationalist ideology provides constraints and rationales for language planning. Nationalism, he
argues, defines what is a good or desirable language which language planning intends to bring into being or strengthen.

In his analysis, then, Fishman does draw attention to the ways in which nationalist and language ideologies may interact in important ways in bringing about the desired imagined nation. However, because of his focus on generalisations, one gets the sense that this relationship is somewhat contrived. That is, he looked for universal forms first in the claims of nationalism made in various times and places. He then looked at universal arguments about language in the nationalist agenda in various contexts. Having abstracted both sets of claims from their diverse contexts, he then brings them together to note their points of commonality. In both, he notes, the claims for "unity" and "authenticity" are made. And hence the relationship between language and the nationalist agenda is described and substantiated. However, Fishman’s construction of this relationship was achieved by removing language and nationalism from their contexts and ideological formations, and joining them in some non-material location, rather than noting their interaction and ideological premises within specific conditions. Divorced from its specific social, political, historical and cultural contexts and relations, the relationship is thus stripped of any ideological significance. His analysis is thus limited primarily to an abstract descriptive account, or checklist, of the relationship between language and nationalism, with little to offer by way of explanation. What is missing is a sense of how this relationship operates within real socio-political, economical, and historical circumstances, within the lives of real people. What is missing are the voices of the people, of the leaders, and the struggle that may emerge between these voices. What is missing is a way to explain nationalist models other than one characterised by these generalisations of unity and authenticity. Ultimately, the dynamism of the relationship between language and nationalism seems to slip away from our grasp.

And so, while Fishman’s and his colleagues’ analyses are important to further our understanding of the challenges facing newly-formed multilingual states, much about the ideological dynamism of the relationship between language and nationalism is not considered. Yet, if nationalist leaders use language in their nationalist agenda, surely they must have ideas about what language means. And surely these ideas about language must relate in important ways with their vision and goals for the nationalist agenda. What is of
interest, then, is how language is talked about in the nationalist agenda, and how language ideologies are used in relation to the meanings of nationalism.

To take us further, I turn to the more recent analyses done by those taking a political-economic approach with a focus on ideology (e.g. Blommaert, forthcoming; Crowley, 1996; Gal, 1989, 1995; Grillo, 1989; Heller, 1992, 1994, 1995; Woolard, 1985, 1989, 1992). Such studies go beyond the problem-solving framework seen in the earlier literature to also consider how language ideologies are involved in the construction of ethnic, cultural and national identity. For example, in her analysis of language and ethnicity in Catalan nationalism, Woolard (1989) talks about how language and ethnicity are highly ideological and controversial, playing a critical role in the social and political organisation of Barcelona (Catalonia), as well as in restructuring the post-Franco Spanish state. The central focus of her analysis concerns the values and uses of two languages, Catalan and Castilian, that coexist in the community, and how language is a “major point of contention in the elaboration of new social policies by the Catalan government” (1989:141). Her analysis also explores the possibilities of alternative or oppositional linguistic forms that may emerge in resistance to the dominant or hegemonic form – a focus that was lacking in Fishman’s analysis. Elsewhere (1985) she explicitly calls for the need to connect social theory and sociolinguistics as a way to advance the understanding of hegemonic and oppositional cultural and linguistic practices in the maintenance of social inequality. She centres on the importance of the ideologies of language (which she defines as “beliefs about language that are connected to societal power structures”, 1992:235), and how these ideologies influence the linguistic choices that people make and the material consequences of these choices.

Along the same vein, Heller (1994) considers the relationship between language, ethnicity and power as central to the basic dynamics of Canadian society. She first situates her analysis historically, using her historical account to demonstrate how the increasing importance of the French language in Ontario is directly related to the economic and political importance of French Quebec (1994:32-78). She also traces the evolution of the identity of francophones in Canada. At first, francophones could identify themselves as Canadiens (rather than European). Then their identity became known as Canadiens français (rather than English-speakers, who then identified themselves as Canadians). Today francophone identity also carries a regional
emphasis as in *Franco-Ontarien* and *Ontarois*, while *Canadien* refers to Canadian citizens (although the old meaning remains as well) (1994:79-105). These labels, she argues, "index not only ethnic boundaries, but also the nature of the ideology underlying ethnic mobilisation and ethnic relations" (1994:24). Underlying each of these is the theme of nationalism; their difference is in the way that national identity is conceived. And the ways of conceiving national identity are wrapped up in debates about language rights and about the nature and future of Canada. While language is generally used to appeal to the notion of national unity, people have different ideas about what this means. Some will argue that this unity is best achieved through bilingualism. Others see English monolingualism as the ideal way to unity. They believe that English is neutral, giving all equal access to full participation in Canadian society. However, many francophones do not see English as neutral at all, and do not see bilingualism as tenable. They argue instead for the establishment of Quebec as a nation-state where French is the hegemonic language and the path to socio-economic success. In each of these views, then, language and language ideologies are intricately tied up with the ideology of the nation.

Looking specifically at Ontario, Heller argues that language is a contested terrain from two perspectives. First, using Bourdieu's (1977, 1982) notion of "linguistic capital", she talks about how language affects one's chances of getting access to situations where valuable resources are produced and distributed (1994:94-98). In the process, language acquires a value of its own, and becomes a source of power and prestige. By looking at French and English as valuable resources, she argues, it is possible to examine the socio-economic and political underpinnings of the debates over language and nationhood. Second, she looks at language as an ethnic emblem, as a badge of ethnic identity that serves to regulate the nature of ethnic boundaries (1994:98-102). In the rest of her analysis, she uses ethnographic data of French schools in Toronto to look specifically at the role schools have played in maintaining minority languages (especially French) and the way students and parents use schools to gain access to bi-/multi-lingualism (1994:106-178; see also 1995). In so doing, she demonstrates the ways in which issues of language and nationalism are highly ideological and grounded in socio-economic and political relations.

In these political-economic analyses, the focus is very much on the material circumstances within which language exists, and the way language ideologies make language a
potent location wherein power and identity struggles are enacted. They consider the language choices that people make in their everyday interactions, and the reasons for and consequences of these choices. While my work will focus more on the ideological construction of language within the nationalist agenda as seen in political discourse (rather than based on ethnographic data), these analyses are significant in suggesting ways to focus on ideology as the basis for the relationship of language and the nation. They demonstrated very powerfully the way governments have brought together language and their desired image of the nation, and the way this relationship has influenced, in very real ways, the everyday lives of people and the language choices they make. What this focus on ideology, on the struggles over meaning, and on issues of power relations all begin to suggest is that we might consider the relationship between language and the nation as one of discourse. To take us closer to this notion of discourse, I turn to Blommaert's (1996) analysis of language and nationalism in Flanders and Tanzania.

Blommaert begins his discussion in much the same way that we have seen before, with a note about the influence of the eighteenth century on nationalist movements:

It is a well-known fact that language serves a crucial function in many nationalist movements. It is often given a central role in the ascription and definition of national or ethnic identities through the classic Herderian association between a language and the 'spirit' of a people, and language issues may constitute an important battlefield of nationalist struggle. Furthermore, governments or nationalist movements may introduce an (explicit or implicit) language policy as part of their nation-building ambitions. The language(s) thus officially promoted may serve as an instrument for giving the nation its desired shape. Often this shape is homogeneous: one language, one people, one nation... (1996:236)

He then goes on to note instances where this homogeneous shape is challenged by circumstances of language diversity. However, Blommaert goes further than just the problem solving approach that we saw earlier. Instead, he goes on to talk about the constructive ideological underpinnings of the relationship: “The study of how language becomes an ingredient of nationalism, and the way in which it articulates and sustains nationalist claims, may be an important contribution to the revival of nationalism studies” (1996:236). More specifically, “The way in which language is symbolised may cohere with the general set-up of
the particular nationalism; its ideological construction may be guided by similar underlying assumptions, viewpoints and visions of the desired 'ideal society' which nationalists are trying to build” (1996:236). He argues for more refined ways of distinguishing between various types of nationalisms (plural), rather than seeing nationalism (singular) as a unique and universal aspect of social and political organisations (see also Hroch, 1992). The issue of language, he suggests, may offer potentially interesting inroads into the ideological structure of different nationalisms.

Blommaert demonstrates his argument with a brief analysis of nationalism in Flanders and Tanzania. While both Flemish and Tanzanian nationalisms placed an emphasis on the central role of language in attaining nationalist goals, he found some important differences: the former embraced a form of ethnic nationalism, while the latter developed a socialist state nationalism. The Flemish view of language is predominantly ethnic. The Dutch language is seen as an inalienable marker of identity, shared with the Dutch people, and distinguishing them from the Walloon Belgians. Language is also seen to be closely associated with the territory on which it is spoken. The result is a homogeneistic and assimilationist attitude towards speakers of other languages on Flemish territory. In Ujamaa’s Tanzania, Swahili was seen as the instrument for attaining a socialist political-ideological hegemonisation of the state. Swahili was chosen not for cultural reasons but because, the argument goes, it allowed for egalitarian, socialist connotations. Blommaert thus clearly departs from any focus on generalisations, and instead attempts to understand how this relationship between language and the nation is forged in specific social, historical, and political circumstances, with a focus on ideology.

In the next three sections, I will lay out in more detail how we might understand the notions of nationalism and language and their relationship. The ultimate goal of these sections is to position the discursive interaction between language ideologies and the ideological construction of the imagined community (the imagining of the nation) as the central framework for this thesis. When speaking of language ideologies, I concur with Blommaert who defines the term as “the set of socially anchored (and politically embedded) ideas, perceptions and beliefs about language-in-society” (1997:11). This emphasis on discourse centres on the dynamism of the relationship, and allows for ways to talk about the construction of this relationship, and to account for variation in the way this relationship forms in particular
moments. It also allows for voices of opposition, and for an analysis that considers how these voices also contribute to the imagining of the nation.

1.3 The Nation: The Imagined Community

Almost all studies of nationalism begin with comments about the notorious difficulty in defining the terms of nation, nationality, nationalism, and so forth. Already in the late nineteenth century, Walter Bagehot (1887) wrote: "We know what it is when you do not ask us, but we cannot very quickly explain or define it" (cited in Hobsbawm, 1992:1). Hugh Seton-Watson, who has been acclaimed for producing the most comprehensive work on nationalism, observes: "Thus I am driven to the conclusion that no 'scientific definition' of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists" (1977:5; see also Breuilly, 1985:65). Ironically, many of them then go on to either provide a new definition or select one definition to be used in their own analysis. However, it is not particularly clear to me what can be gained by attempting to arrive at some kind of conclusive definition. What is more interesting is how and why specific views of the nation have emerged at particular historical moments. Thus, what is required is a more dynamic view of the nation than any one definition could accord.

In this respect, Hobsbawm's suggestion to begin with the concept of "the nation" (i.e., with nationalism) rather than with "the reality it represents" is more useful. He goes on to elaborate: "Concepts, of course, are not part of free-floating philosophical discourse, but socially, historically and locally rooted, and must be explained in terms of these realities" (1992:9). He aligns himself with Gellner (1983) in stressing the "element of artefact, invention and social engineering which enters into the making of nations". Quoting from Gellner (1983:48-49), he says, "Nations as a natural God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent... political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality" (1992:10).

Although I will be talking more about language in a moment, it is useful to see how Hobsbawm carries this view of ambiguity and myth to his discussion of language as well.
“Moreover”, he says, “the criteria used for this purpose - language, ethnicity or whatever - are themselves fuzzy, shifting and ambiguous, and as useless for purposes of the traveller’s orientation as cloud-shapes are compared to landmarks” (1992:6). From this he concludes that: “National languages are therefore almost always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally, like modern Hebrew, virtually invented. They are the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind” (1992:54). Elsewhere he states: “the mystical identification of nationality with a sort of platonic idea of the language, existing behind and above all its variant and imperfect versions, is much more characteristic of the ideological construction of nationalist intellectuals, of whom Herder is the prophet, than of the actual grassroots users of the idiom. It is a literary and not an existential concept” (1992:57).

The potency of his argument comes in his discussion of how these ambiguous criteria become “unusually convenient for propagandist and programic [sic]” purposes (1992:6). What Hobsbawm is suggesting is a focus on the way these criteria have been used, and how meaning has been constructed by national leaders to further their nationalist endeavours. This view allows us to locate language within its social, political, historical and cultural contexts, and to think about how these contexts interact with language and nationalist ideologies. Because the meanings of nation/nationalism and their criteria are continually shifting, it is possible to begin to think about issues of power relations, and of negotiations of meaning with respect to the place of language in the nationalist agenda, and about how such meanings stick.

However, some of the possibilities in Hobsbawm’s analysis dissolve when he turns his questions into a discussion about the “myth” of nationalism, and about the falsity/genuineness of the claims of nationalism. This is evident in his account of the Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka. He quotes from the Sri Lankan nationalist party Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (1951, cited in Kearney, 1985:904):

The Tamil-speaking people in Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of the Singalese [sic] by every fundamental test of nationhood, firstly that of a separate historical past in the island at least as ancient and as glorious as that of the Singalese [sic], secondly by the fact of their being a linguistic entity entirely different from that of the Sinhalese, with an unsurpassed classical heritage and a modern development of language which makes Tamil fully adequate for all
Hobsbawm comments on this passage: “The purpose of this passage is clear: it is to demand autonomy or independence for an area described as ‘over one third of the island’ of Sri Lanka, on grounds of Tamil nationalism. Nothing else about it is as it seems” (1992:7). He goes on to talk about how diverse the region really is, about the Sinhalese who refused to consider themselves national Tamils and preferred identification as Muslims, and so on. Like Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm seems to be preoccupied with the “myth” or untruth of the claims of nationalists. Gellner puts forward the view that “Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all not what it seems to itself. The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions” (1983:56). Elsewhere Gellner puts it this way: “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist” (1964:169). Hobsbawm similarly says more than once that nationalism is mostly a matter of reaction and resentment, a response to imperial domination, foreign threat, or immigrant pressure. However, as Fishman already noted in his 1972 essay, there is nothing really new about the fact that the claims of nationalism, or indeed any other political discourse, are often removed from “reality” (whatever that may be). What is more interesting is why these claims, true or otherwise, are constructed, and how they are believed.

To take us further, I turn to Benedict Anderson’s (1991) analysis of the origin and spread of nationalism. Like Hobsbawm, Anderson departs from any attempt to define nations and instead brings forward the notion of “imagined communities”. His use of “imagined” is significantly different from that mentioned earlier. Gellner and Hobsbawm used the notion of “imagining” and “invention” to stress how nationalism masquerades under false pretences. In this sense, they assimilate “invention” to “fabrication” and “falsity”. Anderson deliberately separates himself from this view and says the issue is not with the falsity/genuineness of communities, but rather, with “the style in which they are imagined” (1991:6). Imagining is thus a creative force, a will to being. He sees nationalism (and nation, nationality, etc.) as particular kinds of “cultural artefacts”. In order to understand them, he says, “we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meaning has changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy.”
Nationalism needs to be seen as dynamic and historically grounded. The nation, he says, is "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (1991:6). He then goes on to unpack this definition.

In the first place, the nation is imagined because the members (even of the smallest nation) will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them. Yet, in the minds of each person lives the image of their communion, their shared membership. Second, the nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them has "finite, if elastic, boundaries beyond which lie other nations" (1991:7). As he further notes, "no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind." Third, the nation is imagined as sovereign. The gage and emblem of the nation is its freedom, in contrast to the former legitimacy of the divinely ordained hierarchical dynastic realm that the Enlightenment and Revolution destroyed. And finally, nations are imagined as community because, regardless of the actual inequalities and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation "is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (1991:7). Anderson's focus is thus on the ambivalent emergence of nationalism:

The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness... [Few] things were (are) suited to this end better than the idea of nation. If nation states are widely considered to be "new" and "historical", the nation states to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and... glide into a limitless future. What I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which - as well as against which - it came into being. (1991:11-12)

It is not clear to me how political ideologies can be separated from cultural systems. Neither is it clear how one can ignore the self-consciously held political ideologies that inform the imagining of the nation. However, it is Anderson's idea of "imagined communities" that propels me forward.

In talking of the imagining of nations, I want the term to convey a number of meanings. First, I take this to mean that nation-ness is an on-going process. Nationalists around the world like to talk about "nation-building" with the connotation of a completable project. Yet, in a contradictory way, this "completable" project is always future oriented. For example, in Singapore, the government frequently refers to an "emerging national identity" or
the need to forge such an identity. This view has been incorporated into much of the literature on the topic as well. Gopinathan (1977) talks about an “evolving political identity”; Chan Heng Chee (1972) talks about the need to “create a national identity” as one of the key aims of “nation-building” (see also Kuo, 1976; 1980a,b; Kuo and Jernudd, 1994). While acknowledging the necessary focus that is placed on national identity after a period of colonialism, it is still nonetheless unsatisfactory to talk about the need to forge a national identity as lying in the future. Neither can nations be built; they are, in fact, incompletable. By this I do not mean that nations never have an identity. Indeed, just as Clammer (1985) argues the anthropological impossibility of having to create a “Singapore culture”, so too it is impossible for a nation not to have an identity. Rather, what is of interest is how this identity is understood, how it is projected, and how it changes, and the place that language has in all of this. Chua and Kuo’s comment allows us to think further when they say: “the history of Singaporean culture and identity is... characterised by a state of fluidity, one may even say discontinuities, which reflects the changing conditions, rather than one of constant and consistent unfolding from some naturally given characteristics” (1991:4).

Such is the imagining of the nation.

Second, in contrast to Gellner and Hobsbawm who assimilated the term “imagined” to “fabrication” and “falsity”, I take the term to emphasise the creative process of nation-ness. Third, I also take the imagining of nations to focus on the social, historical, political, and cultural location of nation-ness. Thus I am not in search of ideal “modular-types” (Anderson, 1991), but rather, the formation and meaning of nation-ness within real material moments. Imagination does not occur within a vacuum, but rather draws on materiality. Fourth, I want this “imagining” to suggest an organisation of knowledge. While grounded in materiality, what is important is how this materiality is presented, organised, imagined so as to direct our understanding of our world and “nation” and “nation-ness”. Finally, this imagining suggests that the meanings of nation-ness are open to contestation and to power struggles. I will be using this multiple metaphor throughout this thesis to guide my analysis of the position of language within the nationalist agenda. For it is (among other ways) through language and through language ideologies that the nation is imagined.
Although historically various institutions have been tied into the imagining of the nation (see Figure 3.1, Chapter 3), education and the mass daily press have played particularly dominant roles in this respect. As I already noted in my discussion of the French Revolution (section 1.2), the nineteenth century reformers in France believed in the power of education to reform society and to construct the nation. Rather than have them controlled by religious institutions, they felt that “éducation nationale” must be directed and reinforced by the powers of the state. For, it was the state that directed the nation-building process and could thus align education with the nation’s nationalist objectives (Hobsbawm, 1992; Mitter, 1993; Palmer, 1985). Similarly, as I will discuss in greater length in Chapter Two, print capitalism (of which the mass daily press is the principal manifestation) played a key role in disseminating the ideas of the revolution and in allowing the conditions to develop whereby the people could begin to think of themselves in nationalist terms (Anderson, 1991; Febvre and Martin, 1976).

Education and the newspaper were also crucial to the ideals of the American Revolution (1775-1781). Curti (1946) noted that in the era from the end of the civil war to the First World War, there were numerous new agencies of popularisation: the expansion of cheap newspapers and the cheap magazine,\(^1\) the multiplication of schools and libraries, and the vogue of the dime novel, which, he said, “devoted generous attention to patriotism”. All of these, he argued, “brought to the people in great force the arguments, values, sentiments, and ideas associated with antebellum discussions of national loyalty” (Curti, 1946:173-174). One member of a “Voice of America” forum discussion celebrating the centennial of the Revolution noted that, “Without a free press, it is doubtful whether there could have been an American Revolution. The Revolution didn’t just happen; preachers, pamphleteers and journalists were generating – and publishing – revolutionary ideas for many years” (1976:139; see also Febvre and Martin, 1958). Concerning education, Wiggin asserted that, since the writing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, “Education has been built into the life style of Americans... The emergence of the new national state in 1776 gave a new role to the schools in America”

\(^1\) While there were 37 newspapers at the start of the war, by 1790 there were 90, as well as novels and other forms of literature. M. Curti, The Roots of American Loyalty (New York: Russell & Russell, 1946).
While pre-Independence education had been mostly concerned about moral character, the writers of the Declaration viewed education as the principal means by which to produce citizens dedicated in common to a sense of nationhood and an American identity. The period also saw Webster’s Americanisation of the English language and the publication of new textbooks to help define a national identity (Lipset, 1963; Ward, 1995). Thus we can see that the implication of the mass daily press and education in the imagining of the nation has its roots in a long history. As this thesis will show, these institutions have had a similar powerful presence in the imagining of Singapore.

1.4 The “Worldliness” of Language

Like I noted earlier in my discussion of Fishman and his colleagues, discussions of language and the nationalist agenda often are preoccupied with the “national language question” and functionalist issues of language planning. Yet, in order to understand why language is so important to the nationalist agenda, it is necessary to ask the question of “what is language?” Of course, this question could be a dissertation in and of itself, and the literature is voluminous. My purpose here is to build on my earlier discussion of the contributions by those writing within a political-economic framework to detail some of the initial theoretical assumptions about language that will inform the following discussions in this thesis. As a first step, I want to establish a clear departure from any view of language as being a “symbol” of nationalism or nation-ness. Neither am I interested in a discussion about the falsity/genuineness of national languages as in Hobsbawn’s (1992) analysis. Hobsbawn talks about how national languages are usually “semi-artificial constructs” or even invented, rather than the natural foundation of national culture. Instead, what I am interested in is a focus on the ideological meanings of language, on language as discourse within the imagining of the nation. This is not to say Hobsbawn’s analysis is not relevant. Indeed, most often ideology is tied into such invention in significant ways. However, rather than seeing national languages in terms of their falsity/genuineness, I want to see how these languages are understood, the ideological meanings of these languages and how this ideology implicates language in the imagining of the nation. As such, it is necessary to consider the location of
language within its historical, political, cultural, and social relations – or, in Pennycook’s (1992,1994a) words, to view the “worldliness” of language (based on Said, 1983).

Pennycook’s notion of the “worldliness” of language suggests that language is located in the world and that “it is impossible to deal usefully with language outside its social, cultural, historical, economic or political contexts” (1992:24). It also refers to a sense in which the world is in language. That is, “In the same way that we talk about someone being ‘worldly,’ language is affected by its material presence.” Finally, this worldliness suggests “both a constituted and constitutive role in the world: it is not merely a passive presence, nor just a language acted upon by its material circumstances, but also an active agent” in its material circumstances. This view of language takes us far beyond the view of language as symbolic of nationalism or nation-ness, and certainly goes beyond a discussion of the falsity/genuiness of national languages. Rather, language becomes a participant in the imagining of the nation. Using LePage and Tabouret-Keller’s (1985) terms, language is itself “a continually creative process”. It is an “act of identity”, a will to community, rather than a symbolic expression of a community. However, this does not mean complete autonomy. As Pennycook (1992:27) also argues, this “worldliness” of language and notion of “acts of identity” does not imply a “voluntaristic conception of language acts in which individuals freely do and say as they please.” Rather, it is important to understand the discursive constraints on language use and on the meanings of language.

To develop these ideas further, it is instructive to consider the views put forward by Bakhtin (1981; Volosinov, 1973)² (views which also influenced Pennycook’s notion of “worldliness”) and Bourdieu (1991; see also Crowley, 1996:20-53). Although they take slightly different approaches, both developed their ideas in response to the misadventures of structuralism, particularly seen in the work and ideas of Saussure and (for Bourdieu) Chomsky. And both called for the need to see language as ideological, grounded in social-historical processes and central to relations of power. This discussion is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of their complex theoretical frameworks; nor is it meant to compare the

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² Some have speculated that Volosinov was in fact the pen name of Bakhtin. Thus, I will refer only to Bakhtin; however in my references, I will use the authorship assigned by the publishers.
ideas put forward by these two eminent thinkers. While extremely valuable, such activities would be beyond the scope of this thesis. My focus instead will be on extrapolating from their work their insights on language, and on considering how these views contribute to our understanding of language in the imagining of the nation.

Both Bakhtin and Bourdieu gave a trenchant criticism of structural linguistics. Both saw such (in Bakhtin’s words) “abstract objectivism” as being fundamentally erroneous in seeing language as an abstract, homogenous system, removed from its social-historical contexts and ideological formation. According to Bakhtin, “The divorce of language from its ideological impletion is one of abstract objectivism’s most serious errors” (Volosinov, 1973:71). He went on to detail some of the key features of such an abstract view by contrasting it with his own. Abstract objectivism errs in giving precedence to the factor of stable self-identity in linguistic form over their mutability. It gives precedence to the abstract over the concrete, to abstract systematisation over historical actuality, to the forms of elements over the form of the whole, to the reification of isolated linguistic elements over the dynamics of speech, and to the singularisation of word meaning over its living multiplicity of meaning and accent. Abstract objectivism sees language as a ready-made artefact handed down from one generation to another, and thus cannot conceptualise the inner dynamics and generative process of language (1973:77-82). For Bakhtin, then, what is important is an emphasis on the concreteness of language, its historical and social location, its dynamism and the multiplicity of meaning. As Eagleton said of Bakhtin, he “insisted that there was no language which was not caught up in definite social relationships, and that these social relations were in turn part of broader political, ideological and economic systems” (1983:117). The scenario that Bakhtin offers is of two actual people talking to each other in a specific dialogue at a particular time and in a particular place. And it is only in the immediate moment of interaction that meaning is established. In this sense, meaning is always mutable, multiple, dynamic and contestable.

Along the same vein, Bourdieu criticises Saussurian and Chomskyan linguistics for taking a particular language or speech community for granted, when in fact it is the product of a complex set of social, historical and political conditions of formation. Thompson summarises his view this way: “By taking a particular set of linguistic practices as a normative model of correct usage, the linguist produces the illusion of a common language and ignores the social-
historical conditions which have established a particular set of linguistic practices as dominant and legitimate” (1991:5). Bourdieu calls their view of homogenous language speech communities “the illusion of linguistic communism” (1991:43-44).

Both Bourdieu and Bakhtin also stress the importance of class struggle and power relations to linguistic practices. According to Bakhtin, “The forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organisation of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction” (Volosinov, 1973:21). Terdiman elaborates on Bakhtin’s notion of struggle: “A fundamental asymmetry is a primary fact in the world of discourse. Engaged with the realities of power, human communities use words not in contemplation but in competition. Such struggles are never equal ones. The facts of domination, of control, are inscribed in the signs available for use by all members of a social formation” (1985:38). Most significantly, those who have greater power in a dialogic situation attempt to drive inward the multi-accentuality of the sign, and to make it uni-accentual – to make it unitary and in line with their socio-political interests. Bakhtin refers to the way in which the notion of a unitary language emerged as part of the centralising movement of eighteenth-century European nation-building as an example of this link between larger socio-political interests and the centripetal forces working against heteroglossia (1981:271; see also section 1.2.1). Thus any homogeneity that a language might have is not something inherent to language, but always posited according to the interests of those in positions of power.

Issues of power and struggle and the emergence of a dominant form are also important to Bourdieu’s understanding of language. One of the central ideas of Bourdieu’s work is the idea that there are different kinds of capital (1991:66-89). For example, there is “cultural capital” (i.e. knowledge, skills, as exemplified by educational qualifications), “symbolic capital” (accumulated prestige and honour), “linguistic capital” (the capacity to produce expressions à propos for a particular market), to name but a few. One form of capital can be exchanged for another. For example, educational qualifications can be exchanged for lucrative forms of employment. This is particularly important when we think of linguistic capital. Language, he argues, is always used in particular contexts or markets, and the properties of these markets endow language with a certain “value” (1991:43-89). And so, the distribution of linguistic capital relates in important ways to the distribution of other forms of capital, such as economic,
cultural, etc. These, in turn, define the location of an individual within the social structure. The more linguistic capital a person has, the more s/he can take into account the market conditions within which their particular linguistic “products” will be received and valued by others. As such, they can use their linguistic capital for their own advantage (for example, a politician in Singapore using a Chinese dialect at a political rally to win the favour of voters). Thus, in Bourdieu’s account, all linguistic exchanges are “situated encounters between agents endowed with socially structured resources and competencies – in such a way that every linguistic exchange bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce” (Thompson, 1991:2).

Taken together, Bakhtin’s and Bourdieu’s views of language offer important ways to understand why language is important to the imagining of the nation. What I take from this discussion is the emphasis of the materiality of language, its location within social, political, historical and cultural relations. Language is not merely representative of the social, a commentary on social processes. Neither is language merely the sum of its functional attributes. And neither is it homogenous. Rather, what we have instead is a view of language which starts with the struggle over meaning, and which starts with seeing language within its social, historical, political, and ideological contexts. Language is, in Weedon’s words, “the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed” (1987:21). It is, “a grasping of this [material] reality through language... [language is] a dynamic and articulated social presence in the world” (R. Williams, 1977:37). With this understanding of language, we can begin to see the significance of the position of language in the imagining of the nation. Within and through language, the nation is imagined.

It is this discursive interaction between language ideologies and the ideological construction of the imagined community that is the focus of this thesis. In the next section, I will briefly outline how I will use the notion of discourse in this thesis, and how it can contribute to an understanding of the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation.
1.5 Language and Imagining the Nation: A Discursive Relationship

Thus far in my discussion about language and the imagining of the nation, I have been using the term “ideology”. Indeed, the ground between the terms “discourse” and “ideology” is increasingly muddy (Thompson, 1984), and beyond the scope of this discussion. For the most part, I use the terms interchangeably. However, I bring in the notion of “discourse” here for its particular focus on processes, and for its emphasis on texts. The many meanings of discourse have been well described and debated elsewhere (e.g., Hearn, 1990; Macdonell, 1986; Pennycook, 1994b; Scott, 1988; Thompson, 1984; Weedon, 1987). The way that I will use discourse in this thesis is premised on the definition suggested by R. Simon (1992:109): discourses are “frames of reference within which we define, organise, and regulate a particular sense of ourselves and in relation to others and our physical world.” Discourse in this sense is not about language or language use as is more traditionally understood in applied linguistics; but rather, it is about ways of organising meaning that are often (but not always) conceptualised through language, through the articulation of words. Because of how discourses map our world, power struggles also come into play. Quoting from Foucault: “Discourse is not simply that which expresses struggles or systems of domination, but that for which, and by which, one struggles; it is the power which one is striving to seize” (1972:12). Such a view of discourse allows us to understand how meaning is produced “through a range of power/knowledge systems that organise texts, create the conditions of possibility for different language acts, and are embedded in social institutions” (Pennycook, 1994b:128).

Thus discourses are social, constituting the way we live and understand our lives and define meaning about our world. They are particular ways of articulating markers of social meaning. They are located and embedded in the particular dynamics of the moment - a moment which itself has emerged from proceeding moments. They are grounded in materiality. And they are embedded in power/knowledge systems, giving rise to the notion of dominant discourses. Terdiman's definition of dominant discourses is particularly useful, suggesting how particular views of the nation and of the relationship between language and nationalism come to be taken as commonsense. “The dominant discourse is the discourse
whose presence is defined by the social impossibility of its absence”, he argues (1985:61). The power of dominant discourses comes from its commonsenseness, from its claim to be natural, obvious, and therefore true. Natanson put it succinctly in his introduction to Schutz’s *Collected Papers*: “The central and most cunning feature of the taken for granted everyday world is that it is taken for granted” (1973:xxvi).

It is with this understanding of discourse and dominant discourse that I approach the relationship of language and the imagining of the nation. It is how this relationship works to organise social meaning, the emergence of this relationship within real historical, social, economic and political moments, and the dynamism of this relationship that is the focus of this study. As a way to flesh out some of the questions and themes raised in this chapter, and as a way to prepare us for the following discussions in this thesis, in the next two sections, I will turn to language and the nationalist agenda in Singapore. I will first provide the reader with a “bird’s eye” view of Singapore’s linguistic landscape. I will then move on to talk about how the relationship between language and the nation in Singapore has been discussed in the literature. In so doing, I will explore what questions have been raised, and what remain unasked and unanswered concerning the relationship between language and the nation.

1.6 A “Bird’s Eye View” of Singapore’s Linguistic Landscape

Before I describe the linguistic landscape of Singapore, it would be useful to first provide a brief general description of Singapore’s physical, geo-political, and historical features, all of which will be discussed in greater detail at various points in this thesis. The main Singapore island-state and its approximately 60 small islands comprise about 646 square kilometres in area. Immediately surrounding Singapore are Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia to the north, Sabah and Sarawak to the east) and Indonesia to the south. It is linked to Peninsular Malaysia by a causeway, which carries a road, a railway and a water pipeline across the Strait of Johor. From 1819 to 1963 Singapore was a British colony, beginning with the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles and ending when Singapore merged with Malaya to become Malaysia. As we shall see, one of the consequences of the economic boom in the early years of colonial rule was massive immigration from various
parts of the region. Singapore's linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity continue to give testimony to this immigrant history. Unlike many independence movements elsewhere, there was no armed confrontation between the British and Malaysia. Rather, agreement was reached between the Malayan and British governments through a series of negotiations which considered the merger of Malaysia with Singapore. The merger ultimately failed (see Chapter 4), and in 1965, Singapore became a fully independent nation.

The most critical demographic fact of Singapore is that the Chinese, comprising about 77 percent of the population, constitute the dominant majority. However, regionally, the Chinese are very much a minority - a region dominated by Malay and Islamic peoples. Particularly in the early years, Singapore's neighbours were fearful that Singapore would become a "Third China" with Communist tendencies. Singapore has thus had the unenviable task of balancing the interests of the large Chinese community with those of the smaller (especially Malay) communities, while at the same time, remaining sensitive to its geo-political realities. One of the consequences of this balancing act was the development of a policy of multiracialism, whereby the various races are given equal representation in the nation. For example, Group Representation Constituencies (GRC; comprising four members of the same political party) are one way the government ensures the representation in Parliament of members of the Malay, Indian and other minority communities. Each GRC must have at least one candidate belonging to a minority racial community.

The People's Action Party (PAP) has been in power since Independence (elections are held every five years). Lee Kuan Yew was the first Prime Minister of Singapore. Since he passed the leadership on to Goh Chok Tong in 1991, Lee Kuan Yew has held the position of Senior Minister (SM). It is Lee Kuan Yew who has (and largely continues to) primarily shaped the character of the nation and its politics. As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Five, the defining feature of Lee Kuan Yew's vision for the "ideal society" is sustained economic growth. However, having no natural resources, Singapore has developed an economic policy which places great reliance on its free trade status to link the nation up with the regional (ASEAN) and global economies. Given that the
preconditions for sustained economic growth include predictability and social and political stability, the government has made such stability its primary objective. The result has been numerous laws (tourist T-shirts jest that Singapore is a "Fine" city) to shape this "ideal society" — one that is disciplined, rugged, hardworking, respectful of family and government, and loyal to the nation. The result has also been considerable control over information and over the local and foreign press, which will be the topic of Chapter Three.

This very brief discussion foreshadows many of the discussions that will follow in this thesis. What I want to talk about in the rest of this section is specifically Singapore's linguistic landscape and the ways in which this landscape has been described and analysed. Very loosely, the Singapore population of just under three million people comprises three major ethnic groups: 77.5 percent Chinese, 14.2 percent Malays, and 7.1 percent Indians (and 1.2% "Others") (Singapore Facts and Pictures 1996). Linguistically, these three main categories represent incredible heterogeneity. Singaporean comedian Macaw described Singapore's complex linguistic landscape in the opening lines of his sketch "A Bird's Eye View of Singapore:"

_Singapore, as every fool knows, is an island republic of 2,500,000-odd people of every hue and creed, basking in the sun just 1 degree North of the Equator, and basking in the golden glory of being nothing less than an economic miracle... We speak twenty or more languages and dialects... The Singaporean Chinese babbles in Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Shanghainese, Fuchow, Hainanese, Khek and Mandarin, the Singaporean Indian bubbles out Tamil, Malayalam, Punjabi, Hindi and other Indian languages (1985:5;23) _

Various attempts have been made to document and make sense of this linguistic diversity. Largely because of government financial (and other) support, the national census is by far the most comprehensive documentation of this diversity, and forms the basis of most linguistic analyses in Singapore.

The 1957 Census (S.C. Chua, 1962) was the first census to include questions on mother tongue, language use and literacy in all four languages. It was also the first (and last) census to contain detailed, open-ended questions on language use, which allowed for a fairly comprehensive picture of the extent of language diversity within the Singaporean
population. As shown in Table 1.1, the 1957 Census reported 33 mother tongue groups in Singapore, 20 of which were spoken by more than 1,000 people. The Chinese community (75.4% of the population) was the most heterogeneous group: about 40% claimed Hokkien to be their mother tongue, 23% Teochew, 20% Cantonese, 7% Hainanese, and the rest one of seven other dialects. The Malay community (13.6%) was the most homogeneous with 85% claiming Malay to be their mother tongue, and the rest one of six other dialects. Of the Indian community (8.8%), 59% said Tamil was their mother tongue, 16% Malayalam, and the rest one of six other (mostly Indo-Aryan) dialects. The rest of the population, Europeans, Eurasians, Arabs, and other expatriates, mostly listed English as their mother tongue (71.6%).\(^3\) SM Lee Kuan Yew recently spoke of the challenge this diversity presented to Singapore’s nation-building in a recent book commemorating the 50th anniversary of the British Council in Singapore: “We were a tower of Babel, trying to find a common tongue” (ST 18 Apr 1997).

While much can be said about such diversity, it is interesting to note here that the four official languages (Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and English) were mother tongue for only 18.6% of the population (although, as the Census shows in Tables 44-47, more could speak these languages): Mandarin 0.1%, Malay 11.5%, Tamil 5.2% and English 1.3%. The choice of Mandarin is particularly noteworthy, as Hokkien and Cantonese clearly had larger representation in the population as a mother tongue (30% and 15.1% respectively) and as lingua franca within the Chinese community (Chua, 1962). Clearly, statistics alone cannot explain the decision to appoint these languages as the official languages in the nation. The question inevitably arises, then, “how?” How and why did these languages, mother tongue to such a minority of the population that they barely made it on the census, come to be the languages of Singapore’s nationalist agenda? With what forms of language politicking, and in what kind of historical, social and political moments?

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\(^3\) No statistics were provided in the 1957 census concerning bi-/multi-lingualism. Such statistics only became relevant to the government’s interests after the bilingual policy was put in place.
Table 1.1 Mother Tongue Diversity in Singapore by Ethnic Group (1957)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Chinese %</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Malay %</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Indian %</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Other %</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Population</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>1,090,596</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>197,059</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>127,226</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>31,048</td>
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<tr>
<td>Siamese (Chinese)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hokkien</td>
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<td>433,718</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teochew</td>
<td>246,478</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>246,478</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
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<td>15.1</td>
<td>217,640</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hainanese</td>
<td>74,498</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>74,498</td>
<td>6.8</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Henghua</td>
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<td>Shanghai Chinese</td>
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<td>Hokchia</td>
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<td>173</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
<td>1,275</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malay-Polynesian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>166,931</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>166,931</td>
<td>84.7</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Javanese</td>
<td>14,517</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14,517</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boyanese</td>
<td>14,344</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14,344</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Bugis</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<td>Banjarese</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentangkabau</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Indonesian&quot;</td>
<td>407</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dravidian</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>75,617</td>
<td>5.2</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>75,617</td>
<td>59.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malayalam</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20,063</td>
<td>15.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indo-European (Indo-Aryan)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>10,089</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,089</td>
<td>7.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindustani, Hindi, Urdu</td>
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<td>0.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,394</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>1,022</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,022</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telugu</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>26,599</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2,287</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1,927</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>22,221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32,090</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>12,116</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>10,908</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8,827</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from 1957 Census, Chua 1962.
Before these questions can be addressed, it is worth looking at this linguistic landscape in greater detail, and at how others have interpreted and organised this landscape. Using data from the 1957 census, Kuo (1976) identified the major and minor languages in Singapore and the functions they perform. Following Ferguson's (1971) typology, he identified five major languages (Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, English, and Hokkien) and three minor languages (Teochew, Cantonese, and Hainanese). The functions of Malay and English were as “official” languages and as languages of “wider communication”. For example, in 1957, 99.4% of the Malays reported being able to speak Malay, 32.5% of the Chinese, 88.3% of the Indians, and 48.0% of the total population being able to speak Malay. However, the census also points out that this Malay was most often not standard Malay, but rather a form of “Bazaar Malay”. English also had the added function of being the language for international communication. Tay (1993b) broke down the various functions of English this way: English as (1) an official language; (2) the language of education; (3) the working language; (4) the *lingua franca*; (5) the expression of national identity; (6) an international language. Clammer (1985) and Ling (1989) have both rightly noted that a seventh domain is religion, where English is strongly linked to Christianity.

According to Kuo (1976), Mandarin functions as an official language and the language of international communication. Noss (1984) classified the functions and status of Mandarin this way: (1) as a *foreign language* in that the indigenous community of native speakers of Mandarin, as was noted in the 1947 census, is minuscule; (2) as a *national language*, as 75% of the population is Chinese with Mandarin ascribed to them as their “mother tongue” (which in Singapore, as I will discuss later in this thesis, does not necessarily mean they are native speakers); (3) an *official language* because of its official status; (4) as a *minority language* with respect to the fact that there are some native speakers; and (5) as a *religious/classical language* according to Mandarin’s association with Confucianism and Taoism. The function of Tamil is primarily as an official language. Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, and Hainanese function for vernacular group communication. For example, data from the 1972 Survey Research Singapore (SRM) Media Index showed that in 1972, 91.1 percent of the Chinese community could
understand Hokkien, giving some indication of the role Hokkien has played as a *lingua franca* among the Chinese population.

The questions asked in the 1980 census were slightly different than those in 1957. In the first place, the 1980 census no longer asked questions about “mother tongue”, but instead focused on the “principal household language”. This shift has to do with the particular definition of “mother tongue” that had emerged by this time, one that equated ethnicity with mother tongue (i.e., if your ethnicity is Chinese, your official mother tongue is Mandarin regardless of whether or not you know the language). Because of the conflation of ethnicity and mother tongue, the question of “mother tongue” was thus accounted for in the census by the question of “ethnicity”. And so, the question on language was rephrased to inquire about the “principal household language”.

According to the 1980 census figures, the “principal household language for those 5 years old and over” was as follows: Mandarin (7.9%); Chinese Dialects (62.9%: Hokkien (29.0%), Teochew (14.3%), Cantonese (12.5) and Others (7.2)); English (8.9%); Malay (15.5%); Tamil (3.2%); and Others (1.5%) (Khoo Chian Kim, 1981, Table 62). Similar questions were asked in the 1990 census, with the following results: Mandarin (24.2%); Chinese Dialects (40%: Hokkien (19.2%), Teochew (8.8%), Cantonese (8.4%), Hainanese (1.7%), Hakka (1.4%), and Others (0.04%)); English (18%); Malay (14.2%); Tamil (2.9%); and Others (0.7%) (Singapore, *Advance Data Release, Census of Population 1990*, 1991: Table 9). And so, for the first time, the 1980 census included questions that aimed to measure the degree of bi-/multi-lingualism in the home. According to figures in the 1980, 73 percent of those ages 5 and over were monolingual at home. Of these, 5.6% spoke Mandarin only, 29.8% Hokkien, 13.6% Teochew, 11.9% Cantonese, 5.8% other Chinese dialects, 8.5 English, 19.8% Malay, 3.6% Tamil, and 1.4 Other languages. 27 percent of the population were multilingual at home. Of these, 35.6% spoke Mandarin and one or more Chinese dialects (but no English); 11.5% Mandarin and English (with or without dialects); 9.5% two or more Chinese dialects; 31.6% a Chinese dialect and English; 4.0% English and Malay; 3.0% English and Tamil; 2.4% English and non-official languages; and 2.5% other combinations.

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4 The language shift between the two censuses will be discussed later in this thesis.
The documentation of individual multilingualism opened up possibilities to discuss language repertoires, diglossia, the domains of language use, and so on. Platt (1980) for example, describes the typical verbal repertoire of a Singaporean Chinese:

**It usually includes:**

| (1) | the native Chinese Dialect |
| (2) | the dominant Chinese Dialect (Hokkien) |
| (3) | one or more additional Chinese Dialect |
| (4) | Bazaar Malay |

**It may include:**

| (5) | English |
| (6) | Mandarin |
| (7) | Baba Malay |
| (8) | Malay |

An informal survey that I conducted of 94 Singaporean Chinese students in the English Language and Literature department at the National University of Singapore (1997) suggests a similarly diverse picture (of course, university students are rarely representative of the population at large). 48.9% reported English, Mandarin and one dialect in their repertoire; 22.3% an additional dialect; 12.8% reported only English and Mandarin; and only 5.3% included some form of Malay (or Bazaar Malay) in their repertoire (the remaining 10.7% reported a variety of other combinations).

How these repertoires are played out in real life language practices is highly complex. An interesting starting point when considering the complexity of language use is the instructions given to the census enumerators for the 1980 census. One of the questions on language was: “What language or dialect does the person use most frequently at home when speaking to his (a) grandparents? (b) parents? (c) brothers and sisters? (d) spouse? (e) children? and (f) grandchildren?” Enumerators were given the following instructions: “If the person uses two or more languages/dialects when speaking to say, his brothers and sisters, and is unable to indicate straight away the language/dialect most frequently used, you should allow him some time to sort out in his mind the appropriate answer. If the respondent still has difficulty in determining the most frequently used language/dialect after some time, enter the one that he prefers” (Dept. of Statistics, 1980:52). To this Tay comments, “The census planners were well aware that several languages or a mixed use of several languages might be the norm but for practical reasons, this complexity could not be accommodated” (1984:4; see also Gupta, 1998 for a discussion of the problems with census data). It is interesting that 4% of the respondents...
gave "no household language" as their answer, reflecting the difficulty in answering this question (Table 62, Khoo Chian Kim, 1981).

In his discussion of "polyglossia" (as opposed to diglossia) to describe the various codes available to Singaporeans, Platt (1980) uses Fishman's concept of "domains" to describe their employment. He argues that different combinations of codes are used for different domains, and that which code is chosen will depend on the verbal repertoires of the interlocutors and on the perceived appropriacy of the code to that domain. Tay (1993a) used the 1980 census to identify seven factors that appear to explain to some degree the employment of one's linguistic repertoire: (1) the ability of the speaker to speak a particular language; (2) the ability of the addressee to comprehend the language spoken; (3) age, as older people tend to use dialect; (4) the ethnicity/dialect of the head of the household; (5) the type of family nucleus, as those households with grandparents tend to use more dialect; (6) the education level of the head of the household, as the census showed that the higher the education level, the more multilingual the family; and (7) household income, as the higher income households tend to be multilingual.

Such, then, is the "bird's eye view" of Singapore's linguistic landscape. What I want to do in the next section is consider what has been said about language with respect to "nationalism" or "nation-building" in Singapore. Acting Deputy Director of Education, Rev. T.R. Doraisamy, once described Singapore as "an instant language laboratory" (ST 4 Sept 1971). Clearly, the Singapore experience of extreme multilingualism in a small, urban and densely populated nation provides a unique opportunity to see how language works in the nationalist agenda. However, what we find in much of the work on language in such discussions is first of all, a focus on the possibility of English as the language of national identity, to the neglect of the other languages. Secondly, much of the literature assumes a conflict resolution stance. This has resulted in a view of linguistic diversity as problematic and a hindrance to nation building, as well as a focus on language planning within a restrictive 'problem-solving' discussion. This view stems from a larger tendency in the literature to use the government's discourse as a factual premise, and then to reaffirm or "academicise" the discourse it examines. In so doing, little is offered by way to understand the relationship between language and the nationalist agenda, about why the
languages in Singapore have come to mean what they do, and about how such meanings participate in the nationalist agenda.

1.7 Language and Nationalism in Singapore: The Untold Story

In this section, I will briefly consider the type of questions that have been raised concerning language and nationalism in Singapore. There is actually very little explicit discussion on the topic. That is, one will rarely find a title along the lines of Jan Blommaert’s (1996) “Language and nationalism: comparing Flanders and Tanzania” or James Oladejo’s (1991) “The National Language Question in Nigeria: Is There an Answer?” in the context of Singapore’s nationalism. The silence of such discussions, I think, is symptomatic of two key tendencies in the literature.

The first is the tendency in much of the literature to deny the “Asian” languages ideological space in discussions of national identity, allowing such discussions only to appear in relation to the English language (Chiew Seen Kong, 1980; Kuo, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1980b; Pakir, 1992, 1993; see Bloom, 1986, for a more critical discussion). Chiew Seen Kong (1980) refers to a study by Hassan (1977) which showed that those educated in the English-medium schools were more nationalistic than those in the Asian language schools were. Lamzon (1978) argues that English fills the pragmatic and symbolic requirements of a national language. English is presented as being a “neutral” solution to the problem of ethnic diversity, and of potential conflict, and as the way forward towards establishing a national identity. Even discussions about bilingualism tend to collapse into a discussion of the dominance of English, and about English as the de facto national language.

This tendency has largely to do with the way the official languages have been assigned particular meanings within the bilingual policy by the government. That is, the role of English is pragmatic; it serves purposes of international communication, of meeting the economic needs of the country, and for national inter-ethnic communication. Malay, Tamil and Mandarin are “mother tongues”, serving the purposes of building ethnic identity and of national intra-ethnic communication. As I will be discussing later in this thesis, this
divide is extremely problematic; nonetheless, much of the literature tends to accept these parameters of meaning. On the basis of this divide, there is also the tendency to conflate English dominance with English as the *de facto* national language. However, to equate the growing dominance of English with the potential for English to be the language of Singaporean identity is problematic for two reasons.

In the first place, the meanings of the English language in Singapore are far too complex to suggest it is the language of "supra-ethnic identity" (Kuo, 1980b) or the *de facto* national language. When we talk about English as the language of national identity, what kind of English do we mean? Singapore English? Standard Singapore English? And when we talk about national identity through English, who is included and who is excluded? Numerous studies, for example, have shown significant variation in the use and proficiency of English according to socio-economic status. An exception in the literature would be the work by Phillipson (1992) who uses the notion of *linguicism* to account for the dominance of English in Singapore. *Linguicism* refers to the "ideologies and structures" which are used to legitimise and reproduce the unequal division of power and resources between groups which are defined on the basis of their language. However, this view takes the opposite extreme, in that it negates any role that English might play as a language of self-expression and identity in Singapore (Kandiah, 1994). Secondly, discussions about English as the *de facto* national language suggest that the other official languages, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, have no place in the nationalist agenda or in nation identity. Yet, as I will be arguing, the role and meanings of English are completely intertwined and contingent on the role and meanings of the mother tongue languages, and vice versa. Thus, it is not enough to separate them and isolate English as the *de facto* national language.

The second tendency in the literature is to formulate discussions about language and bilingualism along the lines of conflict resolution. Conflict has been defined in two ways. First of all, following the Herderian notion of "one language equals one nation", linguistic diversity is taken by many analysts as problematic and as a challenge to the nationalist agenda. Chiew Seen-Kong (1980) categorically states that "Cultural and linguistic diversity and exclusiveness impede nation-building" (1980:251). Under a section
called "A Language Policy for National Development", Kuo (1980b) begins with noting the "problems of ethnic and linguistic diversity" (1980b:40). In these discussions, the government's policy of bilingualism is presented as a solution to potential conflict. For example, Kuo argues that the multilingual policy is a strategy to "neutralise language cleavages as a politically divisive issue" (1980b:61). Within a problem-solving framework, attention is placed primarily on how the language policies work to solve the problem of potential racial conflict. The second area of conflict concerns the problematic of the dominance of English. For instance, Pakir (1992, 1993) claims that the dominance of English in Singapore has led to the "de-Asianisation" (or pseudo-Westernisation) of Singapore. She introduces the notion (taken from Saville-Troike, 1982) of Singapore being a "soft-shelled society" to talk about how the increasing dominance of English has "left Singaporeans open to outside influences" (1992:258). Along the same vein, Kuo and Jernudd talk about the "matter of fact de-ethnicisation of Singaporeans through English" (1994:74). The work by Ho and Alsagoff (1998) is an important exception to this problem-solving framework. In their analysis of the position and role of English in multi-ethnic Singapore, they make the assumptions in this framework their object of inquire, and "de-naturalise" such discourses. The "role of English in Singapore's nation-building cannot be simply assumed," they argue, "but needs to be critically assessed against the different understandings of ethnicity, culture, multiculturalism and Singaporean-ness" (1998:217).

As with the Fishman-type sociology of language, this "conflict resolution" approach to analysis is important in that it highlights the challenges facing a nation like multi-lingual Singapore. However, I would suggest that such analyses are limiting in two significant ways. The first has to do with what I discussed earlier concerning the Fishman-type analysis. And that is, the tendency when taking a "conflict resolution" framework is to limit the focus given to ideology. For example, the government's rationale for the bilingual policy as a strategy in managing race relations is for the most part accepted in the literature. Few analyses (Chua, 1995 is an important exception) consider how this "problem" of race relations is itself an ideological construction. As Chua notes (personal communication, 1997), there have actually been very few instances of racial conflict in
Singapore. And, for the last three decades, there have been no significant instances (see Chapter 4). The fact that potential ethnic conflict continues to be used to legitimise language policy thus needs to be critically examined. To develop only a “conflict resolution” analysis is not enough. More attention needs to be placed on the ideological construction of the nation, and on the implication of language ideologies in sustaining and legitimising this ideology.

This relates to my second point. For perhaps even more importantly, this conflict-resolution approach largely mirrors the government’s rationale for its policies. For example, Gopinathan uses a quote from then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew as his reference point: “We became a nation without the prerequisites of a nation – a common language, common loyalties and a common psychological make-up” (1985:221). He then goes on to describe the challenge of linguistic diversity to the nation. Yet, given that linguistic homogeneity has never been the goal of the government, questions need to be asked about why the government has referenced such an ideology in the first place, and about how it is used in the imagining of the nation and in relation to other policies. Furthermore, I would argue that the concept of conflict-resolution is itself a powerful discourse used by government leaders in seeking legitimisation for their policies, and thus also requires analysis. The argument for social decadence through English has also been the bulwark of the government’s rationale for its bilingual policies, and has similarly been taken up in the literature.

Ultimately, by uncritically accepting the government’s discourse as fact, and not questioning the reasons for this discourse and how this discourse might connect with the government’s nationalist agenda, such analyses essentially academicise, and ultimately legitimise, the government’s position (e.g., D. Bell, 1972; Chang, 1968; Chiew Seen-Kong, 1983; MacDougall, 1982; Pakir, 1992, 1993, 1994b). Kandiah’s comments about the study of language planning are apt here as well:

the social, political, economic and such-like factors that constitute the basic material of investigation cannot be properly understood unless the issues of ideology, and also of position and power, that centrally determine their nature are frontally addressed. It is not enough to see these various factors and the associated issues simply as a kind of backdrop in front of which
language planners as it were perform, albeit with some awareness of them; rather, it is imperative that these factors and issues be recognised as being integrally interwoven into the language planning activity all along the way. (1994:300)

Without such a materialistic view of language and the nation, there is little space to talk about why these ideologies have emerged, about how they have been used by the government and how they have been talked about, about at what moments they appear, and about how the people respond to them. As Kandiah goes on to say: “For language planning study to fail to see this is for it to lose explanatory value and to get reduced in effect to an exercise in legitimising the planning practice it investigates, a mere reaffirmation of the given” (1994:300; see also Lele and Singh, 1989). Indeed, much of the study about language and nationalism in Singapore concentrates on fairly descriptive accounts of sociolinguistic variation and on summary accounts of government policy and rationale.

A number of studies have tried to break from such descriptive accounts, and do bring us forward in understanding the relationship between language and nationalism in Singapore. For example, Pendley attempts to describe “some salient relationships between ideology, language policy, and social transformation” in Singapore (1983:46). He goes on to say (1983:57):

> Close associations exist between the social and political goals of the political leadership, the nature of dominant ideology, and the language and communications policy pursued by Singapore’s political leadership. Both ideology and language policy... [are] attempts by the political leadership to alter the communicative structure of society, to increase its control over the channels and media, and to a lesser extent the content of communication, and to influence the consciousness of individuals in ways which are consistent with the dominant goals of social transformation.

While his framework tends to be rather positivist (Foley, et al., 1998), Pendley’s account begins to take us beyond mere linguistic description and beyond academicising the government’s assumptions. Pennycook’s (1992) notion of the “worldliness” of English to examine the spread of English around the world is a more complex argument. He argues that the widespread adoption of English as a world language is linked to a Singaporean
capitalist structure that is tied to the outside world, yet bound in local cultural politics. While the focus of his analysis is on English and the implications the worldliness of English has for pedagogy in teaching English as a foreign language, his analysis is useful in directing our attention to the ideological basis of language and how this ideology relates to the particular imagining of the nation in Singapore. Tan Su Hwi (1995b) similarly attempts to take the discussion of “sociolinguistic engineering” in Singapore to the level of “metalinguistic” analysis, meaning an analysis which considers the social, political, economic processes of language and language planning. In particular, while her focus is on the Indian community, she notes how the English language serves as a gatekeeper in restricting access to positions of political and economic power in Singaporean society (see also Puru Shotam, 1987). Pakir’s (1994a) discussion of “invisible language planning” demonstrates the limits of the government’s language planning efforts. Her analysis is based on the influence that parents have on language use in the home. Officially, the variety of English used in Singapore is to follow the standard used in Britain. However, her analysis shows a development of home-grown varieties of spoken English. She thus expands our understanding of language planning to include the “worldliness” of language, as it is understood and used within the everyday lives of Singaporeans. These scholars, while in many ways very diverse, all share a similar interest in the notion of the ideological and material relationship between language and its material circumstances. Their contributions will be discussed in greater detail at various places within this dissertation.

Having raised the key questions and laid out the theoretical assumptions that will guide this thesis, in the next section, I will map the rest of this thesis. I will begin the section by summarising the terrain travelled in this chapter. I will then provide a brief synopsis of the discussions that will follow.

1.8 Where Do We Go From Here?

This thesis is about the relationship between language and the nationalist agenda. More specifically, it is about the relationship between language and the nationalist agenda in Singapore. Language is important to Singapore. As I will show in this thesis, language
is tied up with issues of race and ethnicity, with religion, with politics, with social class and socio-economic status, with education, with morality, and with issues of national ideology. Underpinning each of these is nationalism, or as I prefer to call it, the imagining of the nation. While this is true for many nations, it is particularly evident in the very intensely and centrally planned nation of Singapore. Singapore's leaders have attempted to imagine the nation in very particular ways both at home and in relation to the nation's position in the world. These attempts have often resulted in the need to balance the various and often contradictory faces of authenticity. What is of interest, then, is how the leaders have sought to resolve this global-national tension ideologically and through language. For, while language is not the only arena in which this ideological formulation occurs, because of its discursive relationship with the imagining of the nation, it is a major one. One of the most accessible places to see the discursive construction of language ideologies is in government leaders' speeches as published in newspapers. And so, to understand the ways in which this global-local tension is set up and the way the leaders have attempted to resolve it, I will focus on key speeches given by government leaders, and as published in the mass daily press.

In order to explore ways to think about the relationship of language and the imagining of the nation in Singapore, this chapter began by situating the discussion historically, focusing on the legacy of the eighteenth-century French Revolution and German Romanticism. I argued that the period's legacy came in two ways: first, in the particular construction of the relationship between language and nationalism seen in the equation "one language = one nation"; and second, in the way in which the period's philosophers and nationalists brought together language and national ideologies discursively to further their concept of the "ideal" society. Two kinds of literature were examined: first, the Fishman-type sociology of language, with its focus on the spread of the "one language = one nation" formulation and the problems it causes for multilingual nations; and second, the more recent work done by anthropologists taking a political-economic approach with a focus on ideology. I used my discussion of this second type of analysis to introduce the notion of discourse to talk about the relationship between language and nationalism. To develop this theme further, I laid out some of the theoretical premises concerning nationalism and language, taking up Anderson's (1991) notion
of "imagining the nation" and Pennycook's (1992) formulation of the "worldliness of language" to emphasise the ideological dynamism of these concepts. I then brought the two together through the notion of discourse. Finally, I brought the discussion back to the Singapore context both as a way to flesh out the issues raised, as well as to lay the groundwork for subsequent discussions in this thesis.

In this concluding section, I will map where we will go from here. Chapter Two is primarily a discussion of the methodology and data that will be used in this thesis. Two key factors inform the methodology used to answer this question. The first is that one of the key features of discourse is its textuality (Bhabha, 1990; Bakhtin, 1981; Said, 1983). Secondly, and particularly relevant concerning my focus on Singapore, most of the Singapore government's talk about language and the imagining of the nation appears in the mass media. The newspapers are perhaps the most diligent in providing not only commentary and summary accounts, but often in reproducing the entire script of the speech. As an English-language paper, the ST is particularly important in this respect, as it has the widest circulation and is read by all ethnic communities. These two factors thus suggest discourse analysis of government speeches (texts) as they appear in the ST as a key aspect of the methodology by which to explore the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation. Furthermore, in my discussion of the methodology of discourse analysis, I will talk about how an analysis of the various grammatical and discursive features of texts contribute to our understanding of the discursive construction of the relationship between language ideologies and the imagining of the nation.

Before it is possible to analyse particular government speeches, it is important to have an understanding of the socio-historical conditions of the production of the texts (newspapers) within which they appear. Bourdieu (1991) makes this point very strongly in his criticism of certain forms of political discourse analysis. Thompson (1991) summarises Bourdieu's position this way:

It would be superficial (at best) to try to analyse political discourses or ideologies by focusing on the utterances as such, without reference to the constitution of the political field and the relations between this field and the broader space of social positions and processes. This kind of 'internal analysis' is commonplace... as exemplified by... attempts to apply some
form of semiotics or 'discourse analysis' to political speeches ... all such attempts... take for granted but fail to take account of the sociohistorical conditions within which the object of analysis is produced, constructed and received. (1991:28-29)

Taking up Bourdieu’s argument, in Chapter Three I will provide a socio-historical analysis of the role of the press in Singapore. I will first of all establish the presence of the mass media in the everyday lives of Singaporeans and of the government. Evidence will also be given to show that the mass daily press, and the ST in particular, has been specifically mandated by the government to regard the nationalist agenda as its central mandate. This role of the press in the nationalist agenda is central to understanding the dominant voice of the government in the press and the government controls placed on the press. I will also look at some of the ways in which the press is involved in the dissemination of language policy and ideology in Singapore. I will argue that the location of government speeches in the press is powerfully significant for how these texts are produced and read. This chapter will thus contribute to an understanding of the socio-historical conditions within which political discourse about language and the imagining of the nation occurs.

The rest of the thesis will focus on the discursive relationship between language and the imagining of the nation in Singapore. It is an account of the historical conditions within which this relationship has emerged and changed, looking at the moments when there were shifts in the meanings of this relationship, and looking at the consequences of these shifts. It is a story about the tension between the Singapore’s need to position itself globally, while at the same time authenticating itself nationally. Throughout, what will become clear is that the assumptions about language are often the same as those about the imagining of the nation. And as such, we will begin to see the dynamic interaction between language and the nation, and the ways in which language and language ideologies are implicated in and implicate the imagining of the nation.

Chapter Four is the beginning of this story. This chapter does three things. In the first place, it establishes the groundwork for our understanding of Singapore’s linguistic, and other, complexity. It looks at the “colonial hangover” and the beginning of the imagining of the nation in Singapore. This “hangover” is seen in the development of Singapore’s linguistic and racial heterogeneity, resulting from the colonial government’s
economic and labour policies. It is seen in the creation of an ethnically and linguistically divided nation, resulting from colonial *laissez-faireism*. This “hangover” thus explains the internal social, political and economic complexities, and relates them directly to language ideologies and policy. Second, this chapter shows the early murmurings of Singapore’s attempts to understand itself and itself in relation to the world, and in particular, how it defined its independence. This was not without considerable ideological conflict – particularly between the “Chinese-educated” Chinese, who argued for a nation characterised by Chinese dominance, and the “English-educated” Chinese who envisioned independence through merger with the Malayan peninsula, knowing that this would be the most likely vision the British would accept. Ultimately, after a national referendum on the merger question, it was this latter view that prevailed. And as Singapore moved closer towards merger, language ideologies began to take on particular forms. Malay was taken out of just its ethnic association to take on new meanings as the national language. Finally, this chapter establishes a contrast to post-colonial and post-merger national and language ideologies. For, immediately after independence, Singapore abandoned its pre-merger focus on Malay. All along, the Singapore government had argued for a vision of Malaysia wherein all three of the major ethnic communities held equal status legally, politically, socially, economically and culturally. With independence, this policy of “multiracialism” became a cornerstone of the new government’s agenda. With “multiracialism” came a policy of national multi-lingualism, and in practice, individual bilingualism – ultimately defined as English plus one’s “mother tongue”.

In Chapter Five, Singapore is now an independent nation, independent from both colonialism and from Malaysia. The importance of the immediate post-independence years concerning language ideologies in the imagining of the nation cannot be understated. It is during this time that the blueprint of the nation was drafted. The visions, policies and ideologies that were formed during this time continue to shape the direction of the imagining of the nation even today. Two conflicting issues pre-occupied the Singapore government. The first concern had to do with Singapore’s survival as a nation. Being such a small country with no natural resources, how could it position itself in relation to the world? How could it make itself relevant to the world? The second issue had to do
with its image of itself. With such extreme linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity, and vulnerable to external influence, how could it imagine itself in a way that would be accepted by the people? How could Singapore be a “home” that its diverse peoples could identify with? How could authenticity be achieved?

Language ideologies and policy was and continues to be central to resolving the tension between these two concerns, particularly through the bilingual policy. Very early, Singapore’s four official languages were defined according to their functions: English for pragmatism and the “mother tongue” languages for identity. Using Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s 1972 speech given at a Singapore Teachers’ Union dinner, I will examine how these language ideologies have been constructed, and how these ideologies interact with the imagining of the nation. This imagining was captured in the notion of the “Asianising of Singapore”. In addition to looking at the specific ideologies that formed in government speeches, I will also consider changes in language policy within the schools that came about as a result of these changes in language and national ideology.

In Chapter Six, we see the global-national tension in the imagining of the nation intensify. While never abandoning the need for English, and even establishing policies to further entrench the dominance of English in the nation, the government began to increasingly implicate English in causing the “de-ethnification” and moral decay of the nation. The leaders felt that the Chinese community was particularly vulnerable to the effects of Westernisation, as it had no single language to unite them. As such, they launched an aggressive “re-ethnification” effort, an effort which finds its nexus in the Speak Mandarin Campaign in which the ideological meanings of language and the nation meet. While this campaign has been targeted at the Chinese community, it has also had profound effect on the non-Chinese communities, both in allowing them to benefit from the space it gave them to celebrate their own identities, and in reviving fears about Chinese dominance. Ultimately, the Speak Mandarin Campaign captures the essence of the government’s struggle to both position itself globally at the same time as providing an authentic national image locally.

Using the analogy of a river, with the Speak Mandarin Campaign being the river and the banks being the nation, I suggest three main sections in this river, each located
within specific moments of historicity in the imagining of the nation. The first two sections are the focus of this chapter; the third is covered in Chapter Seven. The first section of the river is the period around 1979 with the launch of the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* to about 1985. During this time, language ideologies were concerned with the "more Mandarin, less dialects" debate. The second is from about 1985 to 1990. This period is characterised by a growing confidence within the Chinese (especially Chinese-educated) community about expressing their Chineseness and about the status of Mandarin within the nation. And the third is the period from about 1990 until today, during which time language ideological debates have been mostly characterised by the "Mandarin versus English" dichotomy.

My analysis in Chapter Six of the first two sections of the river will be based on a speech given by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew at the launching ceremony of the 1979 *Speak Mandarin Campaign*. In this speech we see how language ideologies are debated in relation to the imagining of the nation. I also consider the campaign itself in terms of its scope and strategy. The increasing confidence this campaign (among other factors) gave to the Chinese community was seen in another *Speak Mandarin Campaign* speech given by another key leader, Second Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong, in 1985. In his speech, Ong noted the increasing importance of China’s economic awakening to Singapore’s economic policy, and suggested that Mandarin needs to be valued for its economic potential in addition to its traditional cultural value. This suggestion is significant in that it challenged the functional divide of language ideologies within the bilingual policy. And as a result, serious questions emerge about the meanings of the other official languages and their role in the imagining of the nation. As I will argue, the suggestion to expand the meanings of Mandarin once again needs to be understood in the context of the global-national tension within the imagining of the nation.

This discussion carries into Chapter Seven, where I discuss the continuing motif of the "Asianising of Singapore" through the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*. The principal argument here is on "English versus Mandarin", relating to a changing focus of the campaign. Ultimately, the challenges raised by the expansion of the ideological meanings of Mandarin are resolved in the reinstatement of the functional divide of language
ideologies. In order to see this discursive ideological struggle, I will focus on PM Goh Chok Tong’s 1991 *Speak Mandarin Campaign* speech. His speech also suggests voices of resistance to language ideologies and the impact these ideologies and related policies have had on the everyday lives of Singaporeans. The English-educated Chinese, many of whom have only minimum proficiency in Mandarin, wish to take the meanings of English further and make it their mother tongue. The Chinese-educated have resisted the government’s efforts to eliminate dialects from their lives, and have sought to have their dialect recognised as their mother tongue. The non-Chinese communities continue to feel threatened by the perceived increasing dominance of Mandarin, and the use of multiracialism to deny them access to the economic benefits of Mandarin’s “globalisation”. I will thus also consider how such resistance contributes to the imagining of the nation.

Finally, Chapter Eight is an attempt to draw the various threads of this thesis together, and to discuss ways in which studies of nationalism and the relationship between language and nationalism can be taken up. I suggest that the study of the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation in Singapore is important in at least three ways. In the first place, it is important for what it tells us about Singapore, and about the process of the imagining of that nation. The imagining of the nation in Singapore is one of contradiction and paradox, as on the one hand leaders seek to establish the authenticity of Singapore and its legitimacy as a state in the world, and on the other hand, seek to establish authenticity at home. The management of these aspects of authenticity is particularly evident in the development of particular language ideologies: in seeing English as neutral, and necessary for the objectives of pragmatism, while at the same time decrying English as the root of all evil; in embracing English, yet limiting its scope of meaning; in seeing languages external to Singapore as the *mother tongue* languages of the various ethnic groups; and in seeking to “build” a nation while fostering separate ethnic playing fields. By examining language ideologies we will also see how language (especially English) has been tied up with relations of power.

Secondly, I will argue that this thesis demonstrates the need for a more dynamic framework within which to understand the relationship between language and nationalism than suggested in the typologies offered by Fishman and his colleagues. To see the
relationship discursively allows us to see the ideological connection between language and the nation, and to understand why language has such a popular and powerful presence in the imagining of nations around the world. It allows us to account for how particular ideologies have been taken up and why, for how others are discarded. It allows us to see the ways in which the ideologies of language and of the imagining of the nation interact. Such a discursive understanding also opens up the possibilities for comparative analysis of (using Blommaert’s phrase) nationalisms, allowing us to see the different ways in which language ideologies have been taken up in different visions of the imagined nation.

Thirdly, I will suggest that one place such comparative analysis can begin is through discourse analysis of government speeches about language in the imagining of the nation. In such texts, we are able to focus on the process of this relationship, and see how it is discursively constructed. Specific discursive features reveal something about the stance of the speaker and the position of his message. They reveal something about particular language ideologies and their relationship with the imagining of the nation. Among the discursive features I will be looking at is pronominal usage, which tells us something about how the speaker establishes both group boundaries as well as his/her distance from the message. For example, the use of inclusive pronouns such as “we” suggests diffused group boundaries as well as the direct involvement of the speaker in the message. I will also be looking at the use of conditional statements for what it reveals about how views and arguments other than those presented by the author are curbed or silenced. For example, the use of “if...then” limits the possibilities of alternative views, and suggests a certain amount of certainty and authority in the speaker’s argument. The schema of the text will also be examined, as it shows how the text is structured according to authorial intent. The notion of genre is also important, as it brings into the text particular assumptions and knowledge into the production and reading of the text. This is especially significant with respect to the Speak Mandarin Campaign, where the use of a national campaign, traditionally used in reference to public behaviour, has been used to alter the language patterns in the home (private) of members of the Chinese community. Examining these contradictions is essential to understanding the voices of resistance to the language ideologies put forward in the campaign. These and other discursive features will
thus be examined as a way to see the processes of particular language ideologies. Furthermore, when we see texts as “social process”, they too become part of the imagining of the nation – not merely a reflection of that imagining, but themselves an integral part of it. And so, by “unpacking” the text, it is possible to establish the basis of a comparative analysis between various manifestations of the relationship between language ideologies and the imagining of the nation.

Having established the basic framework and assumptions that will guide this thesis, and mapped the direction of the journey on which I hope to take us, the next chapter will consider the analytical tools that I will use to embark on this journey. Chapter Two in many ways builds on my discussions in this chapter about the worldliness of language, the imagining of the nation, and their relationship as discourse. For, one of the key features of discourse is that it is textual. In this discussion, I will consider the significance of this textuality of discourse for our exploration of the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation, and outline the methods that will be used.
CHAPTER TWO
WAYS OF ANALYSIS

The view developed in the previous chapter is one whereby the relationship between language and nationalism can be seen as discursive. Rather than seeing the relationship as natural and as mere commonsense, and rather than seeking universal characteristics of this relationship, the focus instead is placed on the emergence and ongoing dynamism of this relationship within real, material circumstances and on the ideological underpinnings of this relationship. The focus is on the debates about language, on the discursive construction of language ideologies, and on how these debates implicate and are implicated in the imagining of the nation. It is on the multiplicity of voices and meanings in this imagining. With this theoretical understanding, I turn in this chapter to the question of how exactly we might see the imagining of the nation and the role of language in that imagining.

Two key factors inform the methodology used to answer this question, one having to do with discourse in general, and the other more specifically related to Singapore. First, one of the key features of discourse is that it is textual (Bhaba, 1990; Bakhtin, 1981; Said, 1983). National literature, television, movies, and newspapers are just some of the textual locations within which the imagining of the nation is constructed and contested. Second, in highly literate and urbanised Singapore, it is the mass daily newspaper that is particularly important for the imagining of the nation. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the government has specifically mandated that the primary role of the press be defined by the nationalist agenda. And when government leaders give speeches, it is with the keen awareness and expectation that these speeches will be reproduced, often verbatim, in the mass media. Thus, while the imagining of the nation occurs in other
domains as well, it is the daily newspaper that makes the government’s discourse most accessible to the people. A study of media use by Chen and Kuo (1978) concluded that newspapers (relative to television and radio) were seen as the most useful and most reliable source of information, especially concerning government discourse.

These factors thus suggest that the imagining of the nation can be seen as a form of narrative (Bhabha, 1990): textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative strategems, and so on. They further suggest that, to encounter the nation as it is written in Singapore, we can turn to an analysis of key government speeches concerning language and nationalism as they appear in the mass daily press. Thinking about the notion of discourse with relation to texts, Roger Simon argues that discourses “enable particular forms of textual production and the particular interpretative schema through which a ‘reading’ of a text... takes place” (1992:120). The question confronting us then is how we might understand texts in terms of discourse. In Simon’s words, “How, then, might we apply this conception of discourse to the issue of textual interpretation?” (1992:110).

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the main contributions to my understanding of textual interpretation and map the methodology used. In the first section, I will first look at some of the ways in which the mass daily newspaper can be understood in terms of the nationalist agenda. Two aspects will be examined. First, I will examine how the characteristics of the “national daily newspaper” and the experience of reading these newspapers allow readers to think of themselves in national terms. Second, I will look at “the newspaper” as a medium for political discourse, and look at how government leaders shape their message for the newspaper medium. While I do reference Singapore in this discussion, the main focus here is on newspapers in general, as a way to establish the rationale for the methodology used in this thesis. A detailed analysis of the role of the press in the imagining of Singapore will be discussed in the following chapter.

The rest of the chapter will focus on exploring ways by which to examine the imagining of the nation in and through texts. The second section, as the title suggests, is to establish “points of departure”. The literature on discourse analysis is massive, and the concept is understood and practised in many different ways. I will attempt to sift through some of this
literature, focusing especially on "critical discourse analysis" (CDA) both for its contributions to analyses of media discourse and for its focus on ideology. However, ultimately there remains a gap between the goals of CDA and my attempts to apply the notion of discourse as conceptualised in this thesis to texts. And so, in the third section, I will explore "ways forward" by examining how we might encounter texts in their "worldliness". This discussion lays the groundwork for the next section where I will outline some particular methodological practices whereby we might approach discourse analysis.

2.1 The Newspaper and the Imagining of the Nation

As Anderson (1991) and Terdiman (1985) both note, the involvement of the mass media in the nationalist agenda was already part of the emergence of "print capitalism" during the eighteenth century. They see a significant correlation between the increasing popularity of the mass print media and the spread of "nationalism" (and, I would add, the emergence of mass education). Continuing the theme of the previous chapter concerning the legacy of the eighteenth-century, we can thus add yet another feature: the use of print media, particularly the mass newspaper, to disseminate nationalist ideas. The purpose of this section is to discuss the ways in which the mass daily newspaper can be understood in terms of the nationalist agenda. There are two points of consideration. First of all, I will look at how the characteristics of the "national daily newspaper", and the experience of reading these newspapers, allow readers to think of themselves in national terms. Second, I will consider newspapers as a medium for political discourse, and look at how government leaders shape their message for the newspaper medium.

When one thinks of the involvement of the mass daily press in the nationalist agenda, particularly as it concerns language, one of the most obvious areas would be its role in the establishment and standardisation of a national language (Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1992). However, the significance of the mass daily press for the imagining of the nation goes further. Focusing on the novel, Brennan (1990) says: "the novel joined the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media, helping to standardise language, encourage literacy, and remove mutual incomprehensibility. But it did much more than that. Its manner of
presentation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation" (1990:49). What is of interest here is the effect of the mass daily press in terms of allowing its readers to begin to think of themselves as a group of people and as a nation. This occurs in two main ways: through the mass communication of ideas and through the shared experience as readers.

In the first place, where there is a ubiquitous presence of newspapers in society, they tend to be powerful (although not the only) institutions in the organisation of social meaning. As Anderson (1991) has argued, “print capitalism” opened up the possibilities for ideological insemination on a large scale. Karl Marx noted the powerful influence of the press already in 1871 in a letter to Kugelmann (27 July 1871). He was writing about atrocity stories in the British press during the Paris commune, and made the following observation: “Up till now, it has been thought that the growth of the Christian myths during the Roman Empire was possible only because printing was not invented. Precisely the contrary. The daily press and the telegraph, when in a moment spread inventions over the whole earth, fabricate more myths... in one day than could have formerly been done in a century” (cited in Cohen and Young, 1988:5). With large numbers of people absorbing the same information, the conditions were created whereby people could begin to think of themselves as a nation.

Secondly, the shared experience of reading the newspaper itself creates a sense of community. Anderson (1991) captures this shared moment in the notion of a mass ceremony:

The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing... creates [an] extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption (‘imagining’) of the newspaper-as-fiction. We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that... The significance of this mass ceremony - Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers - is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar... At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life. (1991:35)
He concludes from this, “What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?” The effectiveness of this daily “mass ceremony” in allowing readers to envision themselves as a community is partly evident in how national daily newspapers come to stand as emblems of nationhood, along with a national flag, a national anthem or a national pledge. I experienced this personally when I chanced upon a copy of the *Globe and Mail* in various libraries or Canadian embassies while overseas. There was a sense whereby it reaffirmed my *Canadianness* and my sense of belonging to the larger national community of Canada. And so, in these two ways – through mass ideological insemination and through the mass ceremony of reading – the mass daily press plays a significant role in allowing its readers to begin to imagine themselves as a “community” and as a nation.

The second aspect of the mass daily press that makes it important in the imagining of the nation has to do with its role as a medium for political discourse. Fairclough (1995:176-200; and Mauranen, 1995) takes this up in his discussion of “mediatised” political discourse. A main point of Fairclough’s discussion is to show how the genres of the mass media do not necessarily correspond all that well with the genre of politics, and how this mismatch creates tension and difficulty for politicians. He gives the example of a television interview with Prime Minister Thatcher, where the media genre was a form of celebrity interview. In such an interview, questions are designed to probe the personality and outlook of the interviewee, and answers are expected to be somewhat frank and self-revelatory. Audience members are constructed as over-hearers listening to the interview/discussion. However, Thatcher handled the interview mostly as if it were a political interview and an occasion for political speech making. She treated the audience, rather than the interviewer, as addressee. This created a tension, a certain uneasy relationship between the interviewer’s questions and Thatcher’s answers. She rarely answered the questions, and mostly used the questions as opportunities to say what she wanted to say.

While this analysis is in itself interesting, what is particularly relevant here is Fairclough’s discussion about the consequences of this tension between genres for politicians and their discourse. Political parties, he notes, are increasingly aware of this tension between the genres of the mass media and of politics, and how this needs to be
resolved in order for politicians to maximise their use of the mass media. In what Franklin (1994) calls “packaging politics”, parties are placing more attention on training their members in using the media: to prepare and groom them for media appearances (including appearance, clothes and communicative style), to set the agenda of political news, and to optimise the media exposure of their members. Politicians, policies, and their talk have become “packaged” for media presentation and public consumption. Governments are spending considerable energy and resources on information and communication departments. Fairclough’s discussion further suggests that the mass media have a role to play in shaping political discourse, as well as the audience. I have already mentioned how, in Singapore, government leaders (especially the more senior ones) expect and ensure that their speeches appear in the mass daily press. Thus, whether their immediate audience is teachers at a union meeting, members of a constituency, students at a school assembly, or members of the Chamber of Commerce, the audience they are really addressing is always the nation. This also means that the speech always carries national relevance. Government leaders shape their message for the medium and for the audience that the medium creates. And it is from such speeches, transmitted by the mass media across the nation, that community leaders, business leaders, ministries and individuals take their cue for subsequent thought and action.

Thus, both because of the characteristics of the “national daily newspaper” and the experience of reading these newspapers, and because of its influence on political discourse, the national mass daily press is a powerful location in and through which the imagining of the nation occurs. I now come back to the questions raised earlier. That is, how might we bring our earlier discussion of discourse to an analysis of government speeches as they appear in the mass daily newspaper? To reiterate Simon’s earlier question, “How, then, might we apply this conception of discourse to the issue of textual interpretation?” (1992:110). In the next three sections, I will attempt to answer these questions through a discussion of discourse analysis. This discussion will involve both establishing my points of departure as well as considering ways forward.
2.2 Points of Departure...

In the last twenty years, interest in discourse analysis and the role of language in the construction of social reality has proliferated rapidly. Interest has spread well beyond the traditional disciplines of linguistics and philosophy to such diverse fields as history, literary theory, political theory, sociology, anthropology, and feminist theory. For example, A. Bell (1984, 1991) shows how variance in the pronunciation of word-final-consonant clusters by New Zealand radio reporters correlate with the main occupational profiles of their audiences. Fowler et al. (1979) talk about the various syntactic devices that are used in textual discourse. Goffman (1976,1981) has introduced the notion of "frame analysis", demonstrating how frames in texts organise human experience. Van Dijk (1985, 1988a, 1991, 1992a,b, 1993a) has done considerable work on analysing racism through discourse analysis of newspapers, and has brought the notion of social cognition to discourse analysis. Wetherell and Potter (1992) also analysed racist discourse, focusing on interviews. And Windisch (1990) uses social psychology in his analysis of 'letters to the editor' and interview transcripts to see how ideological discourses create belief systems such as xenophobia.

Given the ever-burgeoning material generated under the rubric of discourse analysis, it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive discussion of the various approaches here. The purpose of my discussion here is to primarily focus on how discourse analysis will inform this thesis and the methodology used. Before I begin, it is important to make clear that, while much of the literature on media discourse that I draw upon concerns journalist discourse (e.g. Cohen and Young, 1988; Fowler, 1991; Glasgow Media Group, 1976, 1980; Hartley, 1982; Menz, 1989; Terdiman, 1985; Van Dijk, 1992a, 1993a), such is not the focus of this thesis. Rather, what I am interested in is specifically government leaders’ speeches as they appear in the press. My focus on the press has to do with the fact that this is where the speeches are most accessible to the people; this is where Singaporeans most commonly see their government’s discourse.

Perhaps the most natural place to begin considering how we might approach discourse analysis would be the body of research known as Critical Discourse Analysis
(CDA). Of particular relevance is work on the ideological dimensions of discourse, and analysis of construction of ideology through (among other texts) newspapers. The approaches to CDA vary considerably (Fairclough, 1985, 1989, 1992a,c, 1995; Fowler et al., 1979; Fowler, 1991, 1996; Kress, 1985a, 1990; Van Dijk, 1985a,b, 1986, 1993b; Wodak 1989, 1990). However, they all share a view of discourse as composed of instances of language use, and locate discourse within relations of social power. That is, they attempt to show how social inequalities are reflected in and created through language (see also Hearn, 1990; Macdonell, 1986; Pennycook, 1994b).

Fairclough sees the principal goals of discourse analysis as twofold (1989:1). The first is to “help correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relationships of power.” The second is to “help increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation.” His concern is thus to locate discourse, which he defines as “language as social practice”, within power relations. In his view, the primary assumption of CDA is that language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology and of struggles for power. It aims to “show up connections which may be hidden from people – such as the connections between language, power and ideology” (1989:5).

Fairclough’s model of discourse analysis (1985, 1989, 1992b, 1993) is premised on a dialectical relationship between the microstructures of discourse (linguistic features) and the macro-structures of society (social structures and ideology). In his words, “The formal properties of a text can be regarded from the perspective of discourse analysis on the one hand as traces of the productive process, and on the other as cues in the process of interpretation” (1989:24). While the macro-structures of society may determine the microstructures of discourse, these in turn reproduce the larger social and ideological structures. There is in his analysis thus a three-dimensional model. The first dimension involves the macro level of discourse practices. Discourse, he says, refers to “the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part.” And so the second level is the micro level of text, which he defines as the product (spoken or written) of the social process of discourse: “A text is a product rather than a process – a product of the process
of text production” (1989:24). Finally, the third level comprises the larger social practices of which the discourse is a part. These social practices are related in important ways, he argues, to ideology and to power. Discourse thus needs to be seen within a view of power as hegemony (1992c:86-91). Putting the three dimensions together, he says: “It is the nature of social practice that determines the macro processes of discursive practice, and it is the micro-process that shapes the text” (1992c:231).

Fowler et al. (1979:1) summarise their views about language and discourse as follows. First, language “embodies specific views – or ‘theories’ – of reality”. This is not to say “a language” embodies “a world view”, but rather, that the different uses of language within one language imply particular understandings. Second, they suggest that “variation in types of discourse is inseparable from social and economic factors” and thus “linguistic variations reflect and, what is more, actively express the structured social differences that give rise to them”. And third, “language usage is not merely an effect or reflex of social organisation and process, it is a part of social process”. The view presented here is thus one in which language use is seen as a social process, and always embedded in its contexts. These contexts are further related to social, political and economic difference.

Fowler’s work on Language in the News in 1991 was largely inspired by the discussions raised in the 1979 collection (especially Trew, 1979 and Hodge, 1979). In this volume, he further develops the notion of critical linguistics. Critical linguistics, he says, “simply means an enquiry into the relations between signs, meanings and the social and historical conditions which govern the semiotic structure of discourse, using a particular kind of linguistic analysis” (1991:5). He later puts a slightly different slant on his definition: “By studying the minute details of linguistic structure in the light of social and historical situation of the text”, critical linguistics seeks to “display to consciousness the patterns of belief and value which are encoded in the language – and which are below the threshold of notice for anyone who accepts the discourse as ‘natural’” (1991:67). Taking this notion to his discussion of language in the news, he argues for the view that news is socially constructed. In his words, “News is not a natural phenomenon emerging straight from ‘reality,’ but a product” (1991:222). News is produced by an industry, shaped by the
bureaucratic and economic structure of that industry and by relations between the media and other industries and between the media and the government. News both reflects and shapes the prevailing values of society. Furthermore, through the use of language, it shapes and changes reality (see also Fowler and Kress, 1979).

Kress (1990) highlights the critical perspective of CDA as being distinct from other forms of discourse analysis. He suggests that the aim of CDA is to "make visible and apparent that which may previously have been invisible and seemingly natural" (1990:85). In so doing, the analyst is able to "show the imbrication of linguistic-discursive practices with the wider socio-political structures of power and domination" (1990:85). He also sets the ambitious target of hoping to "bring about change not only to the discursive practices, but also to the socio-political practices and the structures supporting the discursive practice" (1990:85). He goes on to identify some common assumptions of CDA (1990:85-86). In the first place, there is the view of language as a type of social practice. Second, linguistic features are seen as the result of social processes. CDA also regards texts as the result of the actions of socially situated speakers and writers, and speakers as being differentially located within power relations. Fifth, CDA sees meanings as being the result of those social relations. He contends that mystification is a central characteristic of the use of language and production of texts. As such, the role of the critical discourse analyst is to de-mystify such texts.

Kress (1985a,b; 1986) suggests a four-level analytical model. At the first level are the meanings of texts: "meanings find their expression in text — though the origins of meanings are outside the text — and are negotiated (about) in texts" (1985a:81). The origins of these meanings thus comprise the second level: discourses and genres. He puts it this way: "the meanings of the discourses which appear in the text, and... the forms, meanings and constraints of a particular genre" (1995a:82). However, both discourse and genre are derived from a third level, ideology: "While discourse and genre provide the systematically-organised linguistic categories which make up a text, ideology determines the configuration of discourses that are present together and their articulation in specific genres" (1985b:83). Finally, these ideologies themselves operate "in response to larger social structures" (1985b:83), i.e., relations of power and domination.
Van Dijk (1985a,b,c; 1986; 1988a,b; 1993b) is perhaps one of the more prolific writers dealing specifically with CDA and newspapers. To place his work in context, Van Dijk (1993a) argues that the purpose of CDA is to know "what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play a role" in the (re-) production of ideology. He goes on to say that the primary focus of CDA is on the "discourse dimensions of power abuse and the injustice of inequality that result from it" (1993a:252). Critical discourse analysts are not just analysts, but are social activists: "The 1990s are replete with persistent problems of oppression, injustice and inequality that demand their urgent attention" (1993a:253). Wodak (1989, 1990; and Matouschek, 1993) similarly shares this vision for CDA, arguing that the objective of such research is to uncover inequality and injustice.

In Van Dijk's analysis, the discursive reproduction of dominance has two main dimensions: production and reception. Both require an understanding of social cognition. That is, both require an understanding of the "socially shared representations of societal arrangements, groups and relations, as well as mental operations such as interpretation, thinking and arguing, inferencing and learning" and so on (1993a:258). This social cognition explains both the way in which dominant discourses are produced as well as the way they are understood. In his view, the purpose of CDA is thereby to make explicit the inferences of social cognition of the dominant group, and in so doing, to make explicit the power abuse of dominant groups and its resulting inequality. Much of his research has thus focused on analysing racism through discourse analysis of the press (1991, 1992a,b, 1993a).

There are three levels in Van Dijk's (1985b, 1986, 1992b) analytical model. At the first level is the superstructure, which is essentially a textual schema. Thus, for example, news reports are organised by a conventional news schema. Such schematic patterns, he argues, play a role in both the comprehension and production of the text. The superstructure organises the next level, the surface structure, which comprises the forms of language use one can see and hear (morphology, syntax, etc.). And the surface structure signals the deep/underlying structure, which comprises meaning. Or, conversely, the deep structure finds its expression in the surface structure. Using this
framework, his analysis aims to show relationships between texts, production processes and comprehension processes, as well as the relationship between these and the social practices within which they are embedded.

Although she would position her work outside the field of CDA, because her work adopts some of the same principles, it is worth considering the analysis of D. Smith (1990a,b) here as well. In her analysis, texts are analogous to a “crystal which bends the light as it passes through.” Through these “schemata of interpretation”, texts are themselves seen as “organising a course of concerted social action” (Smith, 1990b:121). Elsewhere (1990a) she calls these schemata “ideological circles”, defined as methods of producing an account. Like Van Dijk’s superstructure, Smith’s ideological circles in a text work on two levels: in organising the production of the text and in determining the organisation for the reading and interpretation of the text. In the text’s production, the “categories structuring data collection are already organised by a predetermined schema; the data produced becomes the reality intended by the schema; the schema interprets the data” (1990a:93). Ideological circles “transpose actual events, located in specific places and performed by real individuals, into the generalised forms in which they can be known” (1990a:172). What this means for analysis is that, by looking at a text, the underlying pattern at work can be discovered. It is possible to see the principles at work structuring and restructuring people’s lives. In the text’s interpretation, the schema of the text, including its structure and syntax, guide how the text is to be read and interpreted.

While such analyses within the CDA tradition are important (see Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard’s 1996 collection for some interesting analyses), some serious questions need to be asked. Pennycook raises some of these questions in his critique of CDA (1994b). In the first place, he asks, “if we indeed understand social relations to be marked by deep inequalities, how are such inequalities to be explained?” (1994b:125). For Fairclough and others working in a neo-Marxist perspective, power is located in the relationship between social classes and economic production. While important, economic class relations is clearly not the only site of inequality (Think of race and gender for example, as is more evident in Van Dijk’s analysis. While such relations are also bound up with economics, they also need to be understood separately.). The tendency, Pennycook
argues, is thus to "construct an over-simplified version of society whereby a 'dominant group' has power while the 'oppressed' do not", and to "become too deterministic in ascribing causality to socio-economic relations" (1994b:125; see also G.Williams, 1992). Even though he takes his analysis outside of just socio-economic relations to that of racism, and even though he cursorily acknowledges social relations to be more complex, Van Dijk, too, assumes a fairly simplistic model of power relations of haves and have-nots.

A related concern has to do with the tendency in much of such analyses for a rather conspiratorial view of ideology. For example, in his earlier writings, Kress (and Hodge, 1979) defines ideology "as the conscious production of an individual or group whose objective is the subversion of some other group" (G. Williams, 1992:244). Fowler (1991:2) assures his readers that "one can believe that news is a practice without also believing that news is a conspiracy"; yet his discussion still tends to suggest similar conspiratorial undertones. In D. Smith's analysis, there is also a Marxist tendency to use ideology in a conspiratorial way, whereby meaning is the basis of sustaining domination. This comes through, for example, in her discussion of "textual realities, ruling, and suppression" where she argues that "Hierarchy, power, and domination sustain the circularity of schema" of the ideological circle (1990a:103).

This has resulted in a third problem in CDA, and that is to posit a "real" world that is misrepresented and hid by ideology - not unlike the falsity/genuineness we saw earlier in Hobsbawm's analysis of nationalism. This is evident primarily in the problematic structure of micro/macro analyses. As Giddens (1984) says in his critique of the micro/macro division, by setting one term off against the other (in what he calls a "phoney war"), the "implication [is] that we have to choose between them, regarding one as in some way more fundamental than the other" (1984:139). This view emerges in the notion that texts (the micro level) are read in order to reveal the "true" workings of social structures (the macro level). The Glasgow Media Group (1976, 1980), for example, argues that television news needs to be understood as being conscious ideology production. In such a view, the task of the critical linguist is to help remove the veil of obscurity in texts so that the "truth" can be discovered. Menz argues that the task of critical linguistics is to "reveal the underlying system of beliefs", to reveal ruling structures, interests of powerful groups,
and concealments (1989:229). Along the same vein, Fowler presents the goal of CDA as being to "expose misrepresentation and discrimination in a variety of mode of public discourse" (1996:5). The general assumption is thus that ideological positions misrepresent a real world, as was most explicitly stated by Fowler: "The world of the press is not the real world, but a world skewed and judged" (1991:11). Pennycook challenges such a position. For, he asks, how then "do we arrive at that real world without the mediation of language? How can we deal with the real world without ideological distortion?" (1994b:125). Collins (1981) brings us forward in this respect when he suggests that, in order to bring the "micro" and "macro" together, we consider the "microtranslation" of "structural phenomena" as the focus of analysis (see also Fine, 1991 who flips Collins' argument around to argue that macrosociology undergirds an adequate microsociology).

In much of CDA, there is also the tendency to give little room for human agency. Van Dijk (1992b) notes this in his discussion of social cognition, but does not see it as a problem. In D. Smith's analysis of "ideological circles" it is also not clear "who" is creating these circles. There is an agentless notion of power, and a view of the autonomy of the text. Furthermore, there is an uncomfortable silence in much of CDA literature about struggle and resistance, and about contradictory voices. What Fiske says about the Gramscian model relates here as well: "It assumes the success of the textual practice of constructing and promoting the dominant ideology and cannot account for its failure" (1989:175).

My final point of departure is from Fairclough's claim that texts are a product of the social process of discourse, rather than a social process itself. But this is the subject of the next section.

2.3 ... and Ways Forward

To carry us forward in this discussion of methodology, I wish to pick up on Said's discussion of texts as being "worldly". We already encountered the notion of "worldly" in Pennycook's discussion of language, which, as noted earlier, was taken from Said (1983). Given the emphasis thus far of the worldliness of language, of imagining the nation, and of
discourse, it follows that texts, as a location wherein all of these concepts meet, are also “worldly”. In Said’s words, “A text in its actually being a text is a being in the world” (Said, 1983:33). This is a point often missed. More commonly, it is the “assumption of the inertia of the text” (D. Smith, 1990b) that seems to have informed textual analysis. In so doing, the text becomes what Fish (1980) calls a “self-consuming artefact”. Studies done by McHoul (1982), Green (1983), Ricoeur (1981), and Widdowson (1978) all presuppose the text as something that appears for analysis already as a specimen, dead, inert, and severed from the social and historical conditions of its production. The text is merely read for its content, as a “text-itself” (Bennett, 1987). There is also a tendency of the deconstructionalist position to place undue emphasis on the limitlessness of interpretation. As described by Jackson (1991), meanings are seen as “indeterminate products of interpretation”, resulting in “textual mysticism”. Textual interpretation can only be a “slime-mould” analysis, with meaning sliding about all over the place (Jackson, 1991:163). Along the same vein, Said describes such a limitless view of interpretation as one wherein textuality is seen as a “somewhat mystical and disinfection subject matter of literary theory” (1983:3). He goes on to say, “textuality is considered to take place, yes, but by the same token it does not take place anywhere or anytime in particular. It is produced, but by no one and at no time... literary theory has for the most part isolated textuality from the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that made it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work” (1983:4).

It is in contrast to such a “slime-mould” view of textuality that Said introduces the notion of the worldliness of texts:

Texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly. Whether a text is preserved or put aside for a period, whether it is on a library shelf or not, whether it is considered dangerous or not: these matters have to do with a text’s being in the world, which is a more complicated matter than the private process of reading. (1983:35)

What this understanding of texts requires is a connection “between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies, and events. The realities of power
and authority - as well as the resistances offered by men, women, and social movements to institutions, authorities and orthodoxies" (Said, 1983:5). All these are the realities that make the texts possible. At whatever point a text and reader are brought together, the text and its interpretation are located at particular and physical social relations. Furthermore, "texts and readers always come together historically" (Simon, 1992:103). Texts come as "texts-to-be-read" (Bennett, 1987).

The worldliness of texts also places constraints on how the texts can be interpreted. Simon brings the worldliness of texts and discourse together when he says,

Focusing on the notion that a discourse references a mode of production of the symbolic, the writing and the distribution of a text can be described as constituted by sets of practices produced within a limited range of rules and ordering procedures for employing a differentiated set of images and signs. In this view texts are not ahistorical facts, but very real traces of discursively ordered and regulated productive practices. (1992:110)

This is not to take Mey's extreme position that, "Whoever is in control of a text's structure has the key to its interpretation" (1989:339). Rather, Said argues, "the closeness of the world's body to the text's body forces readers to take both into consideration." The text's "worldliness, circumstantially, the text's status as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency, are considered as being incorporated in the text, an infrangible part of its capacity for conveying and producing meaning" (Said, 1983:39). Texts are produced for the purposes of readership; thus the assumption is that texts, guided by discourse, intend methods and schemata of interpretation that place restraints on their interpretation. Such a view of texts and discourse in texts takes us away from the mystification for which Foucault has been frequently criticised (O'Farrell, 1982). The worldliness of texts requires an awareness of who are the speakers/writers, who are the hearers/readers, of how they are brought together and to what effect. Bringing us back to my final "point of departure" in the previous section, such a view of texts clearly diverges from Fairclough's claim that texts are a product of the social process of discourse. Rather, in their worldliness, texts are a part of that social process itself, embedded in historical, social and political specificity.

This view of the worldliness of texts, put together with my earlier discussion about language and discourse in the previous chapter, thus allows for more meaningful possibilities of
discourse analysis. This is not to say that the contributions made by CDA are not valuable. Indeed, many of the tools offered by CDA in doing discourse analysis are extremely useful. I share CDA’s view that it is necessary to locate the context of language use (texts) and the speakers within their social, cultural and political (i.e., worldly) context. However, the goals of analysis are different. Rather than trying to unmask some kind of truth hidden or misrepresented by ideology, the purpose instead is to understand how discourses construct our lives and our understanding of our world. The goal is to see how meaning is produced through discourse. And a focus is placed on voices of resistance, and on how such resistance also is part of that production. Bringing this discussion to the imagining of the nation, the focus is on the discursive processes of the imagined community by the government, in the mass daily press. However, even though the focus is on government discourse, care must be taken to avoid reading “the nation” too restrictively, as merely an apparatus of state power. Bhabha’s introductory words in Nation and Narration (1990) are useful in directing our focus in this project as well:

It is the project of Nation and Narration to explore the Janus-faced [using Bakhtin’s terms] ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation. This turns the familiar two-faced god into a figure of prodigious doubling that investigates the nation-space in the process of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are in media res; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of ‘composing’ its powerful image... For the nation... is an agency of ambivalent narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for ‘subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding. (1990:3-4)

It is the dialogic and incomplete (and incompletable) process of imagining that is of significance for analysis.

With this focus and understanding of texts, I turn to the next section where I will briefly outline the technical aspects of the methodology used to examine the discursive production and mapping of language and the imagined nation of Singapore.
2.4 Methodology

Before I embark on a discussion of the methodology that will be used in this thesis, there are a few basic premises that need to be established. The first concerns a note of caution put forward by Verschueren (1991; see also Bakhtin, 1981:292; Singh, Dasgupta and Lele, 1995). "Detailed analyses of texts", he says, "always run the risk of reading more into them than was either meant or communicated." As a result, "individual texts can never be regarded as a sufficient basis for valid general conclusions." His recommendation is that "the studied data have to be as wide as possible; one should abstain from focusing on single occurrences of linguistic features, or even on single texts; the same questions should be asked for coverage of a news event in its totality as for limited passages; the final picture should be arrived at by paying attention to large numbers of interrelated details" (1991:195). In addition to these recommendations, I would also argue for an "inter-methodological" approach. That is, multiple forms of analysis (interviews, observations, etc.) should also be used, the findings of which should further support the conclusions drawn from the analysis of particular texts. Finally, I agree with Verschueren (1991) in that discourse analysis must take an interdisciplinary approach. It should incorporate, for example, the contributions of linguistics, political economy, and sociology in order to provide a wide and balanced analysis. As well, because of the close alignment of language and educational policies in Singapore, such analysis should also draw from studies in education to consider the ways in which language policy and ideologies are implemented in the schools and interact with the objectives of education in the imagining of the nation.

Taking all of these considerations into account, I found the methodology outlined by Thompson (1984) particularly useful (although I do not concur completely with his notion of ideology and aims of analysis). Thompson draws upon the work of Ricoeur (1981) to develop what he calls a "depth-interpretative" procedure. This procedure involves three phases (1984; see Hearn, 1990; and Ruggles, 1986): (1) social analysis; (2) discursive analysis; and (3) dialogic analysis. These three phases are neither necessarily chronological nor are they distinct; their classifications are analytical demarcations only. In the remainder of this section, I will
provide a more detailed description of Thompson's methodology, with some amendments to make it more applicable to the focus of this study.

The first phase of “social analysis” is concerned with an analysis of the social-historical conditions within which human beings interact. According to Thompson, meaning is not a static property of language, but rather is a “multi-layered and fluctuating phenomenon which is constituted as much by the conditions of production as by the conditions of reception” (1984:65). He places the necessity to establish the worldliness of the text at the helm of his analysis: “To suppose that the study of the discursive forms in which ideology is expressed could be detached from the socio-historical conditions of discursive production would be to lose sight of the relations of domination in virtue of which discourse is ideological” (1984:134). Gramsci (1971) made a similar point when he argued that the starting point for any critical account must be the historical process in which identity and self-consciousness are constructed. Thus, in a broad sense, this first level of analysis concerns a description of the social field, history, and social relations relevant to the area of investigation.

Relating this first stage to the analysis in this thesis, what is required is an analysis of the institutional origins and methods of producing particular texts. With respect to the press, Abdul Razak’s (Chief Editor of the economic daily NERACA, Jakarta) definition of press systems provides a useful starting point. According to Razak (1985:2), the “concepts upon which a society is based... determine that society’s news media function.” It is therefore necessary to understand “how the type of system adopted influences the way the medium is used and how this in turn shapes its social impacts” (1985:2). He goes on to identify thirteen key aspects of press systems that require investigation: press role, function, social belief, mode of operation (operational techniques), control, freedom, criticism, censorship, set of standards, time context, geographical boundaries, social systems, and politics. Questions that need to be asked concerning these aspects of press systems include the following. How much freedom is there in the press? Who owns and operates the newspapers? Does ownership translate into actual control over information? What are their political affiliations? What are their other economic interests? Does control over media content translate into ruling class propaganda; does it serve their interests and ultimately give their viewpoint? Do they actually influence public opinion? Who funds the media? How is reporting handled? Who authorises what
particular stories and articles will get covered? What is the hierarchical structure of the particular news organisation? What/who is the source of news? Who writes and edits? Who is the target audience? (see also Hearn, n.d.; Parenti, 1986). Even though my data will be government speeches as they appear in the press, such questions are still important. For we still need to understand how these speeches get into the press, who makes the decisions to have which speeches published and on what page, and so on. These questions are central to understanding the press as an institution of discourse, and the discourse of institutions (Terdiman, 1985) within the imagining of the nation.

The second phase of Thompson's methodology involves a discursive analysis of the linguistic structure of discourse. For, Thompson argues, discourse "must be viewed not only as socially and historically situated practices, but also as linguistic constructions which display an articulated structure. Forms of discourse are situated practices and something more, precisely because they are linguistic constructions which claim to say something" (1984:136). To study the linguistic construction of discourse is to explicate their role in the functioning of ideology. I find Wetherell and Potter's (1992) notion of "interpretative repertoires" useful here. Interpretative repertoires, they argue, are "pre-eminently a way of understanding the content of discourse and how that content is organised" (1992:90). Stylistic and grammatical elements are also often closely associated with this organisation. In looking at such elements, the focus is on "language use, what is achieved by that use and the nature of the interpretative resources that allow that achievement" (1992:90-91). Perhaps most importantly, they stress the use of these repertoires in context, and the ways in which particular concepts are mobilised, paying attention to their specific construction and to their rhetorical organisation.

In this stage, then, the grammatical and narrative features of the text are examined in an effort to see the construction of ideology. Four levels of analysis are involved:

- Voices in the text: who are the various speakers? How directly do they speak? Which ones are paraphrased or anonymous? How much of the story does each voice occupy? Who speaks for whom? The organisation of voices in the text is a key way to organise the internal structuring of language according to authorial intent (Bakhtin, 1981), including counter discourses.
• Argumentative: the explanations and chains of reasoning in a discourse in their procedures of legitimisation and dissimulation. For Verschueren, this level of analysis would also include "how the implementation of specific linguistic choices operate to bring about a specific interpretation" (1991:197).

• Themes: looking at redundancy and repetitiveness in the text as a way to discover themes and the relations between themes, and the way this builds a particular view of language and the imagined nation. This involves both explicitly communicated meaning as well as implicit meaning. For example, Blommaert and Verschueren (1991a, 1992) worked on the assumption that most language users are unable to express all that they mean in a fully explicit way and that most of the assumptions they expect their readers to share with them are left implicit. They thus focus on an analysis of these implicit assumptions, manifested either as recurrence or as systematic absence. Such assumptions, they argue, reveal a common frame of reference, or ideology.

• Genre of the article and its significance for the reader: how the genre of the report and the event (for example, the Speak Mandarin Campaign as a campaign) organise the production and reading of the text. The choice of a particular genre may also work to include and exclude individuals and groups from the discourse. Bakhtin (1981, 1986) also talks about how genres can be used to organise various voices in the text and to thereby direct the reading of the text according to authorial intent.

Building on Wetherell and Potter's (1992) earlier comments about "language use, what is achieved by that use and the nature of the interpretative resources that allow that achievement" (1992:90-91), this stage would also involve analysis of rhetorical devices such as verb tense, nominalisation, the use of pronouns, and other stylistic and grammatical elements. As Janks (1993) and Verschueren (1991) argue, speakers constantly make linguistic choices (either consciously or unconsciously) for linguistic or extralinguistic reasons. Questions need to be asked concerning why these choices were made, whose interests do they serve, and about how these choices contributed to the organisation of the content and interpretation of the discourse. For example, through the use of modality, speakers express their attitude towards themselves,
their interlocutors, and towards their subject matter. Along the same vein, the choice of pronouns allows speakers to control the distance between themselves and their interlocutors, as well as themselves and their subject matter. And the use of tense can be used to prioritise the various elements in the speech. Together, these (and other) stylistic and grammatical elements organise the text towards authorial intent, and direct particular readings of that text.

Finally, the third phase of analysis in Thompson’s methodology is that of interpretation, which connects the second phase with the first. This final phase is vital, Thompson argues, if we are to argue confidently that certain forms of discourse are implicated in the sustenance and maintenance of particular social patterns. “Discourse says something about something”, he says, “and it is this transcending character which must be grasped” (1984:137).

Thompson’s “depth-interpretative” procedure is a useful one, and guides the general framework of my analysis in this thesis. However, as I mentioned earlier, his notion of stages is of course, an idealised scheme. As Wetherell and Potter note (1992) about Thompson’s framework, the stages are entirely intertwined and all are interpretative and all involve constructive readings. As a result, the practical analysis of discourse can never be a tidy systematic procedure. However, the next chapter does seek to establish the socio-political contexts within which the mass daily press in Singapore operates along the lines that Thompson recommends. My aim in that chapter is to develop an introductory account of the textual location within which the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation occurs. I will argue that the location of this discourse in the press is not arbitrary, but rather part of a very particular relationship between the government and the press as well as part of the government’s broader style of imagining the nation.

The rest of my analysis deals with specific texts of government discourse about language and the imagining of the nation as they appear in the press. I began my research much in the same way a sociologist would code her fieldnotes. I first gathered newspaper clippings on language that appeared in The Straits Times from 1959 to 1994. This generated approximately 2,000 articles, which I organised chronologically. These clippings included editorials, reports, transcripts of speeches, interviews, letters to the editor, reports on statistics, and summary accounts of letters to the Chinese press. For the purposes of easy reference, I developed a table of the headlines of each article and the date. My first approach to these
articles was through the form of “open-coding” analysis. That is, I assigned codes to the different categories and themes, regardless of how I would eventually use them. This coding was done with different coloured highlighters. The purpose of this open coding was to develop a sense of what the major themes might be, and to identify where there were shifts in these themes. I then went through the data again, this time using “close-coding” analysis, using the themes that I had identified during the first stage of open coding. At this point I compiled a table which had in its first column the major theme identified; in the second column the dates when articles with that theme appeared in the press; and in the third column, notation about the speakers and/or context involved. Because shifts in language policy usually appear in a minister’s speech (rather than in a specific policy document), this table was also used to note shifts in language policy.

Taking Verschueren’s point about using multiple sources of data, I constructed a similar table detailing the themes of the annual Speak Mandarin Campaign speeches. Because the press largely operates under the heavy hand of the government, even editorials, letters to the editor, and interviews essentially reinforce the dominant discourse of the imagining of the nation. For example, editorials and analyses typically investigate controversial issues more thoroughly, but in an obvious attempt to make them more acceptable to those who might be unhappy or unconvinced about the government’s particular policy or views. However, close reading often revealed voices of resistance as well, which allowed for a more dialogic analysis.

To further substantiate the validity of this analysis, I also was able to interview journalists, academics, members of the Speak Mandarin Campaign committee, and civil servants. These discussions were important to get some sense of the insiders’ points of view, as well as to keep a check on the danger of reading too much into the text. I also watched videos of a number of panel discussions that have been held over the years in Singapore on language and the imagining of the nation. I found it necessary to speak to a number of educationists as well. Much of the discourse of language and the imagining of the nation in Singapore involves education. In fact, it is hardly possible to speak about education without meaning language. As Gopinathan, a prominent educationist in Singapore has remarked, “whenever major decision on education had to be taken, these were expressed in terms of language rather than objectives or content” (1980:175). Language planning policies are usually
made in ministerial statements. There are then translated into Ministry of Education guidelines and implemented in the schools. Apart from the natural relationship between education and language in terms of language learning, the synthesis of language and education also has to do with the central role given to education as an agent of political socialisation (Chan Heng Chee, 1972; MacDougall, 1982). Quoting again from Gopinathan, “education is seen almost completely as an instrument in the national development process” (1985:197).

Finally, at those moments when there was a distinct shift in the ideologies of language, I developed a closer reading of the particular text along the lines advocated by Thompson. These specific texts were identified in a number of ways. First of all, the coding system discussed earlier allowed me to see both where there were important shifts in language ideologies as discussed in government leaders’ speeches. Secondly, also using the coding system, I was able to get a sense of the importance accorded a particular speech by the government. If a particular speech was advertised prior to the event, if there were summary accounts, discussion columns, editorials and interviews with readers in addition to a complete script of the speech, if the text was subsequently referenced in other ministerial speeches, and if the speech resulted in particular policy changes – these all were taken as indicators of the significance of a particular speech for the development of language ideology in the imagining of the nation. Thirdly, the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* speeches themselves were a guide, as they often synthesised and embodied the particular changes in government-think that might have occurred during that particular year.

Once these texts were identified, I was then able to conduct a more detailed analysis of the language used, and how the particular linguistic devices used contributed to the organisation of meaning in the text. Continuing from my discussion of discourse and text, it is clear that the focus of analysis is not how discourses or texts reflect social reality. Neither do I want to focus on the causes or basis of power and inequality. Rather, what I am interested in is how discourses produce and map our understanding of social realities, in this case, the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation.


2.5 Recapitulation

In these last two chapters, I have attempted to lay out some of the introductory questions, concepts and methodology that will inform this thesis. This thesis is about the discursive relationship between language ideologies and imagining the nation in Singapore. One of the key aspects of discourse is that they are most often (although not always) conceptualised through language, through the articulation of words. Hence they are textual. And certainly, although not the only domain, one of the most accessible locations wherein the government in Singapore has imagined the nation is in the mass daily press. And so, I began this second chapter by examining what it meant to have the government’s imagining of the nation located in the mass daily newspaper. First, I looked at how the characteristics of the “national daily newspaper” and the experience of reading these newspapers allows readers to think of themselves in national terms. Second, I looked at newspapers as a medium for political discourse, and at how government leaders shape their message for that medium.

The rest of the chapter was framed by Roger Simon’s question concerning how we might understand texts in terms of discourse: “How, then, might we apply this conception of discourse to the issue of textual interpretation?” (1992:110). After considering the contributions by those writing under the rubric of CDA, it became apparent that the goals of CDA and my attempts to apply the notion of discourse as conceptualised in this thesis to discourse analysis were fundamentally different. Said’s notion of the dynamic worldliness of texts brought us forward, allowing us to see texts as social process and embedded in the social, historical and political conditions wherein they are produced and read. In this view, then, texts are evidence of discursively ordered and regulated productive practices. Indeed, the moment we begin to examine texts, we are involved in discursive activity. And thus, by examining texts and the articulation of words in texts, it is possible to see the processes of particular discourses and to understand how they operate as “frames of reference” within which we understand ourselves and ourselves in relation to the world.

The last section of this chapter focused on the methodological practices whereby we might approach discourse analysis. Using Thompson’s “depth-interpretative” procedure, it is
possible to bring together the discursive dynamism of the imagining of the nation, the worldliness of language, and the worldliness of texts. It involves a level of “social analysis” whereby the socio-historical conditions of the production and reading of texts and of their institutions are examined. It involves a level of “discursive analysis”, using the tools of linguistic analysis to examine how discourse is organised. And finally, it involves a level of “interpretation”. These are the key methodological procedures by which to examine the ongoing and incompletable imagining of the nation.

I now take us to the next chapter where I will discuss in detail the role of the press in Singapore. This next chapter is thus the first step of analysis as outlined by Thompson: the socio-historical analysis of institutional origins and methods of producing particular texts. This analysis will help us better understand the imagining of the nation in and through government leaders’ speeches as they appear in the press. To take us to this chapter, I repeat Thompson’s quote that I gave earlier. In this statement, Thompson is summarising Bourdieu’s (1991) critical position of certain forms of political discourse analysis. “It would be superficial (at best)”, he says, “to try to analyse political discourses or ideologies by focusing on the utterances as such, without reference to the constitution of the political field and the relations between this field and the broader space of social positions and processes” (1991:28-29). In the next chapter, then, I will focus on the sociohistorical conditions within which government speeches in the mass daily newspaper appear and are received.
CHAPTER THREE

NEWSPAPERS IN SINGAPORE: A MASS CEREMONY IN THE IMAGINING OF THE NATION

In a speech at an annual Singapore Press Club dinner (26 Feb 1988), Brigadier General (hereafter BG) Lee Hsien Loong (then Trade and Industry Minister and Second Minister for Defence) made two important comments concerning the role of the press in Singapore. First, he made the observation that, while not the only influence on public opinion in Singapore, the mass daily press “is a major one... One way or another, the press moulds the perceptions of Singaporeans.” Second, he placed before his audience what he saw as their highest mandate: “The stance of the Singapore press must be to contribute to nation building. Anyone endeavouring to do this and working towards these goals can hold his head high in the full confidence that his is an honourable profession” (ST 28 Feb 1988). BG Lee’s comments are profoundly important for understanding the role of the press in Singapore, and for understanding the significance of this role with respect to the presence of government speeches in the press.

In the first place, his comments suggest the centrality of the mass daily press in the everyday lives of Singaporeans, and the powerful influence that the government sees the press having on the way that Singaporeans think and act. This influence is a key reason why the government considers the press as an important location within and through which to imagine the nation. For, as we see secondly, his comments also suggest the centrality of the mass daily press in the imagining of the nation. And because the government has mandated the press to participate in the national agenda, it can also expect the press to publish its speeches, policies and activities. The location of the press for government speeches is significant with respect to the way the speeches are written,
presented and understood. Most importantly, because the press is made part of the national agenda, when government speeches are located within the press, these speeches too (and their audience) are "nationalised". By this I mean that, by virtue of their location within the press (which is located within the national agenda), these speeches also become part of that imagining. And the intended addressee is no longer the immediate physical audience; rather it is the entire nation. Thus clearly it would be impossible to adequately analyse and understand government speeches that appear in the press without reference to the conditions of their production and reception in the mass daily press. The purpose of this chapter is to provide this socio-historical analysis, to consider the role of the press in the imagining of Singapore, and to consider how this role contributes to our understanding of government texts in the press.

The first two sections of this chapter will provide some of the necessary background information for this discussion. The first will provide the rationale for my choice of The Straits Times as the main source for my data, as well as give a brief description of the newspaper. The second section will focus on establishing the presence of the mass daily press in the everyday lives of Singaporeans. While other forms of mass media are also very much part of everyday life in Singapore, it is the press that is particularly popular among the people, especially as it concerns obtaining information about the government. In the third section I will examine the role of the press in the imagining of Singapore. The role of the press in nations around the world is most often tied into the specific imagining of that nation. However, in Singapore, this relationship is particularly explicit and well defined. I will first consider its location within the national agenda with respect to other national institutions (such as education, national service, urban planning, etc.). I will then identify how the role of the press in the nationalist agenda has been defined and practised. The most familiar theme is that the press must help maintain social control and national cohesion by teaching and supporting government policy, and by supporting the establishment of Asian values.

Because of the powerful presence of the press in both the everyday lives of Singaporeans and the nationalist agenda, the government has placed considerable control on the press. As I will discuss in the fourth section, this control comes in three ways:
through the relationship between the government and the press, through forces of centralisation, and through direct legislation. This discussion will demonstrate how press control in Singapore is conditioned by the socio-political climate of the nation, and by the type of nation that the government wishes to imagine. Finally, in the fifth section, I will look at the daily press as an institution of discourse with respect to the government's language policies. This will prepare us for the remaining chapters, where I look at the government's discourse on language in the imagining of the nation.

3.1 Introduction: The Straits Times

While newspapers in Singapore are available in all four official languages (Mandarin, English, Tamil, and Malay; Table 3.1a), the primary source for my data in this project is the English daily newspaper, The Straits Times. The most basic reason for this choice has to do with my limited proficiency in the other languages. However, there are other considerations as well. In the first place, it is The Straits Times that has the largest share of the local newspaper market and that is read by all ethnic groups in Singapore. Because of its cross-ethnic readership, The Straits Times tends to give a more balanced presentation of events and issues that concern the different ethnic communities. For this reason it has been given a special role in nation building (ST 24 July 1988). It is also one of the longest surviving newspapers in Singapore, its first edition dating back to 15 July 1845.

Another important justification for my choice of The Straits Times has to do with the particular press system operating in Singapore. All of the various language presses are under the same publishing company, Singapore Press Holdings. Hence, they are all governed by the same rules and operate under similar constraints. Their reporters attend the same news briefings, they receive the same press releases (in English), and their editors meet daily for a news-editorial conference. This is not to say the newspapers are identical. However, it does imply a certain degree of congruency. This consistency was borne out in a study on multilingualism and the mass media in Singapore conducted by sociologist Eddie Kuo (1980a). He found that, although the Chinese press was more supportive of the government's Speak Mandarin Campaign than the English press, both were consistent in their reports concerning
the government's discourse about language and the nation. A final consideration to note is that the official version of all government speeches and documents (ironically, even those concerning the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*) is always the English one, even if the speech was originally given in one of the other official languages. For these reasons, then, I have chosen to use the English-medium *Straits Times* as the primary source of my data.

*The Straits Times* comes in three sections. The main section carries the news in an average run of 40 pages. Included in this section is the “Forum” page, which publishes letters to the editor. The second section called “Life!” features light articles on issues ranging from films, books, TV, theatre, to family, food, fashion, music, arts, and travel, as well as the daily entertainment guide. The third section is for classified ads. *The Sunday Times* includes additional sections called “Sunday Plus” and “Sunday Review” which provide commentary, book reviews, and other entertainment reviews. Also under the rubric of *The Straits Times* is *The Straits Times Overseas Weekly* which provides a weekly summary of the news coverage of the daily, and is mostly for Singaporeans studying or working abroad.

With this brief introduction to newspapers in Singapore, I now turn to an analysis of the mass daily newspaper as a national mass ceremony in the everyday lives of Singaporeans.

### 3.2 The Mass Daily Press in the Everyday Lives of Singaporeans

Newspapers are very visibly rooted in the everyday lives of Singaporeans. Every morning and late afternoon newspaper vendors appear at subway entrances, bus depots and the markets with their piles of papers. Commuters on the crowded morning subways and buses engross themselves in the newspaper before they begin their day's work. A walk through the apartment estates in the early morning and evenings shows old men relaxing on park benches or at a table in the “void deck” (open areas under the apartments blocks) with their newspaper. The morning routine in the hawker centres is a cup of steaming “kopi” (local coffee) with a newspaper. In the hot, humid afternoons when business is slow, shopkeepers crouch in the shade, reading a newspaper. Even young school children can be frequently seen reading newspapers while riding the city bus or subway on their way home from school.
Statistics bear out this popularity of the daily press. Around the time when discussions about language and language ideologies began to have a strong presence in the press in 1979, there were eleven daily newspapers in Singapore (Table 3.1a,b). There were four Chinese papers, with a circulation of 272,800 (47.7%); three English, with circulation at 257,300 (45%); one Malay, with a circulation of 31,800 (5.6%); two Tamil, with a circulation of about 8,800 for one of them (1.5%); and one Malayalam paper, with a circulation of 700 (.1%). The 1980 census showed that, while on average only about 25 percent of the population purchased a newspaper, more than 80 percent of the adult population (age 15+) read one every day (Tay, 1983). In 1994, there were (and still are) eight daily newspapers in Singapore: three Chinese, with a circulation of 438,000 (42.5%); three English, with a circulation of 527,500 (51.1%); one Malay, with a circulation of 61,000 (5.9%); and one Tamil, with a circulation rate of 5,000 (.5%). Readership again was much higher than circulation (Table 3.2). In 1994, readership for the Chinese dailies was 1,511,000, with 3.5 readers per copy. Readership for the Malay newspaper was 206,000, translating to about 3.4 persons per copy. And readership for the Tamil daily was 16,000, with about 3.2 readers per copy.

The newspaper is particularly important to those with at least secondary education, which is quickly becoming the average minimum level of education in Singapore. Kuo et al. (1993) found that 90 percent of those with post-secondary education read English newspapers, compared with 70 percent of those with secondary education, and 22.8 percent of those with primary education or less. 50 percent of those with post-secondary education read two language papers regularly, while 27.6 percent of those with secondary and 47.9 percent with primary education or less only read the paper in their own language. Furthermore, 84 percent of those with post-secondary education read the newspaper daily, compared with 70.7 percent of those with secondary and 47.9 percent of those with primary education and less. Finally, they found that everyone with post-secondary education read at least some of the newspaper, while 1.1 percent of those with secondary and 17.9 percent of those with primary education or less did not read the newspaper at all.
### Table 3.1a Newspapers and Their Circulation Rates* in Singapore (1978-1995)

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<tr>
<td><strong>English – Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>238,500</td>
<td>257,300</td>
<td>264,200</td>
<td>277,000</td>
<td>287,000</td>
<td>314,000</td>
<td>399,500</td>
<td>460,800</td>
<td>527,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Nation (1971-1984)</td>
<td>45,100</td>
<td>41,000</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Straits Times (1845-)</td>
<td>188,400</td>
<td>211,300</td>
<td>248,200</td>
<td>260,000</td>
<td>270,000</td>
<td>297,000</td>
<td>311,900</td>
<td>345,500</td>
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<td>17,000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>347,000</td>
<td>359,000</td>
<td>404,500</td>
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<td>Shin Min Daily (1967-)</td>
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<td>45,700</td>
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<td>61,000</td>
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<td>37,400</td>
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<td>54,800</td>
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<td><strong>Tamil – Total</strong></td>
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<td>8,500</td>
<td>6,400</td>
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<td>4,800</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Murasu (1935-)</td>
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<td>8,800</td>
<td>8,500</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Malayalam – Total</strong></td>
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<td>700</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malaysia Malayali (?-1988)</td>
<td>700</td>
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<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>558,100</td>
<td>571,400</td>
<td>680,100</td>
<td>673,300</td>
<td>690,300</td>
<td>709,300</td>
<td>809,000</td>
<td>925,100</td>
<td>1,031,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Key:** [ ] paper no longer in circulation  [ ] paper not yet in circulation [n.a.] figures not available

* Nanyang Siang Pau and Sin Chew Jit Poh merged in 1983 to become Lianhe Zaobao

* At times, various sources gave conflicting circulation rates, and at times, different annual editions of the same source gave conflicting figures for the same years. However, although conflicting at times, the trends remained apparent. As such, I have rounded the circulation figures to the closest averaging hundred.

* Estimated, based on previous year
Table 3.1b Newspapers and Their Circulation Rates in Singapore (1978-1995) (%)

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<td>English</td>
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<td>44.3</td>
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<td>49.8</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Chinese</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>42.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<td>5.9</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<td>.8</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.5</td>
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<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>99.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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Table 3.2 Readership of Singapore’s Newspapers (1983-1994)

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<td>English – Total</td>
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<td>37.2</td>
<td>987,000</td>
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<td>1,129,000</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>1,207,000</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>1,397,000</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>1,755,000</td>
<td>50.3</td>
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<td>The Straits Times</td>
<td>682,000</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>893,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>901,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>924,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1,115,000</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1,166,000</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Times</td>
<td>37,000</td>
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<td>94,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>87,000</td>
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<td>88,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>136,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>146,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>The New Paper</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>195,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>346,000</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>443,000</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Chinese – Total</td>
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<td>54.4</td>
<td>1,241,000</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>1,212,000</td>
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<td>44.9</td>
<td>1,490,000</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>1,511,000</td>
<td>43.3</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>624,000</td>
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<td>723,000</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>279,000</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>440,000</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>272,000</td>
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<td>328,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>365,000</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Malay – Total</td>
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<td>206,000</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>206,000</td>
<td>5.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>204,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>211,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>203,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamil – Total</td>
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<td>16,000</td>
<td>.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamil Murasu</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<td>10,000</td>
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<td>16,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>2,562,000</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2,388,000</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>3,246,000</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>3,488,000</td>
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<td>Base: Adults (age 15+)</td>
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<td>2,030,000</td>
<td>2,062,000</td>
<td>2,089,000</td>
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<td>2,505,000</td>
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</table>

Source: Straits Times, 14 December 1983; Survey Research Singapore, January 1994

Note: the italic figures show the percentage each language group holds of total readership; the non-italic figures show the percentage of the base sample that reads each newspaper.
I will be coming back to these tables and figures again in my discussion of press control (section 3.4). But first, to get a broader picture of the significance of the daily press in the lives of Singaporeans, it is useful to locate it within the context of mass media in general. In 1980, a statutory board called Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) operated radio and television. SBC Radio broadcasted on four channels and in the four official languages, and claimed a total daily audience of about one-third of the adult population. SBC was restructured in 1994 to become the Singapore International Media (SIM). SIM is an umbrella organisation for the Radio Corporation of Singapore (RCS), Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS), and Singapore Television Twelve (STV12). RCS currently has 10 stations: 4 English, 3 Mandarin, 2 Malay, and 1 Tamil. Total transmission time is 1,541 hours per week, with about 1.7 million listeners daily. In addition to SBC/RCS Radio, a private cabled broadcasting service called Rediffusion broadcasts mostly popular Chinese entertainment programmes. Their daily output in 1994 was 18 hours of Mandarin programmes on their “Gold Channel”, and 24 hours of English/Chinese cultural programmes on the “Silver Channel”. They have about 90,000 subscribers in total (Singapore Facts and Pictures 1995). Finally, NTUC Radio Heart broadcasts 24 hours daily over two stations. Most of its programming is in English and Mandarin, with 6 hours per day devoted to Tamil and Malay.

Concerning television, 1980 statistics show that about 90 percent of the population lived in homes with at least one television set. About 65 percent watched at least some SBC television programs on an average day (ST 14 Sept 1980). In 1991, this increased to about 77.4 percent (Kuo et al., 1993). SBC, and now TCS, operates two channels: Channel 5, which is mostly in English; and Channel 8, which is mostly in Mandarin. STV12 operates two channels: Prime 12, offering a mixture of Tamil, Malay and foreign programming; and Premiere 12, which is mostly in English. In 1990, Pennycook (1992) found that about 63.8% of total SBC programming was in English, 27.7% in Mandarin, 4.0% in Malay, and 4.5% in Tamil. However, the availability of Malaysia’s TV1 and TV2 raises Malay viewing time considerably. TV1 and TV2 had 46.2% of their programming in English, 41.6% in Malay, 8.1% in Mandarin and 4.1% in Tamil. As well, most of the programmes on Singapore channels are subtitled. Generally, non-English programmes
have English sub-titles, and English programmes have Mandarin or Malay subtitles. For the sake of dialect speakers, many of the Mandarin programmes also carry Chinese sub-titles. In 1992, Singapore CableVision (SCV) launched three cable channels, two in English and one in Mandarin.

The mass media industry thus clearly has a significant presence in the everyday lives of Singaporeans. As I mentioned earlier, such a presence suggests that the mass media is also powerfully active as an institution of discourse. However, relative to the other forms of mass media, the newspapers have a particularly daily presence in the lives of Singaporeans. In Anderson's (1991) words, this shared reading of the newspaper, usually read at particular times of the day, creates an "extraordinary mass ceremony". As well, and particularly relevant for this project, it is the print media that is seen to be the most useful and most reliable source of information compared to television and radio (Chen and Kuo, 1978). This is especially so with respect to information about government policies and actions. Thus, it is the reading of the mass daily newspaper that is particularly powerful in creating this sense of a "mass ceremony" in the imagining of the nation. This shared experience, rooted in the everyday life of Singaporeans, becomes part of what it means to be Singaporean, to be part of the imagined community. As the next section will show, the experience of imagining communities does not come just from the experience of shared reading; it also comes from the explicit mandate given to the press by the government.

3.3 The Mass Ceremony: Imagining Singapore

Singapore is a highly and centrally planned society. Virtually every aspect of public (and often private) life in Singapore has been accounted for in the government's planning and imagining of what it sees as the "ideal" society. As such, all institutions are expected to understand their role as it is defined by the nationalist agenda (see Chapter 5). The mass daily press is no exception. On more than one occasion, government leaders have explicitly detailed to members of the press what their primary roles are to be. In this section, I will examine what it means for the role of the mass daily press in Singapore to
be defined by the imagining of the nation, both in relation to other national institutions and concerning its publication. Through this discussion, it will be possible to begin to understand the significance of the mass daily press as a location for government leader’s speeches.

**3.3.1 The Mass Daily Press in National Orbit**

In order to understand the position of the mass daily press in the nationalist agenda, it is necessary to locate it in relation to the other institutions operating within this agenda. A useful analogy can be taken from astronomy. In this analogy, one must visualise a series of ever-larger concentric circles revolving around a hub. The hub pulls all other planets into orbit around itself, directing their paths, defining their relationship to it and to each other, and mandating their agendas. The concentric planets support the hub, providing its sustenance in terms of climate, nutrients, and atmosphere. The centripetal forces of the concentric planets also ensure their cohesion with each other and with the axial planet.

Applying this analogy to Singapore, the hub is nation building, or, imagining the nation. The concentric circles orbiting around this hub include institutions such as education, the mass media, housing policy, economic planning, national defence, and (although it also cuts across all other institutions) language (Figure 3.1). What this analogy highlights is the way the various institutions are together implicated in and implicate the imagining of the nation. The centre of this “planetary system” is the “imagining of the nation”. It defines the agenda and direction of these institutions, drawing them into orbit around itself, and defining the relationship between the institutions. The institutions, as institutions of discourse, give sustenance to the “hub”. They provide the on-going imagining, and feed into the “nationalist agenda”. Symmetry and cohesion are paramount in this system. For, should any one member of this planetary system fail to participate, or fail to participate in line with the established agenda, the very existence of the entire national galaxy would be at stake. There is thus an element of vulnerability in this model – itself a powerful discourse in the imagining of the nation (see Chapter 5).
Figure 3.1 The Mass Media in National Orbit

Keeping this analogy in mind, I now turn to the way government leaders and members of the press have talked about the role of the press in this nationalist agenda. Most often (e.g., ST 20-30 Nov 1982; Commentary, 22.1, 1993) the discussion is framed by contrasting two models: the Western model, wherein the press is seen as a “fourth estate” and watchdog of the government, versus the notion of a “responsible” press that works together with the government for the “national good” (usually defined by the government). The former is seen as inappropriate in the Singapore context, while the latter is the model Singapore’s leaders seek to follow. Minister for Culture Jek Yeun Thong put it this way at the 1976 DISTRIPRESS Convention:

We are concerned by the irresponsible use of the media in creating confusion and chaos and in undermining the people’s confidence in the political leadership and their policies and strategies for nation building... We believe that the media has an obligation to contribute towards reinforcing Government policies and strategies in the enormous task of nation building. (The Mirror 12.13, 29 Mar 1976)
Then Prime Minister (hereafter PM) Lee Kuan Yew stated his views categorically at the 1971 General Assembly of the International Press Institute at Helsinki. “Freedom of the news media”, he said, “must be subordinated to the overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore, and to the primacy of purpose of an elected government” (1971:13).

In defining this “responsible press”, government leaders typically draw upon two models: the BBC and the Japanese press. BG Lee Hsien Loong said in his 1988 Press Club speech: “The closest model is the BBC ideal – fair, impartial reporting of events, but interpreted from a definite point of view” (see also Lee Kuan Yew, 1988). However, he goes on to say, the difference between the BBC and the Singapore press is the latter’s “far greater role in nation building” (1988:2). In this respect, he argued, the Japanese model is more appropriate. Goh Chok Tong described the appeal of the Japanese press for Singapore in his 1995 National Day Rally speech: “Japan is an Asian society with strong communitarian values. Its opposition parties are not destructive. The Japanese press is free but responsible. It protects and advances the national interest”. In his view, the Japanese media reflect the Asian values of consensus as opposed to confrontation, co-operation rather than conflict, and responsibility to the community and nation rather than individualism. Singapore’s leaders have thus clearly sought to “subordinate” the press to the “overriding needs of the integrity of Singapore” and to the “primacy of purposes” of the government. In the next section, I will look at what this means operationally for the press in Singapore.

### 3.3.2 Operationalising the Nationalist Agenda

As I will discuss in Chapter Five, there is one key objective that Singapore’s government leaders have highlighted as being essential to their view of the “ideal” imagined nation: economic growth. In their view, the viability of nationhood and economic growth are essentially the same thing. And, the argument goes, in order for there to be continual economic growth, there must be social stability (racial harmony),

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1 In the early 1980s, *The Straits Times* even sent a team to Japan to study their press model.
political stability, and a strong government. It is in establishing and maintaining these conditions that the role of the press is defined. This has been no where more clearly stated than in Lee Kuan Yew’s 1971 Helsinki speech.

In his speech, Lee Kuan Yew first of all stressed the need for the press to participate in fostering social cohesion. “People are affected by the suggestion of the printed word”, he said. And he went on to cite examples in Singapore’s history where “the printed word reinforced the staged mass rallies to stoke up enough emotional steam” for uprisings to occur (1971:12). Secondly, he expected the press to support the government’s policies and to teach these policies to the people. The press, he said, is “to present Singapore’s problems simply and clearly and then explain how if they support certain programmes and policies, these problems can be solved” (1971:7). In line with his particular vision of the nation (see Chapters 5-6), he highlighted “Asian values” as being one area of government policy that was particularly important for the press to support, emulate and teach. In his words, “More important, we want the mass media to reinforce, not to undermine, the cultural values and social attitudes being inculcated in our schools and universities” (1971:7). Twenty years later, Straits Times Editor Leslie Fong reiterated Lee Kuan Yew’s views at a 1991 forum on the Role of the Press in “The Next Lap” (PM Goh Chok Tong’s term to capture his agenda for his first term). As fellow panellist Simon Tay noted, Fong’s view of the press in “the next lap” is really no different from its role in the “last lap” (ST 27 Oct 1991). But more importantly, it shows how the press has come to define itself and its role according to the nationalist agenda.

The rest of this section will be used to examine these features of the role of the press in the imagining of the nation means operationally. I will first look at the role of the press in fostering social and political stability. And second, I will consider the role of the press as a tutor and advocate of government policy.

3.3.2.1 Social and Political Stability

According to government leaders, Singapore’s multilingual, multiracial, and multi-religious population living in a small and highly urbanised island is cause for concern. It
spells the perpetual possibility of social unrest. While there have actually been only a few instances of racial (or other) disturbance in Singapore's history (Chua Beng Huat, personal communication, 1997), these nonetheless have become icons of this vulnerability to be called upon in the justification of numerous policies. They also appear in the rationalisation of the role of the press in the nationalist agenda, particularly as the press has been indicted in causing these incidents. For example, BG Lee Hsien Loong said in his Helsinki speech (26 May 1987) that the Singapore government is always keenly aware of how "the media may bring in undesirable values, how newspapers can be used to carry out covert subversion, and how inflammatory reporting can lead to racial riots. These are not theoretical dangers, but painful setbacks in Singapore's recent history." Elsewhere he states: "In our experience, an unrestrained babel leads to mayhem rather than enlightenment" (ST 2 Mar 1988).

In these comments, BG Lee Hsien Loong is referring to two particular incidents that occurred in Singapore's early history: the Maria Hertogh riots of the 1950s and the Malay-Chinese riots in 1964. Concerning the former, Maria was a Dutch Catholic girl who was fostered by a Muslim family during the Japanese occupation. During a custody battle between the girl's natural parents and her Muslim parents after the war, the British Chief Justice sent the girl to a convent until the case was resolved. The Malay press expressed outrage, interpreting the ruling as religiously and racially biased. The English press retaliated in kind. The press war ultimately led to bloody anti-white riots, killing 18 people and wounding 173 others. Concerning the latter, in July 1964, the Malay language press accused the Chinese majority for suppressing the rights of the Islamic Malay minority. Tensions erupted during Prophet Mohammed's birthday party procession; thirty-six people were killed and many injured.

The press seems to have accepted its role in fostering social stability. Members of the 1988 Consultation on Press Systems (ASEAN) in Jakarta formally agreed that the press should "exercise self-restraint in sensitive, racial, ethnic and religious matters" (Business Times (BT) 1 Dec 1989). And Straits Times editor Leslie Fong told participants at the press forum that the press cannot "pander to the tribal instincts of any one community at the expense of multiracial harmony and national unity... The press must do
nothing that will result in any one community drifting further and further away from the others, and everything to help build bridges between them" (ST 1 Nov 1991).

The following scenario was once presented to the former Chief Editor of The Singapore Monitor, Seah Chiang Nee, which illustrates particularly well the way the press understands its role in fostering social stability (Ivan Lim, 1989:6). He was asked the question: “Is truth and freedom sacrificed in the name of stability in Singapore?” His reply was: “Supposing a fight broke out in Geylang between Chinese and Malay youths and some people got killed. How would the different papers treat the story? Repeat the truth on page one and know that tomorrow there would be Malays and Chinese seeking revenge? Do you consider the truth supreme?” Straits Times Editor-in-Chief Cheong Yip Seng responded to Seah’s scenario with an unequivocal “Very simple, I wouldn’t carry it. What trade-off for us? Defend truth and freedom to publish? What’s the price?” Seah’s scenario was based on an actual event in Geylang where a street brawl between a Chinese and Malay really did occur. The story did not appear in any of the newspapers. Similarly, Hindu extremists demolishing an ancient mosque in Ayodha in 1993 received minimal coverage with no photos (ST 3 June 1993). And few knew about the tensions that erupted in “Little India” between the Tamils and Sikhs when Indira Gandhi was killed by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. The press did not carry the story (B. Nair, 1989:86).

In addition to fostering amiable relations between the different ethnic communities, the Singapore press also has a role to play in fostering “consensus politics”, or amiable relations between the people and the government. That is, it has a role to play in cultivating political stability. In a recent World Press Freedom Day article, Straits Times columnist Cherian George explained this role of the press by contrasting the Singapore press with that of the USA (ST 2 May 1997). The American model “guarantees the effectiveness of the press, protecting it from being subverted by governments”, he said. In contrast, “The Singapore model reverses that equation. It is meant to guarantee the effectiveness of the Government, protecting it from being subverted by the press.” Leaders have argued on more than one occasion that the Western idea of the press as the fourth estate and as an adversarial watchdog of the government goes against their goal of consensus politics. Again, the Japanese press offers a model. For example, in his speech
at the 150th anniversary of The Straits Times, PM Goh Chok Tong (ST 16 July 1995) compared the Western and Japanese press coverage of the Kobe earthquake. Western reporters, he noted, tended to accentuate the negative, focusing on the worst scenes of destruction and personal loss. They “seemed to be on the prowl for controversy and confrontation, prodding cold, hungry victims with questions like ‘Do you think the government has done enough to help?’” In contrast, the Japanese media included in their pictures scenes of buildings still standing, and their reports focused on harmony among the displaced victims rather than discord. “In other words”, Goh concluded, “the Japanese press understands that it has a healing role to play in a time of national catharsis” (ST 16 July 1995). Applying this to Cherian George’s earlier comment, it understood its role in protecting the government from being subverted by the press.

An example of the role of the press in supporting consensus politics comes from a recent incident concerning one of Singapore’s leading authors, Catherine Lim. In the 20 November 1994 edition of the Sunday Review, Lim gave a critical evaluation of PM Goh Chok Tong’s leadership. Her comments were met with swift and harsh words from the government. PM Press Secretary Chan Heng Wing wrote a letter of scathing rebuttal in The Straits Times (4 Dec 1994). If she wanted to have a voice, he wrote, she should enter politics, and not attack the government as a writer “on the fringe” (see also ST 5 Dec 1994). In a subsequent letter, Chan appealed to the familiar rhetoric of vulnerability to defend the government’s harsh rebuttal. “Singapore is not America”, he said. “It is small and fragile and needs a strong and fair government to survive. If its government is continually criticised, vilified and ridiculed in the media... then the government will lose control. The result will not be more freedom, but confusion, conflict, and decline” (ST 29 Dec 1994). He went on to say that the PM “cannot be dictated to by a vocal minority who disagree with a proposal... and [will] not follow popular opinion.” From vocal minority to popular opinion, the public voice is silenced. In the end, Lim apologised to the Prime Minister. “Consensus” was thus restored. While it is not insignificant that such debate does occur in the press, the positioning of this debate in the press was used to re-establish the conditions of consensus politics.
The call for consensus also goes beyond Singapore’s borders to promoting regional cohesion with its ASEAN neighbours. There is a keen awareness in ASEAN that the views expressed in one press can have repercussions on foreign relations and on domestic events in neighbouring countries. This was the reason Lee Kuan Yew gave to the American Society of Editors (14 Apr 1988) for why, since the early 1960s, Malaysia and Singapore have banned each other’s newspapers. Members of the 1988 Consultation on Press Systems (ASEAN) in Jakarta even signed an agreement stating that: the ASEAN journalist “shall not write news, reports, or opinions and commentary which... incite armed confrontations between his country and another ASEAN country, but shall, on the contrary, make efforts to promote solidarity between ASEAN nations” (cited in BT 1 Dec 1989).

The need for such a formal agreement was made evident again recently in Singapore. In an affidavit filed against a Singaporean opposition candidate, Lee Kuan Yew made some disparaging remarks about Johore Bahru (a Malaysian city across the causeway). These remarks were published in the Malaysian press, which then sparked off an intense and sustained media war between the Singaporean and Malaysian presses (ST Mar 1997-July 1997, esp. May) and strained relations between the two governments. The coverage by the Philippine press of a Filipino maid in Singapore convicted of murder and sentenced to hang in 1995 was similarly explosive. The emotional Philippine press coverage of the case damaged bilateral relations to the point where both governments recalled their ambassadors. Both of these cases show the extent to which newspapers are an integral part of the regional “diplomatic web” (Tan Teng Lang, 1990:4).

So far, I have looked at what it means for the press to be implicated in the national agenda by focusing on its role in fostering social and political stability. In the next section, I will look at the contents of this mass ceremony. Because of its educational tone, I call it a “mass tutorial” in the imagining of the nation.

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2 The 1974 Newspaper and Printing Presses Act reads: “No newspaper printed in Malaysia shall be published, sold, offered for sale or distributed in Singapore” without approval of the Minister.
3.3.2.2 The Mass Tutorid

Singapore is an educating society. Billboards, subway posters, TV advertisements, video displays in medical clinics, and telephone information lines are all ways used by the government to teach and inform the masses about policy, about how to behave, and what to value. One observer wrote in the early 1970s: “The PAP inaugurated a policy of information saturation to educate, convert, give shape to, and guide public opinion” as a way to establish support for its government (Bellows, in Kua and Chen, 1983:49). This strategy of the PAP government is central to understanding the educating role of the press in Singapore. As we have already seen, the PAP government regards the press as having a powerful influence on the minds and actions of Singaporeans. Cultural Minister Jek Yeun Thong argued in parliament that:

In the mass media aspect of our activity, it is our policy to induce the change of attitudes in our people. Many a developing country has rightly endeavoured to modernise itself on the basis of economic and social transformation but has inadvertently omitted a vital area – the minds of men. Our modernisation process should never neglect attitudinal change in our people and this is where the mass media comes in to play an essential role. (PDS, Vol.27, Col.190-191, 1968)

It follows then that the press has been of particular interest to the government as a medium through which to convey its policies and influence the people. In fact, government leaders expect the press to give them top priority in its news agenda. Lee Kuan Yew has been known to reprimand the press when (in his opinion) it gave inadequate coverage of a particular speech or policy (e.g., ST 16 Apr 1959; Turnbull, 1995). So prevalent is the government’s voice that opposition MP Jeyaretnam once complained to parliament that every morning Singaporeans are “regaled... with news in their newspapers about the various activities of the Government, to be repeated over TV and radio” (PDS 25 Mar 1982, Vol.41, Col.1630).

Basically the government expects the press to highlight and explain its policies to the people, as well as to persuade them that these policies are good and necessary for the benefit of Singapore. In 1988, Lee Kuan Yew approvingly noted that the Japanese press
stays “out of a partisan role in active politics, but goes beyond plain reporting to shape public opinion to help build up a national consensus on important issues” (emphasis mine, Speeches 12:2, 1988:10). And BG Lee Hsien Loong told a group of journalists: “this being Singapore, being for Singapore will often mean agreeing with the government... because the government is often right and if you are a responsible newspaper, you will have to acknowledge that” (ST 2 Mar 1988). To present a critical view of the government would thus be irresponsible; it would undermine the consensus needed for the country to be governed effectively.

As a result of these expectations, ministerial speeches usually appear on the front page, accompanied by complete transcripts, explanatory notes, discussions, highlights, and bullet point summaries that appear throughout the paper. Related articles, commentaries and discussions explaining the policies in greater detail generally continue for a number of days. For the most part, discussions tend to focus on the implementation of policies rather than a critical evaluation of them. And dissenting voices expressed in public opinion polls or in the “Forum page” are followed by a response from the appropriate government office. As one academic told me, “official response in the press comes from everywhere and all angles” (interview, 8 Dec 1994). In this way, even dissension is used to reinforce the government’s voice (such as in the Catherine Lim incident). The press will often pick up particular themes or opinions that may appear in a government speech, and focus on them for a number of days. The topic of “Asian values”, which will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Seven, has received particular attention from the press. The press even organised a number of seminars to examine ways in which it could better promote Asian values, and has declared “Asian values” to be the basis for censorship and analysis (Bokhorst-Heng, 1996). For ST editor Leslie Fong, the guiding principal for members of the press is that they must “be discriminating about what [they] publish, [they] have to take a moralistic approach” (ST 1 Nov 1991).

I will come back to this discussion of the role of the press as a mass tutorial later in this chapter where I talk specifically about language policy. At this point I want to turn our attention to how the press stays in “orbit” in the imagining of the nation. Given the role of the press in both the everyday lives of the people and in the imagining of the
nation, it is not surprising that the government is also closely involved in controlling the press. As put by Dr. Wong Soon Chong of Nanyang University (ST 31 May 1973): “The press cannot be freed from political control mainly because the newspapers can exert great pressure to influence the masses and is, therefore, an effectively strong political instrument.” In the next section, I will look at some of these controls and how they work to align the press with the imagining of the nation.

3.4 Centripetal Forces and Press Control

The government’s control over the dissemination of information is a familiar theme in discussions about Singapore. The PAP government exerts a much greater influence over the operation and control of the media than do governments in Canada or elsewhere in the Western world (Birch, 1993; Ivan Lim, 1985; Kuo et al., 1993; C.V. Nair, 1976; Tan and Soh, 1994). And the accumulation of laws aimed at curtailting the press is undoubtedly disconcerting to the Western mind attuned to the notion of a free press. There is a thus a tendency in the literature to see Orwellian shadows in Singapore’s press controls (Casady, 1975; J. Lent, 1975; 1982; 1984). However, I have been arguing that the operation of the press is intricately tied into the political paradigm of the nation within which it exists. Razak put it particularly well when he said, “the concepts upon which a society is based... determine that society’s news media function” (1985:2). And it is in this context that we must seek to understand the controls on the press in Singapore.

The logic goes something like this: The PAP leaders (a) perceive the mass media as powerful instruments that can influence the masses AND (b) hold the view that people are persuadable and can hardly resist the influence of the mass media; THEREFORE (c) if the mass media is in the wrong hands, it may be abused to disrupt social harmony and political stability and society, BUT (d) if in the right hands and with proper guidance, it can perform a constructive role in nation building (i.e., social stability and cohesion, government policy, Asian values); THEREFORE (e) the mass media must be controlled (Kuo and Chen, 1983). Essentially, the government will not tolerate the press taking any stand against it on any issues that it considers fundamental. For the purposes of this
discussion, then, of importance is not so much press control *per se*, but rather how it works as a centripetal force in aligning the press with the Government's imagining of the nation. This may not necessarily exonerate the government's restrictive control over the press. However, it will take us beyond a limiting list of negativisms to a broader understanding of how the various press laws and the role of the press interact towards imagining the nation. Coming back to my earlier planetary model (Figure 3.1), the various control mechanisms imposed on the press are analogous to the gravitational forces at work keeping the planets (the press) in orbit around the hub (the imagining of the nation). Loosely, there are three gravitational spheres of control: the relationship between the government and the press, forces of centralisation, and direct legislation.

### 3.4.1 Forces of Relationship

Given the extent to which the government uses the press to further its imagining of the nation, it is not surprising that government leaders have actively pursued a close relationship with the press. A former employee of Singapore Press Holdings told me (personal communication, July 1995) that it is not unusual for ministers and editors to meet informally over lunch to discuss various issues of national interest. Since 1982, representatives from each ministry and statutory boards have been appointed as "press liaison officers". Their appointment was specifically to facilitate the flow of communication from the government to the press. Not only would journalists be thus more likely to share the values and perceptions of the government, but also they would be more amenable and better equipped to persuasively explain government policy to the people.

Various analogies have been given to describe this close relationship between the government and the press. Cultural Minister Dhanabalan used the analogy of a team to emphasise the co-operation needed from the press in working with the government. For the press to be critical would be like "a chap in the football team saying, I want to show them that I am independent from the rest so I play a different kind of football from the rest of the team. But the chap is a member of the team; he's an individual who should play
with the others. The aim is to score the goal" (*ST* 19 May 1982). The aim is the imagining of the nation. One writer in the *Business Times* referred to tandem cycling to depict the “newspapers pedalling along with the government in the direction set by the political leadership" (*BT* 29 Nov 1989). The analogy of Siamese twins evokes a similar relationship: “Politicians and the press are like Siamese twins pulling together in the same direction for their mutual survival" (*Malay Mail*, 26 May 1973). Each analogy suggests a very intimate and harmonious relationship between the press and the government, directed towards the imagining of Singapore.

However, while these analogies do depict a close working relationship, they also suggest something else. In each of these relationships, rarely is there total equality between partners. Most often, one team member, one cyclist, one of the twins is dominant. In the same way, the relationship between the press and the government in Singapore is made up of unequal partners, with the government being dominant. In this sense, the relationship becomes very much one of control. This was already evident in the way the mandate of the press liaison officers was worded. In an interview with *The Straits Times* (17 May 1982), Cultural Minister Dhanabalan said that journalists were not to be mere “passive recipients” of whatever the liaison officers told them. However, to him “non-passivity” meant the journalists were to go beyond what the liaison officers said and to actively “anticipate and understand the mind of the public.” Journalists would then be better able to find the most effective way to communicate the government’s policy to the people. Thus, non-passivity has nothing to do with engaging in critical evaluation of government policy or discourse. It is only to sharpen the effectiveness of the press as a government information service. Thus it is the government who sets the terms of this relationship.

Perhaps the most important evidence of the unequal terms of this relationship comes in the form of setting the agenda, or “out of bound” markers, for debate in the national agenda. “OB markers”, as Singaporeans more commonly call them, refer to the limits within which the press can operate: what it can say about race, religion, government policy, and so forth. Lee Kuan Yew told journalists: “You must accept that you are not in a position to set the OB marker. If you want to set the OB marker, you have to come out

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into politics” (New Paper, 1 Feb 1995). The press has not been elected, whereas politicians have. And so it is the responsibility of the press to support the government the people have elected. It cannot act as a watchdog and critic. “Nobody elected the press”, says Leslie Fong. “The government, on the other hand, is returned by the majority of the people... A press that locks itself on a course that focuses only on the failures, deficiencies, shortcomings, [and] contradictions of politicians and policies... becomes a participant, a player in the contest for power. That degrades the democratic system in which it is allowed to operate” (ST 1 Nov 1991). In a curious twist, then, it is precisely because of democracy that the press cannot be the fourth estate.

The problem for the press, however, is that the OB markers are not always clearly defined. As one Straits Times journalist told me, “the lines are shifting all the time.” There is constant debate among journalists and editors concerning where the lines should be (interview, 3 Nov 1995). It is well known that journalists who go too far and provoke the ire of the government will be publicly reprimanded in Parliament. On occasion, some have even had details of their academic and national service records publicly disclosed as an exercise towards dis-accreditation and humiliation (ST 25 July 1984; 31 Mar 1988). For obvious reasons, this causes a certain amount of uneasiness and fear among journalists (Commentary 11.1, 1993; interview with a ST journalist, 1995).

According to Straits Times reporter Cherian George, the lack of explicit boundaries was in fact the “genius of the system of government controls... The OB markers are not clearly defined until you cross them” (ST 27 Oct 1991). The result is a rigidly self-imposed censorship by journalists and editors. For example, the chief editor stopped the printing and distribution of the Business Times on 22 March 1985 when he deemed a particular article about a minister’s policy statement too critical for publication (editorial, ST 28 Mar 1985). Straits Times Columnist Cherian George (at a 1993 round table discussion on press freedom in Singapore; Commentary, 22.1 1993: 136) and journalist Tan Tarn How (interview, 3 Nov 1995) both have recounted instances when their editor either altered or refused to publish a particular article on the grounds of political sensitivity. The net result of these ambiguous “OB” markers is a press marked by a dominant-subordinate relationship. Tan Ban Huat (retired Chairman and Editor-in-Chief
of *Nanyang Siang Pau* noted that the papers are passive, “responding to government-led campaigns rather than taking the initiative in any movement to bring about a better way of life.” He summarises his view by saying, “today the government is playing a lead role while the newspapers [have] a supportive role” (*ST* 25 Feb 1980). And by not setting clear guidelines, the government is thus absolved of being labelled as repressive and dictatorial, while yet achieving the censorship its desires.

### 3.4.2 Forces of Centralisation

Over the years, there has been a pattern of mergers (and “demergers”) and closures of various newspaper companies against all apparent logic. A nexus of three things comes to mind: there has been, since independence: (a) steady population growth, (b) increasing readership, and (c) an increasing sophistication of readership (which I will define in a moment) (Table 3.3).

| Table 3.3 Population Growth, Literacy, and Daily Newspaper Circulation Rates (1979-1993) |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total                           | 2,362,700 | 2,558,000 | 2,690,100 | 2,930,200 | 24%     |
| Chinese                         | 1,799,100 | 1,953,900 | 2,089,400 | 2,269,600 | 26.2%   |
| Malay                           | 355,100   | 380,800   | 380,600   | 415,900   | 17.1%   |
| Indian                          | 141,000   | 164,700   | 191,000   | 209,400   | 48.5%   |
| Other                           | 47,500    | 58,600    | 29,200    | 35,300    | -25.7%  |
| **Literacy Rates (10+)**        | 72%      | 86%      | 90%      | 91%      |
| **Daily Publications Circulation Rates** |         |          |          |          |
| Total                           | 571,400  | 673,300  | 809,000  | 1,031,500 | 80.5%   |
| Chinese                         | 272,800  | 350,000  | 359,000  | 438,000   | 60.5%   |
| English                         | 257,300  | 277,000  | 399,500  | 527,500   | 105%    |
| Malay                           | 31,800   | 39,900   | 45,700   | 61,000    | 91.8%   |
| Tamil                           | 8,800    | 6,400    | 4,800    | 5,000     | -43.2%  |

Table 3.3 shows a population increase of 567,500, just under 25 percent, from 1979 to 1994. During that same period, literacy increased from 72 to 91 percent. Newspaper circulation increased for the three largest language press groups, Chinese, Malay and English, and at a much faster rate than population growth. Circulation rates for the Chinese dailies increased by approximately 60.5%, the Malay dailies by about 92%, and the English papers by an overwhelming 105% from 1979 to 1994 (Table 3.1a shows the circulation rates for each newspaper). The decrease in circulation (-43.2%) for the Tamil dailies reflects the general trend within the Indian community towards English.

Data compiled by Survey Research Singapore indicates that not only has newspaper circulation increased, but readership has as well (Table 3.2). In 1983, readership figures for the different language presses were as follows: 1,053,000 for the Chinese daily papers; 162,000 for the Malay papers; and 719,000 for the English daily papers (Tamil figures were not available). In 1990, readership was 1,162,000 for the Chinese papers, showing a 43% increase; 203,000 for the Malay papers, a 227.2% increase; and 1,755,000 for the English papers, an increase of 144%. Part of this increase in readership can be attributed to an increase in the population and literacy. However, Table 3.2 also shows an increase in the number of people reading more than one daily newspaper. Thus, there is also a greater sophistication in readership patterns as people broaden the range of their information sources. In 1988, on the crude assumption (for discussion purposes only, as some do not read a newspaper at all and others read more than two) that all adults read at least one daily newspaper, the total readership figures show that 426,000 persons (total readership of all dailies minus the total base population), or about 20 percent of the total base population, read more than one paper. This rose to 24 percent in 1990, and in 1994, 39 percent of the base population read more than one paper.

In light of this nexus of population growth, an increase in readership and circulation rates, and the increasing sophistication in readership, the decrease in the number of dailies in circulation is most curious. As Table 3.1a shows, in 1978 there were eleven daily newspapers: four Chinese, three English, one Malay, two Tamil, and one Malayalam. In 1985, there were only seven dailies; and, since the addition of the New
Paper in 1988, there have been eight dailies in Singapore: three Chinese, three English, one Tamil, and one Malay. In part, this reduction in the number of papers in circulation was the result of a series of mergers and closures during the mid-eighties (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2 Mergers and “Demergers” of the Singapore Press (1973-1989)**

The process of centralisation began in 1982 with the merger of Sin Chew Jit Poh and Nanyang Siang Pau to become Lianhe Zaobao under the new holding company Singapore News and Publications Limited (SNPL). The government also closed down Kuai Bao. Two years later (1984), SNPL merged with the Times Publishing Berhad and The Straits
Press to form Singapore Press Holdings (SPH). With all English, Chinese, Malay, and since early 1996, Tamil, newspapers under one SPH umbrella, the mergers have created a virtual controlled newspaper monopoly.

The government leaders defended their decisions regarding the mergers on the grounds that increased centralisation would prevent wars between rival newspapers. They argued that, from a business point of view, competition was wasteful and inefficient. The financial argument does hold some merit. The move towards centralisation meant a more cost-effective operation, increasing the profitability of the newspapers, which of course benefits the government's capitalistic interests. The final merger created a communications group capitalised at S$1.5 billion (BT, 5 Oct 1984). However, the sacrifice for this commercial gain was the silencing of diversity and alternative avenues of expression to that of the government. This in itself points to other reasons for these mergers, reasons that are more closely related with the government's overall agenda of imagining the nation.

As I pointed out earlier, the government leaders see the press primarily as a place to disseminate their views, rather than as a market place of competing ideas. The various mergers have only enhanced their ability to keep the press aligned with their interests and to silence alternative voices. This was already noticed by backbencher Dr. Toh Chin Chye when the merger was announced. He cautioned that the removal of competition could "lock [the] press into the role of an obeisant official mouth-piece along the lines of the Soviet Union's Pravda or China's People's Daily" (Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), 26 July 1984). With the monopoly of SPH, readers now have no access to alternative presentation and evaluation of news and views.

The political imperatives behind the mergers were evident in the timing of the mergers. The 1981 elections caused a major disruption in politics, bringing in the first opposition MP, J.B. Jeyaretnam. A furious Lee Kuan Yew blamed the press for this political development, faulting their election coverage for largely causing the PAP's loss. He proposed to appoint a Permanent Secretary to the Board of Directors of The Straits Times Press, and a senior civil servant to the Managing Director's staff. The purpose of these appointments was to "keep tabs on the operations of the editorial department" and
to prevent any reoccurrence of such an event (Ivan Lim, 1985:111). This proposal did not go far, as it would have been unconstitutional. Instead S.R. Nathan, on his retirement as Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was made Executive Chairman of *The Straits Times* Press. Even Nathan’s appointment was problematic, as he was also the former director of the security and intelligence division of the Ministry of Defence. Jeyaretnam accused the government of moving its censor into Times House itself. Ever since Nathan’s appointment, he argued, there had been “a total clamp down on any news or views that may be considered in any way a criticism of the government policy or programme” (*PDS*, 25 Mar 1982, Col. 1629-31). It was around this same time that the mergers took place. And it was also around this time that the government began its appointment of press liaison officers (section 3.4.1).

In contrast to this centralising trend of the *local* press, the government allows Singaporeans to have access to an astonishing array of *international* news. This contrast relates in many ways to the global-national tension within the imagining of the nation. Singapore seeks to imagine itself as the information hub of Asia, and seeks to locate itself at the crossroads of the “East” and the “West”. At a presentation of the 1991 PM’s Book Prizes, PM Goh Chok Tong said, “We can be like a transformer, serving both the English-speaking countries in the West and the Asian businessmen, entrepreneurs and policy-makers in the East” (*ST* 28 Aug 1991; see also *BT* 9 Sept 1993). As part of this vision, Singapore is rapidly becoming a major regional press centre. Reuters has moved its entire operation from Hong Kong to Singapore. Japan has twelve news agencies operating in Singapore. And regional editions of the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Sunday Express*, *USA Today*, and *Time* are printed and distributed in Singapore. In addition, 3,700 foreign publications circulate in the country. BBC World Service is available 24 hours a day at the explicit request of Lee Kuan Yew.

However, at the same time as positioning itself as the information hub of Asia, Singapore also seeks to authenticate itself locally and “protect” itself against foreign influence. It is in this effort that the government attempts to allow just one *national* voice. This attempt is evident in the contrast between the diversity of international news and the homogeneity of local news. It is also evident in the fact that one of the very few controls
on the foreign press in Singapore relates to their coverage of Singapore (section 3.4.3). There are strict penalties for those publications attempting to interfere (or seen to interfere) with the domestic politics of Singapore. It is an effort to maintain control over the imagining of the nation.

### 3.4.3 Forces of Direct Legislation

The most direct control that the government has over the mass daily press is through direct legislation. Essentially the various laws can be grouped into two main areas of control: control over voice and control over content. Control over voice in the press comes in various forms. In the first place, control comes through press ownership. Since 1974 under the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPP Act), newspaper companies must be public companies, thus terminating individual or family ownership. The Act provides for two classes of shares: ordinary and management. Ordinary shares carry a maximum ownership of no more than three percent per person. Management shares can only be issued to Singapore citizens and when approved by the government. They carry 200 times the voting power of ordinary shares. This means that the ownership of management shares is a key means by which to control editorial policy. And so, through its appointments and dismissals of management shareholders, the Government has powerful control over the voice of the press. This is further reinforced by the appointment of management and editorial staff, which must also be approved by the Government.

With respect to the content of the press, Lee Kuan Yew’s government has shown over the years a paranoiac sensitivity of press criticism. Already in the years just before independence, Lee Yuan Yew’s repressive measures rattled The Straits Times to the point that it moved its headquarters to Kuala Lumpur in March 1959. It did not return to Singapore until 1973, leaving a sister company in Kuala Lumpur (Turnbull, 1995). During the 1970s, Lee Kuan Yew’s war on the press was unrelenting as he tried to purge the country of “pro-Communist” influence. In May 1971, four senior executives of the

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3 Today, the Malaysian company is called The New Straits Times, and exists independently from its Singapore counterpart. Like the other Malaysian newspapers, it is not allowed to circulate in Singapore.
_Nanyang Siang Pau_ were arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for allegedly stirring up racial issues, and glamorising communism (*ST* 4-12 May 1971). And the government closed the _Eastern Sun_ and the _Singapore Herald_ for allegedly accepting questionable funds and for their involvement in “Black Operations” (operations organised externally to cause disruption in the country in which the operations are working).

The laws empowering the government to enforce such closures reside in the ISA. The ISA empowers the government to detain individuals considered to be operating outside “the public interest” without trial for up to two years without review. Articles 20 through 29 involve legislation having to do with publications (repeated almost verbatim in the Sedition Act of 1964). For example, a “subversive document” is defined in the ISA as one that has the tendency to incite violence, to encourage disobedience to the law, to threaten the peace and security of Singapore, “or to promote feeling of hostility between different races or classes of the population.” Printing such a document can lead to arrest under the ISA. Other forms of legislation concerning the content of the press include: the Official Secrets Act (1963), which aims to prevent leaks of official information that might endanger Singapore’s security; the Defamation Act (1965), which deals with “libel and slander and other malicious falsehoods”; and the Undesirable Publications Ordinance (1938; 1969), which prohibits imported publications considered “prejudicial to public safety or public interest” (e.g., *Mao’s Little Red Book, Playboy, Penthouse, Cosmopolitan*).

The last aspect of press laws concerns licensing, which essentially controls both _voice_ and _content_. The NPP Act requires press licenses to be applied for annually and gives the government control over issuing these licenses. They are renewed on condition that media owners agree not to print “any article which is likely to cause ill will or misunderstanding between the government and people of Singapore (and Malaysia); or which is likely to excite communal or racial emotions; or which glorifies or justifies the use of violence in politics.” In 1986, the government extended its licensing requirements to the foreign press. The 1986 NPP Act empowers the Minister for Communication and Information (now Ministry of Information and the Arts, MITA) to restrict the sale or distribution of foreign publications which have been seen as having attempted to
manipulate local public opinion and to interfere with the domestic politics of Singapore. A further “Amendment to the NPP Act” in 1990 extended annual licensing to offshore publications. Since instituted in 1986, this Act has been very actively exercised. In October 1986, *Time* had its circulation cut from 18,000 to 2,000. In February 1987, *Asian Wall Street Journal (AWSJ)* was cut from 5,000 to 400 copies. In October 1987, *Asiaweek* was cut from 11,000 to 500 copies. In December 1987, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* had its circulation cut from 9,000 to 500. And in August 1993, *The Economist* had its circulation frozen at 7,500.

The Singapore government has fiercely defended its actions. In an article entitled *The Right to Be Heard*, the government documented its correspondence with *Time* and the *AWSJ* leading to their gazette. Lee Hsien Loong’s Helsinki speech, *When the Press Misinforms* (26 May 1987), and Lee Kuan Yew’s speech at the American Society of Newspaper Editors on 14 April 1988, *Why Singapore Disallows Foreign Press to Interfere in Domestic Politics*, outline and defend the Singapore government’s position with respect to the foreign press. In each instance, the government argues that its gazette ruling was motivated by the fact that these publications interfered with Singapore’s imagining of the nation. They sought to be a “major political force” and “set the agenda” of the nation (Lee Hsien Loon, 1987). The clash was thus over the sort of society Singapore should be. It was over modes of imagining the nation and over who has the right to set the agenda for that imagining. In his speech at *The Straits Times*’ 150th anniversary dinner (15 July 1995), PM Goh Chok Tong put it this way: “A newspaper provides the first drafts of our history. It shapes perceptions within the society and the perceptions others have of us” (*ST* 16 July 1995). Thus, Singapore “cannot ignore the attacks by the foreign press and journalists.” It must have the right to reply, and the right to its own imagining.

It is clear, then, that press control in Singapore (as elsewhere) is conditioned by the socio-political climate of the nation, and by the type of community the government wishes to imagine. It is not so much a war of “intimidation, interference, and oppression” against the press by a “virtually totalitarian regime” as Lent (1975:7-16) would have us believe. Rather, it is a powerful gravitational force aimed to keep the mass daily press
orbiting within the imagining of the nation. Press control prevents the press from colliding with or obstructing other national institutions, and from colliding with the national agenda. And it ensures the government has a location within which to enact and communicate to the people its imagining of the nation, and to nationalise its voice. Conversely, it makes the press an accessible place for the people to see the government’s imagining of the nation. It allows them to be part of the addressee of government leaders’ speeches.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will look specifically at the activity of the press involving the implementation of language policy and language planning. This discussion is useful to demonstrate the ways in which the mass daily press participates in teaching and supporting government policy. It also foregrounds my later discussions about language ideologies in the imagining of the nation as seen in government speeches that appear in the mass daily press.

3.5 Language and the Mass Media

Already in my discussion about the role of the media in the everyday lives of Singaporeans it was clear that language policy has a direct bearing on the structure of the mass media in Singapore. All four official languages are represented in the various mass media. However, given the role of the media in the imagining of the nation, it can also be anticipated that the relationship between the mass media and language is far more complex. Particularly since the 1970s, when Lee Kuan Yew began to take a very personal interest in the language issues facing the nation, the press has been very actively involved in the discourse of language. Up until the late 1980s, the press carried news stories or comments on language issues nearly every day. And even today, while no longer every day, discussions about language continue to frequently appear in the press.

Gonzalez et al. (1984) identified four key ways in which the Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS) is involved in implementing official language policies: (a) the direct presentation and explanation of the policies to the public; (b) through its control of the language medium and language form in its programming; (c) through its control of
program content; and (d) through direct language teaching. These can be applied to the mass daily press as well.

Firstly, the daily press is actively involved in reporting and explaining language policies and campaigns. Tay writes in her census monograph: "The mass media play a crucial role in explaining language policy to the general public" (1984:52). Most often, the initial report will cover the basic details of the particular policy. In the days following, further explanation is given according to information detailed in press releases. The ministers involved in the release of the policy will often participate in interviews, panel discussions, and "debates" on the particular issue. For the period from early April 1978 to April 1990, I located twenty-eight panel discussions, debates, and documentaries involving issues of language policy that had been featured on television and/or the press (Appendix A). Twenty-four of these occurred within just three years. Fifteen were organised directly by the mass media; and in seven, the mass media was represented on the panel.

It is very significant that five of these occasions directly involved the PM, Lee Kuan Yew. In April 1978, Lee Kuan Yew held two televised forum discussions on language: the first (6 Apr 1978), in English, on Mandarin: The Tasks Ahead for two hours; and two weeks later (20,21 Apr 1978), in Mandarin, on Talking About Mandarin for 90 minutes. He was also the keynote speaker in three other panel discussions. He used these discussions with journalists and other panellists as a platform to explain the rationale of the bilingual policy and his views on language. On 24 November 1979, he discussed the topic of Language Competence and Multilingual Societies with three journalists in English. The televised forum was preceded by a documentary on language and education in Mauritius and Luxembourg (100 minutes). On 9 January 1980, he again spoke with journalists, this time in Mandarin. The topic was On Bilingualism, and lasted 75 minutes. Finally, on 16 November 1980, he held a 60-minute discussion with four journalists in Hokkien about the Language Spoken at Home and the Learning of Languages. All of the forums were reported meticulously in the press (usually in all four languages), with wide discussion and often full transcripts reproduced over a few days. The press also provided feature stories, editorials, commentaries, and letters to the editor to further explain and support the policy. Lee Kuan Yew's active participation in these events clearly signalled
to the mass media and to the people the high priority that the government gave to language issues. Furthermore, the fact that the panel members appearing with Lee Kuan Yew were members of the press speaks of the importance the government has placed on the role of the press in disseminating its policies.

Second, the mass media implement language policy by controlling the language medium and language form used in its programming. I have already noted the allocation of language on television and radio programming and in the press, which is in line with official policy. As I will discuss in Chapters Six and Seven, an obvious example of the role of the press in implementing language policy concerns the elimination of Chinese dialects from Chinese programming. Since the early 1980s, all Chinese programming and commercials have been in Mandarin. The spoken and written forms of languages used have also been a central concern for the mass media. Tay writes about the problematic "wide range of accents heard on television and radio" in the speech of local newsreaders. English newsreaders are trained to speak in British Received Pronunciation (RP), while their Chinese counterparts are coached in their putonghua pronunciation. The mass daily press also controls the form of language used. For example, in early 1979, the Chinese press switched from classical to simplified characters (ST 20 Mar 1979). The level of difficulty and range of the characters used in the press is determined in conjunction with the school syllabus (ST 4 Nov 1989).

Third, the mass media is involved in the implementation of language policy through its control of program content. In addition to direct government-sponsored programs to educate the public concerning a particular policy, there are other public service programs and features that function to support that policy. For example, mini-programmes, slogans, and spot advertisements have been shown on television in support of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. Another example would be the documentary mentioned earlier based on the visit of members of the Ministry of Education to Mauritius and Luxembourg, shown in both English and Mandarin. The documentary emphasised the dangers of "uncontrolled multilingualism" and hence supported the government's policy of "controlled bilingualism" (Gonzalez et al., 1984:71). Similarly, a regular bilingual column featuring Chinese legends appears in The Straits Times in English and Mandarin, in support of the government's
bilingual policy. The press also features stories about how families coped with switching from dialects to Mandarin at home, and about how various political leaders met the challenge of learning Mandarin (e.g., ST 25 Nov 1979; 15 Oct 1982; 26 Mar 1984; 3 Oct 1986; 30 Jan 1990).

Finally, the mass media actively participates in language teaching. Radio and television have always been popular avenues for language learning. Before the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*, English was the language most frequently taught over the air. Mandarin has now taken over as the most popular language. SBC launched a Conversational Mandarin Program in late 1979, involving twenty-six 30-minute lessons. These lessons were also available on radio and cassette (e.g., Lin, 1980-81). A 4-page pullout "*Xin Yi Dai*" ("The New Generation") was jointly produced in 1982 by the Chinese press and the *Singapore Monitor* for students learning Mandarin. And until recently, *The Straits Times* carried a "Bilingual Page" (at the request of Lee Kuan Yew; *ST* journalist Tan Tarn How, interview, 3 Nov 1995). These lessons were compiled in a book called *The Straits Times Bilingual Collection Volume I*, published in 1979 (there were no subsequent volumes). *The Straits Times* also published a 3-volume series of books called *The Straits Times Collection: Fun With Chinese Characters* (1980, 1982, 1983), which had also originally appeared in the *Bilingual Page*.

In addition to these four areas in which the mass media is involved in language policy implementation, Kuo (1984) specified two other areas not directly identified by Gonzalez et al. The first has to do with what I mentioned earlier. That is, the mass media must not only present the government’s policies, but it must also *promote* them and convince the public of the need for such policies. Promotion comes, for example, through the sponsorship of forums and debates about language (Appendix B). It also comes through editorials, which typically express support for the government’s policies and language campaigns, and chastise those who oppose. The mass media has also been extensively involved in organising student debates, composition contests, story-telling contexts, and in the distribution of promotional materials such as pamphlets, T-shirts, and other paraphernalia.
The second activity of language planning noted by Kuo is the involvement of the press in the assessment and evaluation of the government's language policies. The government sees the press as a principal source by which to evaluate public reaction to its policies, especially the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* (*ST* 26 Sept 1979). The assessment and evaluative comments from the mass media appear primarily in three forms. In the first place, the press reports public opinion concerning the government's various language policies and campaigns. Some of these can be seen in Appendix B, where I have listed the various surveys that I found in *The Straits Times* for the period 1978 to 1993. For example, between 25 September 1979 and 25 June 1980, *The Straits Times* alone had conducted nine surveys on the use of language in family and work environments, and people's attitudes toward Mandarin. Immediately following Lee Kuan Yew's 1979 *Speak Mandarin Campaign* speech, *The Straits Times* interviewed individuals in ten different categories to elicit their views on his speech and the campaign, including counter staff in government and statutory offices, bus conductors, taxi drivers, and hawkers. This was expanded in October, when journalists conducted a series of interviews with families over four weeks to measure the general response to the campaign (*ST* 10-20 Oct; 23 Nov 1979). As Kuo notes, while both the Chinese and the English press were very supportive, generally the former appeared to be more so. The views expressed in the Chinese press came mostly from those with Chinese-education backgrounds, while those in the English press also included the views of the English-educated and non-Chinese readers.

The press is also involved in the evaluation of government policy through editorials and letters to the editor. The *Sin Chew* devoted a whole page daily for at least two weeks to accommodate the letters it received after the launching of the 1979 campaign. *The Straits Times* was a similar hotline for debate and reaction to the campaign. It would also include an occasional "round-up" of letters that had appeared in the Chinese press (e.g., 24 Sept 1979). Most of the editorials supported the government's policies, although there was the occasional critical comment (usually relating to the speed with which a policy was implemented). And finally, the press both publishes various government surveys and conducts its own concerning the effects of the government's language policies and campaigns (Appendix B). For example, in March 1981, *Nanyang Siang Pau* conducted a
survey of 1,000 English-steam students from Primary to pre-University to determine their attitude towards learning Mandarin. They also asked questions to determine whether the campaign had successfully influenced language-use, and to see how the newspaper could help the students learn the language. In July 1981, the government asked Nanyang Siang Pau, Sin Chew Jit Poh, and The Straits Times to assist in assessing the effectiveness of the campaign. The Straits Times was to conduct a large-scale survey among the English-educated Chinese, Nanyang Siang Pau in coffee shops and restaurants, and Sin Chew Jit Poh at hawker centres. Detailed statistics with graphics, analysis and discussion of each of these surveys appeared in all three papers.

As Kuo (1984) noted, these surveys themselves provide some empirical evidence of the involvement of the press in language and language campaigns. In the 1981 Straits Times study, 91% claimed to have heard about the Speak Mandarin Campaign through television; 67% heard about it through the press. The same survey revealed that about 38% of the respondents said they watched Mandarin programmes more often than before the launch of the campaign (ST 28 Sept 1981).

Clearly, in each of these six areas, the mass media is actively involved in the implementation and promotion of the government’s language policies. It is involved through: (a) the direct presentation and explanation of the policies to the public; (b) the control of the language medium and language form used in its programming; (c) the control of the content of its programmes; (d) direct language teaching; (e) its promotion of government policy; and finally, (f) through its evaluative and assessment activities. However, the story of the mass daily press and language in the imagining of the nation is far more complex, grounded in ideology, power relations, and fraught with paradox as government leaders attempt to direct the imagining of the nation. The rest of this thesis will look at language ideological debates in this imagining of the nation as they appear in government speeches located in the mass daily press in Singapore, and at some of the consequences of these debates.
3.6 Conclusion

Because of its role in nation building, some have labelled the Singapore press as following the Third World "development journalism" model (e.g., *ST* 27 Oct 1991; Lee Hsien Loong, 1987). Hachten (1981) described the "development press model" as one wherein all aspects of the mass media must "aid in the great tasks of nation building... building a political consciousness, assisting in economic development." In this model, he argues, there is no place for dissent or criticism. The flow of power and information works from the top down, and individual rights and freedoms of expression are "somewhat irrelevant" (1981:73). Ramaprasad and Ong (1990) took this model and measured the Singapore press against it. On the basis of content analysis of *The Straits Times* "Forum" page, they concluded that the press allows enough critical views to be expressed to take Singapore outside the development press model (1990:41-56).

I would take this argument in a different direction. The use of the term "development model" suggests that at some higher stage, the press in Singapore will move to a more advanced press model. Such a connotation is problematic, if for no other reason than it assumes there is some authority that can determine what is the highest ideal model for all nations. I would suggest instead that the only thing the "development model" really tells us is that the Singapore press is expected to work within a particular framework in the imagining of the nation. In this, it is no different from the press in any other nation, "developed" or otherwise. The press in nations such as Canada or the UK may operate differently than in Singapore, but all function within the political paradigms defining that nation.

The position of the press within the nationalist agenda is thus the central framework of this discussion. Coming back to my analogy from astronomy, the imagining of the nation lies at the centre of this orbiting system. "Imagining the nation" determines the agenda for all other institutions in Singapore, including the mass daily press. As we saw in this chapter, the daily press actively participates in maintaining the conditions necessary for nationhood: social and political stability. It also provides the conditions for a strong government by teaching and advocating government policy. Because of its
national importance, the government has placed considerable control on the press. Through its relationship with the press, through forces of centralisation and through direct legislation, the government has established gravitational forces to ensure the orderly orbiting of the press within the nationalist agenda.

The position of the press within the nationalist agenda is central to understanding the importance of the press as a location for government speeches concerning language in the imagining of the nation. Because the press has been incorporated into the complex “planetary system” of the imagining of the nation, both the message and the audience of the government speeches have been “nationalised”. It is in these speeches, then, where we can examine the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation in Singapore.

The rest of the thesis will focus on this discursive relationship between language and the imagining of the nation in Singapore. It is a story about the tension between the Singapore’s need to position itself globally, while at the same time authenticating itself nationally, and about the shifts in language ideologies as the government leaders attempt to address these tensions. The next chapter is the beginning of this story. It looks at the origin of the historical conditions that faced Singapore when it became an independent state in 1965, looking particularly at the emergence of its ethnic and linguistically divided population. It also looks at the early development of nationalist ideology, and how different factions of Singapore had different understandings of what an “ideal” society should be. And it looks at how language participated in Singapore’s early social structure, in the development of nationalist ideology, in Singapore’s merger and ultimate succession from Malaysia. From early nationalist rumblings, to merger and to succession, language was centrally implicated in the struggle for Singapore to establish its authenticity in order to be recognised as an independent state, both in the eyes of the world, and in the eyes of Singaporeans.
### Appendix A
The Mass Media as Institutes of Discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Lang.</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Organiser</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 May 1978</td>
<td>TV Forum</td>
<td>Opinion Forum: Talking About Language</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td>RTS</td>
<td>four scholars from Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore and the USA</td>
<td>13 May: summ. &amp; quotes (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Aug 1978</td>
<td>TV Forum</td>
<td>Language and Culture</td>
<td>English &amp; Mandarin</td>
<td></td>
<td>RTS</td>
<td>academics from Nanyang and the University of Singapore</td>
<td>11 May: ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Nov 1978</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
<td>A Balance of Languages</td>
<td>English &amp; Mandarin</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>RTS</td>
<td>featuring three “successful” bilingualists</td>
<td>20 &amp; 21 Nov: full transcript in ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Jan 1979</td>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>The Importance and the Limits of Bilingualism</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td>Joint Campus Organisation</td>
<td>Lee Kuan Yew, PM</td>
<td>11 Jan: full transcript in ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Jan 1979</td>
<td>TV Forum</td>
<td>What Sort of Mandarin Should We Speak?</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td></td>
<td>RTS</td>
<td>Chew Kok Chang, assist. Director; MOE Lee Mien Yen, teacher Nan Chiau Girls' High Yap Kwee Hock, secretary of SCCCI</td>
<td>12 Jan: segments pub. in ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 1979 - two evenings</td>
<td>TV Discussion</td>
<td>Bilingualism: Can it be Achieved?</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td></td>
<td>7 bilingual scholars from Chinese-stream schools</td>
<td>4 of the seven scholars mentioned above - plus one English-educated man</td>
<td>2 Mar: announced in ST 3 Mar: summ. &amp; quotes (ST) Followed closely by the ST throughout the seminar, with summaries and many quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mar 1979</td>
<td>TV Forum</td>
<td>Bilingualism: Can it be Achieved?</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>RTS</td>
<td>4 of the seven scholars mentioned above - plus one English-educated man</td>
<td>2 Mar: announced in ST 3 Mar: summ. &amp; quotes (ST) Followed closely by the ST throughout the seminar, with summaries and many quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-21 April 1979</td>
<td>Seminar</td>
<td>Acquisition of Bilingual Ability &amp; Patterns of Bilingualism with Special Reference to SEA Context</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td>RELC</td>
<td></td>
<td>26 Apr: reported in ST; made into a video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 April 1979</td>
<td>TV Forum</td>
<td>Opinion: Bilingualism: What Does it Mean?</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td>RTS</td>
<td>R. Ghosh, A. Gonzalez, J. Gumperz, E. Oksaar, M. Swain (had also participated in an earlier RELC seminar on Bilingualism)</td>
<td>26 Apr: reported in ST; made into a video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1979</td>
<td>TV Forum</td>
<td>Opinion: Bilingualism in Singapore: Limits and Possibilities</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td>RTS</td>
<td>T. Anderson, H. Beardsmore, B. Harris, E. Kuo, B. T'sou (had also participated in an earlier RELC seminar on Bilingualism)</td>
<td>Made into a video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Lang.</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Organiser</td>
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<td>Coverage</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 May 1979</td>
<td>TV Forum</td>
<td>Multiracial Society and Language</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td></td>
<td>RE LC &amp; RTS</td>
<td>Dr. Benjamin T'sou, linguist, U. of Hong Kong</td>
<td>4 May: reported in ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Aug 1979</td>
<td>Forum</td>
<td>Promoting Mandarin Among the Chinese</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nanyang Siang Pau, Singapore Baolin Recreation Club; Sin Chiew Jit Poh, ST</td>
<td>4 Aug: announced in ST</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teo Liang Chye, chair, S C C C I ed. sub-committee.</td>
<td>16 Aug: full translation of a report by Nanyang Siang Pau of the forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 1979</td>
<td>Forum</td>
<td>Promote the Use of Mandarin</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Five Chinese educational bodies</td>
<td>1 Oct : summ. (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Oct 1979</td>
<td>Seminar</td>
<td>Promoting the Use of Mandarin</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td></td>
<td>NT UC</td>
<td>Ong Tee Wah, vice dean of Nanyang U. (Arts)</td>
<td>7 Oct 1979: ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1979</td>
<td>Panel Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18 students</td>
<td>15 Oct 1979: summ. (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1979</td>
<td>Panel Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 Teachers and a Principal</td>
<td>20 Oct 1979: summ. (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nov 1979</td>
<td>Panel Discussion</td>
<td>How to Promote the Use of Mandarin in the Constituency</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18 Constituency members - including teachers, taxi drivers, hawkers, community leaders, and members from the community centre</td>
<td>2 Oct 1979: summ. (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 &amp; 28 Oct 1979</td>
<td>TV Forum</td>
<td>To Overcome the Obstacles of Speaking Mandarin</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>2 x 50 min</td>
<td>RTS</td>
<td>22 Speakers on the Panel, Including: Fong Si Peh Chee, Senior Parliamentary Secretary Leslie Fong, ST editor Tai Ching Ling, of Nanyang U. Lim Ho Hup, Vice-Chair of the S C C C I Ed. Com.</td>
<td>27 Oct 1979: summ. (ST); RTS televised in full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Lang.</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Organiser</td>
<td>Participants</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 June 1980</td>
<td>Forum</td>
<td>New Education Policies and the Student</td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zainul Ahdin, editor Berita Harian</td>
<td>Fok Tai Lay, St Andrew's parent-Teacher Assoc.</td>
<td>7 June, reported in ST</td>
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<td>Tan Yeow Chuan, rep. of the Singapore Chinese</td>
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<td>Lee Kuan Yew, Lam Keng Loi, Nanyang Siang Pau Reporter</td>
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<td>17 Jan 1981</td>
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<td>Ang Beng Choo, MOE</td>
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<td>On the problems of learning Mandarin and how it can be made easier</td>
<td>English (?)</td>
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<td>Straits Times</td>
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<td>Giam Meng Tuck, ed. writer Lianhe Zaobao</td>
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### Appendix B

**Language Surveys and the Press (1978-1993)**

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<td>17,000 Pri. 1 to Pre-U students</td>
<td>How Chinese-stream and English stream students compared in their standards of Engl. &amp; Mand.</td>
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<td>U. of S'pore; Min. of Def.</td>
<td>Military service men</td>
<td>Same as above, looked at their GP results</td>
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<td>24 Apr</td>
<td>SRS</td>
<td>1,418 children(7-14)</td>
<td>Chinese children’s home language(s)</td>
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<td>5 May</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Questioned parents to see where they planned to send their Pr. 1 kids – Eng. or Chinese stream</td>
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<td>16 Nov</td>
<td>Goh Keng Swee</td>
<td>10 primary schools</td>
<td>Study the problems in learning two languages</td>
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<td>1979</td>
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<td>19 Feb</td>
<td>SBS; req. by LKY</td>
<td>SBS conductors</td>
<td>The language of communication with passengers</td>
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<td>8 Sept</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>16 TV viewers 16 gov’t clerks 25 English-ed. 6 Chinese-ed. 20 bus/taxi dr.</td>
<td>interviews to find their reaction to Lee Kuan Yew’s campaign speech</td>
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<td>9 Sept</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>10 hawkers 13 grandfathers 70 Chinese</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
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<td>13 Sept</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>20 staff in tourist shops, foreign firms</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
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<td>25 Sept, 4 Nov</td>
<td>Civil Service</td>
<td>Chinese officers in gov’t dept., min. &amp; stat board</td>
<td>Survey to see how many could speak Mandarin, the degree of proficiency, and how often they speak dialect when dealing with the public</td>
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<td>29 Sept</td>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>12 Chinese Pr. And Sec. Schools</td>
<td>Eval. of “Speak Our School Languages Campaign” in Chinese schools; 12 schools (7 week camp.)</td>
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<td>3 Oct</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>23 Chinese civil servants</td>
<td>Reaction to possible oral Mandarin exam to qualify for promotion</td>
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<td>Reg. Of Veh.</td>
<td>20,000 taxi drivers</td>
<td>Questionnaires on oral Mandarin</td>
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<td>Survey on Mandarin-speaking ability</td>
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<td>17 Jan, 27 Aug</td>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>34,155 Pr. 3 Chinese-stream stu.</td>
<td>Study of whether the use of dialects at home influenced the learning of Man. &amp; Engl.</td>
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<td>22 parents</td>
<td>Survey: reactions to the recommendation to switch from dialect to Pinyin names in schools</td>
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<td>10 hawker patrons</td>
<td>Survey to see if they used Pinyin names or dialect</td>
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<td>Number of bilingual homes</td>
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<td>746 Chinese (12+)</td>
<td>Survey to determine the extent to which Singaporeans were speaking Mandarin</td>
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<td>Census</td>
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<td>Sin Chew Jit Poh</td>
<td>Hawker centres, dept. stores (3,261 cases)</td>
<td>Use of Mandarin</td>
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<td>Nanyang Siang Pau</td>
<td>Rest. &amp; coffee shops (799 employees; 1,182 customers)</td>
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<td>Registry of Vehicles</td>
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<td>Chinese (12+)</td>
<td>Language use (Mandarin vs dialect)</td>
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1989

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<td>Ability to read and understand the Chinese newspapers</td>
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<td>Food Court and Coffee Shops</td>
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1990

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<td>40 parents &amp; teachers</td>
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<td>14 educ., soc., ling.</td>
<td>'Can Asian Values be transmitted in any language’</td>
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<td>20 companies</td>
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1991

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1992

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1993

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<td>NUS</td>
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<td>Study on bilingualism and math skills</td>
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1991

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<td>MITA</td>
<td>Home, school, work, hawker centres</td>
<td>Language use (mostly Mandarin versus dialects)</td>
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CHAPTER FOUR

IMAGINING THE NATION IN SINGAPORE

Singapore. If listed in Roget’s Thesaurus, the list of synonyms that would appear would include clean, orderly, highly efficient, organised, sterile, safe, planned, regulated, controlled, paternalistic, incorrupt, and so forth. Singapore has virtually no extreme poverty, no homelessness, no begging, and little crime. Unemployment is almost non-existent (about 2%). The air is clean. Cars are so restricted that even rush hour traffic flows somewhat freely. Year after year, Singapore has achieved economic growth of around ten percent. Everything in Singapore works.

Yet, not even 40 years ago, when Singapore gained internal self-government in 1959, this list would have constituted the antonyms of the adjectives above. At least one-third of its 1.5 million people was concentrated in only 4 square miles in the south of the island, resulting in a chronic housing shortage. About only two percent of the housing that did exist was equipped with sewer-connected sanitary facilities. Stan Sessor (1992) vividly describes the Singapore that Lee Kuan Yew inherited:

When Lee Kuan Yew took power, he found himself governing a mosquito-infested swamp dotted with pig and chicken farms, fishing villages, and squatter colonies of tin-roofed shacks. The streets of the central city were lined with shophouses – mostly two-story buildings with ornate facades. A family would operate a business on the ground floor and live on the second floor... often without plumbing and electricity, and housing as many as ten people to a room... “The Chinese, who constitute the main current of the city, live in utter filth and poverty”, Asia Scene, a travel magazine, reported in 1960. “Their poverty is phenomenal. One must see with his own eyes to believe it.”
In addition to poverty, there were racial and political tensions, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s. Ethnicity became increasingly politicised and often resulted in racially motivated rioting and violent student militancy. Communist radicals wreaked havoc. Unemployment was high and union activism threatened to frustrate the establishment of a smooth running economy.

So what happened? To Lee Kuan Yew, the transformation of Singapore from swamp and poverty to concrete and economic miracle is the result of (his) deliberate engineering. He calls Singapore a "man-made artifice" (ST 15 Nov 1988). While Lee Kuan Yew made this comment to stress the absence of the more "traditional" elements necessary for nationhood, and hence Singapore's unique "unnaturalness", I would take his comment down a different road. As I argued in Chapter One, the processes that create nations are never "natural", but always involve the vision of particular individuals at particular historical moments, of individuals working within particular social and power relations. Building on Anderson's (1991) notion of "imagined communities", the story I seek to pursue here is the imagining of Singapore. It is a story of how Singapore understands itself and understands itself in relation to the world. It is a story of struggle, of various possibilities of meanings being brought forward, challenged, considered, discarded, accepted, or made dominant. It is a story of paradox and tension arising from balancing the various faces of authenticity, and the way that this is played out in language. For, it is in language where history, politics, and discourse converge. In language is where the struggle over meaning occurs.

In the next few chapters, I will be looking at language in the imagining of Singapore. The focus will be on the nexus of politics, history, and discourse, and how language has been implicated in and by this nexus within the imagining of the nation. This imagining can be divided into three key moments. The first is the years leading up to and including Singapore's independence from colonial rule through merger with Malaysia (1957-1965). During this period, the government attempted to pursue a policy of "unity in diversity". The second (see Chapter 5) is the first fifteen years of Singapore's independence after separation from Malaysia (1965-1979). This period is characterised by the government's initiatives to create an English-speaking Singapore through "English-
knowing” bilingualism. The final moment is captured in the “Asianising of Singapore” (1979–today), characterised by a renewed focus on the mother tongue through the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*. In Chapters Six and Seven, I use an analogy of a river to talk about language ideological debates within the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*. The purpose of this analogy is to emphasise the on-going interaction of language ideologies past, present and future, and to emphasise the socio-economic and political location of language. It is to take us away from a static view of language to dynamic processes of imagining. I want to pull this analogy forward here already in thinking about these “three moments” in the imagining of the nation. For, it is important to see that these moments are not isolated, autonomous stages. Rather, they are on-going interactive processes, each taking with it assumptions of past ideologies for current interpretation, and each looking towards the future.

This chapter is the beginning of the story of language in the imagining of Singapore. I will first of all look at the “colonial hangover” and the beginning of the imagining of the nation in Singapore. This “hangover” is seen in the development of Singapore’s linguistic and racial heterogeneity, resulting from the colonial government’s economic and labour policies. It is seen in the creation of an ethnically and linguistically divided nation, resulting from the colonial *laissez-faire*ism. This “hangover” thus explains the internal social, political and economic complexities, and relates them directly to language ideology and policy. Secondly, I will look at the early murmurings of Singapore’s attempts to understand itself and itself in relation to the world, and in particular, at how it defined its independence. Independence was understood differently by two major groups in Singapore: the “Chinese-educated” Chinese, who argued for a nation characterised by Chinese dominance, and the “English-educated” Chinese who envisioned independence through merger with the Malayan peninsula, arguing that this would be the most likely vision the British would accept.

After a national referendum on the merger question established the direction of independence through “Malaysia”, language ideologies began to take on particular forms. The leaders struggled with two forms of identity, one national and one Malayan, each of these carrying specific language ideologies. Ultimately, as I will discuss in the last part of
this chapter, “a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand”, and Singapore and Malaysia went their separate ways to follow their different visions of the imagined nation. Because of the very different direction language ideologies developed in post-independence Singapore, this chapter thus also establishes a contrast to post-colonial and post-merger national and language ideologies.

4.1 The “Colonial Hangover”

Singapore’s modern history began with the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles on 19 February 1819. To anyone else, Singapore did not offer much. Bloodworth (1986) describes Raffles’ Singapore as a “flat, mangrove swamp, except where Homo Sapiens had scratched his puny initials in the soil.” There were only a few piratical sea gypsies, about 120 Malay fishermen, and approximately 30 leathery Chinese gambier growers (a source of vegetable dye for use in tanning) who lived in tiny settlements “hacked out of the thankless hinterland” (1986:4). But to Raffles, ambitious and keen to establish himself within the East India Company, Singapore was his window of opportunity. The island had natural deep anchorage and a river for small boats. It had a flat site on which to build a town, and held a strategic position as a watergate between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. In short, it was the ideal trading post, offering Raffles a chance to counter the dominance of the Dutch in the region. In 1826, Singapore, Malacca and Penang were joined to become the Straits Settlements under the control of British India. And in 1867, the Straits Settlements became a Crown Colony under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Office in London.

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2 Other historical accounts, such as a 1349 report by a Chinese merchant, indicate that there already was a fairly large settlement of Chinese living on the Temasek Island, as Singapore was then called, well before Raffles’ arrival. See Alex Josey, Lee Kuan Yew: The Crucial Years (Singapore: Times Books, 1980). This group of Chinese was thoroughly Malaynised through many years of intermarriage and close social and economic relations with the Malays. They spoke their own Malay dialect called Baba Malay. Today they are known as the Babas, or Peranakan.
Although Raffles spent only nine months in Singapore in three visits, his influence on Singapore’s development was such that his legacy continues today. He immediately established Singapore as a free port, giving the island, as Bloodworth put it, “the kiss of life” (1986:4). He set it on track to become the world’s second largest port (after Rotterdam) and to become the commercial and financial heart of all of Southeast Asia. By the close of the 19th century, Singapore’s economy was experiencing unprecedented growth. Trade increased eight-fold between 1873 and 1913 (Singapore 1994). This booming economy attracted migrant workers from South China, India, Malaya and elsewhere in the region. By 1860, the population had grown to 80,792, of which 62% were Chinese, 13.5% Malays, 16% Indians, and 8.5% Europeans and “others” (Singapore 1994). Such were the origins of Singapore’s multiracial population.

It is this last aspect of Raffles’ influence, Singapore’s multiracial society, which I wish to emphasise in my discussion of the colonial legacy in Singapore. In particular, what I want to consider here is the colonial government’s response to this ethnic diversity and the effects of this response as it relates to language and language ideologies in the imagining of the nation. What is most striking is not the lack of policy, as some have argued (Wilson, 1978). Rather, it is the lack of consistent policy and the resultant emergence of an ethnically and socio-economically divided society that is so noteworthy.

The colonial government’s general policy towards Singapore’s multiracial population was one of non-interference. As much as possible, they remained uninvolved in the social organisation and daily lives of the different communities. This policy largely reflected a debate within the colonial office concerning the responsibility of the colonial leaders towards the residents of their colonies. But it also reflected their commercial preoccupations. As Edwin Lee has pointed out, “Trade and commerce were the driving force behind all life in Singapore” under colonial rule; “It was the object of government and it set the style of government, and even of the law” (1989:4). Thus the British were mostly interested in the different communities for their particular skills and economic contributions, and were not too concerned with their daily lives. J.S. Furnivall’s classic description of plural societies in South East Asia in the 1940s aptly describes the kind of society Singapore had become under colonial rule (also see Vlieland, 1931):
Probably the first thing that strikes the visitor is the medley of peoples – Europeans, Chinese, Indian and native. It is in the strictest sense a medley, for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling. There is a plural society, with different sections living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. Even in the economic sphere there is a division of labour along racial lines. (1948:304)

Education was also divided along racial lines. Four main systems developed: English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese (further divided by different dialect schools), with each modelled after education in their respective homelands. And even though there was a fairly large Chinese community of about 70,000 members, the communities were so separate that in 1857, not a single European resident could understand their language (Josey, 1980:72).

However, this policy of “non-interference” was not consistently applied to all communities. It did hold for the non-Malay workers, primarily because the British saw them as transient workers, and as such, felt little responsibility for them. The Chinese in particular were content with such an arrangement, as it allowed them to continue their traditional forms of governance and social organisation through clan, guild and triad organisations (Carstens, 1975; Freedman, 1960). However, the British were more directly involved in the Malay community, especially with respect to education. They also had specific policies concerning the learning of English. Both of these areas of direct policy were to have profound effect on the structure of Singapore’s society. In the next section, I will look more closely at the forms of education that emerged under the colonial government’s inconsistent implementation of its *laissez-faire* policies, and the resultant social structure that formed.

### 4.1.1 Education: The Making of an Ethnic Cauldron

Educational policy during colonialism needs to be seen in relation to the economic and political interests of colonialism. In the first place, the economic imperatives of
colonialism required a workforce that could meet the commercial needs of the colonial empire. Secondly, the government was mostly concerned with the administration of Malaya as a whole. This resulted in a focus on the needs of the (rural) Malays in Malaya to the neglect of those of the urban cosmopolitan society in Singapore (Wilson, 1978). Thirdly, past experiences in other colonies (e.g., India) largely influenced the colonial government's educational and social policy in Singapore, particularly concerning English.

The colonial government's involvement in education was mostly restricted to the Malay vernacular schools. The Malay schools were the only vernacular schools that received full government funding. This is not to suggest that these schools offered any kind of superior education: education was very rudimentary, and placed a heavy emphasis on handicrafts ("Basketry") and agriculture ("Rural Science"). The rationale put forward by the administration is revealing of the colonial mind-set (Kratoska, 1983) concerning the limits of their obligation towards Malay education. In his 1884 Report on Education (Perak), Inspector E.C. Hill quoted from an earlier report by H.B. Collinge (State School Inspector, Perak) to state his position:

Thousands of our boys are taken away from idleness, and whilst learning to read and write their own language, to cipher a little, to know something of geography, to write Malay in the Roman character, and to take an active interest in physical exercise and manly sports, they at the same time acquire habits of industry, obedience, punctuality, order, neatness, cleanliness and general good behaviour... After a boy has been a year or two at school, he is found to be less lazy at home, less given to evil habits and mischievous adventure, more respectful and dutiful, much more willing to help his parents and with sense enough not to entertain any ambition beyond following the humble home occupations he has been taught to respect. (Straits Settlements, ADR, 1884:177)

Hill goes on to talk about how vernacular education also tends to remove any "lingering" anti-British sentiments that the boys might have and make them more amiable to the colonial government. Education appears to be closely linked with an attempt to mould an ideal citizen, and with the need to maintain a certain level of social stability in the colony. As Wilson (1978:49) noted, while this kind of curriculum may have suited the needs of rural schools in Malaya, it is difficult to justify its application to schools in urban
Singapore. This unsuited education for the Malay community was compounded by the government’s policies regarding English education.

English education in Singapore began with the arrival of Stamford Raffles. One of his first objectives upon arriving in Singapore was to set up a college, the Singapore Institution (1823). His ambitious dream was that this institution would serve not just the Malay region, but reach as far as China, Japan and India (Raffles, 1835). It never did reach this scale, and at first operated mostly as a school for the sons of well-to-do Chinese families. Yet, it was this institute that was to become the influential Raffles Institute of today (see Chapter 7). It was also this institute that was to produce key English-educated persons like Lee Kuan Yew to lead the anti-colonial struggle. But even more importantly for this discussion is the prestige this school gave to English-medium education. In the following years, education in English was mostly provided by missionary bodies and by “Free” (non-ethnic) schools. These Free schools were supported and controlled by the government either completely or through a grants-in-aid scheme. It is noteworthy that secondary education was only available in these English-medium schools. These schools also provided scholarships, and gave their top students a chance to further their education in British universities.

The main purpose of the English schools was to “supply candidates for nearly the whole of the subordinate appointments under Government in the Colony and Native States and for clerical and other appointments in mercantile houses” (Straits Settlements, 1894 ADR, 1895:173). Access to English-medium education was to be given discriminately, particularly as it related to the Malay community (again, a policy reflecting the government’s preoccupation with Malaya). E.C. Hill gives his reasons for this limited provision of English education in his 1884 report:

The objections to teaching English in all the Malay schools would be (1) that the cost would be very great; (2) that it would be impossible, at once, to obtain teachers with the necessary qualifications; (3) that as pupils who acquire a knowledge of English are variably unwilling to earn their livelihood by manual labour, the immediate result of affording an English education to any large number of Malays would be the creation of a discontented class who might become a source of anxiety to the community. A certain number of Malays educated in English are of course
required to fill clerical appointments and situations of a kind which do not include manual labour. (Straits Settlements, *ADR*, 1884:171).

The high cost of English education and the scarcity of qualified English teachers were, of course, very real problems. Government expenditure on education in the Straits Settlements showed the disproportionate expense of English education. In 1938, 72.4% of total government expenditure was on English education, 19.1% on Malay, 4.2% on Chinese, 3.8% on vocational education, and 0.5% on Tamil education (Straits Settlements, *ADR*, 1938:647). The disproportionate allocation of funds for English education is even more significant considering the relatively few English schools.

But it is Hill's third argument that is particularly revealing, and touches on the debate that had been raging within the colonial office concerning the provision of English education in their colonies. Colonial education policy in India had been more liberal with English. The result was what H.B. Collinge describes as a nation "[swarming] with half-starved, discontented men, who consider manual labour beneath them, because they know a little English" (Federation of Malaya, *Perak Gov't Gazette*, 4 Jan 1895). Because of such experiences, the colonial administration had what Silcock (1964) calls a "pathological fear" of over-educating the natives and of producing unemployed clerks and intellectuals. Access to English needed to be managed in close tandem with the administrative needs of the colony. Anything more than that would certainly result in social instability. Resident Frank Swettenham put it quite candidly when he said, "Whilst we teach children to read and write and count in their own languages, or in Malay... we are safe" (emphasis in original; Federation of Malaya, *Perak Gov't Gazette*, 6 July 1894).

The result of these two policies concerning Malay and English education was the conspicuous absence of the Malays in the English schools. The vast majority of students attending the English schools were the middle- and upper-class Chinese, Straits-born Chinese (see Footnote 2), Indians and Europeans. In 1884, Malays represented only 8% of total enrolment in these schools (Straits Settlements, *ADR*, 1885). For the most part, the Malay community was unwilling to send their children to English-medium missionary schools anyway, on the grounds of religion. The fact that the English schools charged substantial fees, while Malay schools were free, contributed further to this reluctance
(Bokhorst, 1993). However, that the Malays were not desirous of English-medium education does not mean they were reluctant to learn English, or that they wished to be marginalised in Singapore’s economic boom. Yet, the inappropriate and limited syllabus, and the restricted access to English clearly had this effect. The result was a race-class linkage, whereby the Malays were positioned at the bottom of the social ladder.

In contrast to their involvement in Malay and English-medium education, the colonial government adopted a laissez-faire attitude towards Indian and Chinese education. Until 1935, no Tamil school in Singapore received government assistance, or was even registered. This low visibility reflects in part the small size of the community, as well as the administration’s general disinterest. In 1935, five Tamil schools with a total enrolment of 156 pupils and 26 teachers were recorded, although none of these received any assistance (Straits Settlements, ADR, 1935:383-384). Not until 1938 was Tamil education registered in the government’s expenditure on education, listed as 0.5 percent (Straits Settlements, ADR, 1938:647). The Indian schools were mostly staffed by teachers from India, and closely followed the curriculum and administration of schools in India.

The story of Chinese education is more complex. There are two main issues concerning Chinese education that are important here. The first relates to the political nature of the Chinese schools that was able to flourish under colonial laissez-faireism. The second, which I will discuss more in the next section, concerns the division that emerged (and continues today) between the Chinese-educated and English-educated within the Chinese community. Ultimately, while the government’s laissez-faire policy was well meaning, it ultimately was to become a curse on Singapore’s social and political development throughout the early and mid-1900s.

The Chinese had taken with them a dense network of dialect and regional clan associations. This network provided a framework of support and organisation for the immigrants, and played an important role in maintaining ties with the homeland. They were also very involved in education. The 1956 Report of the All-Party Committee on

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3 In Singapore, the terms “English-educated” and Chinese-educated” (rather than English-medium educated, etc.) are used to refer to these two groups within the Chinese community. “English-educated” is never used to refer to the non-Chinese who attended English-medium schools.
Chinese education located five origins of Chinese education: (a) wealthy, charitable individuals; (b) teachers; (c) district committees; (d) guilds, societies (she tuan), dialect associations (hui guan), and Chinese temples; and (e) religious bodies such as Christian missions and Buddhist organisations. The result was that virtually every school had its own organisational body and recruited their teachers directly from China. This complex organisation, the dialect divisions, and the fact that the schools held such strong ties with China resulted in highly politicised Chinese education. As one scholar put it, political content was “the spirit and soul of Chinese education, the very reason for its existence” (Lee Ah Chai, 1957).

After the 1911 Revolution, the revolutionary politics of China became especially potent in the Chinese schools in Singapore. Many schools changed from dialect to the new Chinese national language Kuo-yu (Mandarin), and many became centres for Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) politics. Looking forward to my discussion of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, it is noteworthy that Mandarin was first brought into Singapore for political reasons, as a way to unite the Chinese community. A politically unified Chinese community, with 313 Chinese schools in the Straits Settlements (Kua Kia Soong, 1985), did not sit well with the colonial administration. In 1917, the Director of Education explained the administration’s position:

> All Chinese vernacular education is in the hands of the various Chinese communities and is entirely independent of Government. The Education Department is not at present staffed with officers acquainted with the Chinese language, so that if there was supervision it could only... deal with such matters as sanitation, suitability of accommodation, equipment, physical exercises, etc. I have visited several schools in Singapore, but have not been impressed very favourably. Methods are very different from those in English schools. Discipline does not seem to be a very strong point. The pupils in many cases are taught military drill and are a familiar sight parading and marching in their smart little uniforms, but the spectator gets a shock when he recognises the ‘goose step,’ imported no doubt by instructors from China, whence indeed it is said that these schools are generally controlled. (Straits Settlements, ADR, 1917:235)

Two years later, following a number of anti-Japanese riots involving Chinese students and workers, D. Beatty (Protector of Chinese in the Straits Settlements) submitted a
confidential memorandum to the Governor. He warned the Governor that there was "even a danger" that the teachers "may poison the minds of their scholars against the Government if it should suit their purposes at some future date" (cited in Wilson, 1978:57).

As a result of this increased political activity in the Chinese schools, the colonial government reversed its laissez-faire attitude towards Chinese education. In 1920, they instituted the Registration of Schools Ordinance (amended in 1926) which required all schools, supervisors of schools, committees of management, and teachers to be registered. They also introduced a grants-in-aid scheme. To qualify for grants, schools would have to, among other things, use dialect and not Kuo-yu (ironic, given the current government’s policy) as the medium of instruction. The purpose behind this policy was to limit the influence of politics in China and to keep the community disunited by their dialects. The Chinese community reacted strongly against the 1920 Ordinance, and many of the schools refused the grants because of the conditions attached. In 1932, only 10 of the 215 registered Chinese schools had accepted grants (All-Party Report, 1956).

The colonial hangover concerning education was thus the establishment and hardening of linguistic, racial and economic divisions. In the first place, apart from English education, which was somewhat more pan-ethnic, educational policy resulted in ethnic enclaves and segregation, with each community preoccupied with their own ethnic and motherland issues. The Chinese identified more with China and with the political struggles going on there; many of the Indians were staunch supporters of the Indian National Congress; and many of the Malays were more involved with Malay and Islamic concerns elsewhere in the region. Only the English-educated stepped outside their communal enclaves and identified with the British. Secondly, educational policy created a race-class link in its provision of free, yet largely irrelevant, Malay education. Thirdly, it resulted in a highly politicised Chinese-educated community, one that would later lead a militant anti-colonial struggle. Finally, colonial education policy created a new English-speaking elite (primarily Chinese) – one that was culturally alienated from the Chinese-educated and one that occupied prestigious government, professional and mercantile positions. At the same time, it created a Chinese-educated lower class. These were all
potent ingredients of social unrest. In particular, a highly acrimonious relationship emerged between the English- and Chinese-educated. This divide was to have a powerful impact on the processes towards independence.

4.1.2 A Divided Community

The fault-line cutting through the Chinese community was already formed with pre-war colonial education policy. English was positioned as the language of prestige, and through laissez-faireism, Chinese-education sustained high levels of political intensity. However, this fault-line cracked open very violently as soon as independence appeared on the horizon. There are two main factors contributing to this story. The first is the dawn of independence itself and a kind of political awakening. This awakening began with the three-and-a-half-year (1942-1945) Japanese Occupation of Singapore. The fall of Singapore to the Japanese was a pivotal turning point in Singapore's history, largely because it opened up the possibility of independence. It dismantled the myth of British superiority in the region, and for the first time, the people realised that the British and British rule were not invincible. Most significantly, the Japanese Occupation also brought Lee Kuan Yew on the scene. Lee Kuan Yew returned to Singapore in 1950 after having studied four years of law at Cambridge. Known then as Harry Lee, he spoke impeccable English but not a word of Mandarin; he could only write his name in Chinese characters, but nothing else. His father wanted him "to be the equal of any Englishman" (Singapore, LAD, Vol.1, 12 Apr 1956, Col. 1919). Lee succeeded so brilliantly that George Brown, the British Foreign Secretary in the mid-1960s, said to him: "Harry, you're the best bloody Englishman east of Suez" (cited in Sessor, 1992). It was after seeing the callous brutality of the Japanese and their rape of Singapore that Lee Kuan Yew vowed Singapore's independence.

The changing demographics of the Singaporean population were also significant in this political awakening. By 1947, 59.9% of the Singaporean Chinese population were born locally, compared to 25.1% in 1921 and 35.6% in 1931. And in 1947, 46.9% of the Singaporean Chinese population were female, compared to 32% in 1921 and 37.7% in
1931. The Chief Statistician interpreted these demographic changes as "positive evidence... of a general intention amongst the Chinese community to settle" (Del Tufo, 1949:84-85). This "intention to settle" translated into greater interest in local matters and the increasing involvement of the Chinese community in local politics. There was a shifting focus in *The Straits Times* from affairs catering to a predominantly expatriate British community to *national* concerns. Historian Turnbull (1995) noted that in the early post-war years, letters to the editor and birth, marriage, and death announcements reflected a growing Asian readership. Furthermore, she notes, although the paper generally continued to support the British colonial administration, it "left its readers in no doubt about the growing strength of Asian nationalism and international pressures against European imperialism" (1995:146). Anti-colonial editorials from prominent American newspapers and speeches by nationalist leaders such as Nehru and Aung San were frequently reproduced in the paper, calling for Asian unity in the cause of independence. This heightened political awareness was mostly driven by the English-educated. As will become evident in subsequent discussions, their vision of the imagined community differed in virtually all aspects from that of the Chinese-educated.

The second factor contributing to the explosive fission between the English- and Chinese-educated members of the Chinese community has to do with language and education policy. The colonial government's immediate post-war educational policy was a complete reversal of pre-war policy. On the one hand, they gave increased access to English-medium education. On the other, they tightened their control over Chinese-medium education.

### 4.1.2.1 Open Access and Tightened Screws (1946-1954)

To get some sense of the debates around language and education during the post-war years, it is worth considering two conflicting views that were circulating among the leaders in post-war Singapore. The first view was the familiar pre-war argument for Asian-language education. D.D. Chelliah, at the time Vice-Principal of St. Andrews (English) School, was particularly influential in arguing this position. In his published
Ph.D. thesis (1947), he argued that all primary education should rightfully be given in the students’ mother tongue for the sake of cultural preservation. However, for the purposes of inter-cultural communication, English should be taught as a second language (1947:141-142). Post-primary education should also be available in the mother tongue, but with an increased focus on English. His reasoning for this approach was to achieve “a careful blending of both” Western and Eastern cultures in order to develop a “modern Malayan culture” (1947:159-154).

The second view was presented by educationist Dr. Seng Ong (Wilson, 1978). He contended that English-medium education should be made available to everyone, and that government support for Asian-language education be reduced or even eliminated. His reasons included the economic value of English, the need for a *lingua franca* in the region, and the need for national unity. Asian-language education would only continue to crystallise the divisions between the various communities, he argued, when what was needed now was the welding of these communities into a single, unified society. *The Straits Times* editor strongly supported this view (25 Nov 1948):

In a city with a Chinese population of 78.8 percent, the sort of education which Chinese children get is bound to be the major influence in determining the political and cultural climate of the future. The English school is the mould of Malayan citizenship, proved and attested by the Straits Chinese, whereas the Chinese vernacular school merely perpetuates the present barriers between the Chinese-speaking population and the rest.

In what appears to be a complete reversal of pre-war policy, the colonial government adopted this second view.

There are a number of reasons for this reversal. In the first place, the colonial government had to acknowledge that decolonialisation in Singapore was inevitable. They saw it in their interest to ensure as much as possible a leadership and people amenable to some kind of association with Britain.⁴ Secondly, the immediate post-war years saw a

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⁴ For the British, Singapore provided an ideal naval and air base from which the British could continue to exercise some control in the region. Also, the British were interested in maintaining the island as a secure and stable base from which to continue their economic operations.
rapid increase in the number of private English, Chinese and Indian schools. This increase was largely because of the growing demand for education, which could not be met by the government schools. While the English and Indian schools posed no real threat, the Chinese schools were more problematic. They continued to be heavily influenced by politics in China. The Education inspectorate did not have sufficient staff to regularly monitor these schools. All of these factors figured heavily in the colonial government's changing attitude towards English education.

This change in attitude is clearly evident in numerous official reports. For example, in the 1947 Educational Policy in the Colony of Singapore – Ten Years Programme (Ten Years Plan), J.B. Neilson (Director of Education) stressed the “urgent need” to redirect ethnic-based loyalties in education towards “national needs... through fostering a sense of common identity” in order to “extend the capacity for self-government” (1947:5). English was explicitly stated as the more appropriate language for developing this national identity. Neilson talked about the English schools as “the nursery for the more Malayan minded of our youth” (1947:11). In contrast, the Asian-language schools were “over-crowded, staffed with teachers either untrained or of non-Malayan training and outlook, using non-Malayan text-books, and in many cases imparting alien political doctrines.” He warned that “Unless students are provided for in the English schools, the undesirable features” of these schools “will increase, the alien influence and political outlook will strengthen, and difficulties in developing a sense of civic loyalty and responsibility will be multiplied” (1947:12). The 1950 Annual Report similarly noted that vernacular schools were not “likely to assist in producing that unity and corporate feeling that was essential if progress towards nationhood was to be made” (Colony of Singapore, ARDE, 1950:59).

Other developments in education further attest to this shifting attitude within the government ranks. Neilson had pledged in the Ten Years Plan to extend “universal free

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5 There appears to be no similar increase in private Malay schools. In fact, in 1958 the Vice-President of the Singapore Malay Education Council, Inche Abdul Rahman Mohamed Said, accused the Singapore government of not caring for Malay education. He claimed there had been no increase in the number of Malay schools since the war, and the result was that “hundreds” of Malays were being forced to attend English schools (The Straits Times, 9 June 1958).
primary education” to all vernacular schools, not just Malay. This was a highly ambitious promise. During the immediate post-war period, birth rates soared: in the years 1947-1950, more than one-third of the population was under ten years, and more than half under the age of 20 (S.C. Chua, 1962:50). Neilson’s initial plan was to construct an average of ten Government primary schools each year. In 1949, a *Supplementary Five Years Plan* extended this provision to additional eighteen new primary schools each year beginning in 1950 (Colony of Singapore, *ARDE*, 1950). Apart from the growth in government schools, there also was a rapid increase in the number of private schools. The massive expansion of education can be seen in Table 4.1.

### Table 4.1 Schools and Enrolment in Singapore (1945-1954)

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<th>1947 (%)</th>
<th>1949 (%)</th>
<th>1951 (%)</th>
<th>1954 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese schools</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>154 (57.5)</td>
<td>271 (64.1)</td>
<td>288 (59.9)</td>
<td>277 (49.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment</td>
<td>20,423</td>
<td>53,478 (59.2)</td>
<td>68,434 (59.5)</td>
<td>75,974 (54.1)</td>
<td>81,605 (45.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English schools</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>68 (25.4)</td>
<td>94 (22.2)</td>
<td>131 (27.2)</td>
<td>204 (36.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment</td>
<td>14,194</td>
<td>29,410 (32.6)</td>
<td>37,500 (32.6)</td>
<td>54,645 (38.9)</td>
<td>84,062 (47.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay schools</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35 (13.1)</td>
<td>39 (9.2)</td>
<td>42 (8.7)</td>
<td>60 (10.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment</td>
<td>4,102</td>
<td>6,463 (7.2)</td>
<td>7,862 (6.8)</td>
<td>8,505 (6.1)</td>
<td>10,470 (5.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian schools</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11 (4.1)</td>
<td>19 (4.5)</td>
<td>20 (4.2)</td>
<td>20 (3.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>919 (1.0)</td>
<td>1,315 (1.1)</td>
<td>1,272 (0.9)</td>
<td>1,465 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total schools</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>268 (100.1)</td>
<td>423 (100)</td>
<td>481 (100)</td>
<td>561 (100.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment</td>
<td>38,719</td>
<td>90,270 (100)</td>
<td>115,111 (100)</td>
<td>140,396 (100)</td>
<td>177,602 (99.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Annual Reports for Singapore, 1946-1947; Department of Education, Annual Reports, 1947-1954*

As Wilson (1978:142) says of these figures, this pattern of educational expansion does not necessarily reflect parental preference. At no time during this period were there sufficient places in the four types of schools for complete freedom of choice to be exercised. However, this table reveals two things. First of all, it is important to place these figures beside that of government expenditure on education. In 1948, 75.3% of total education expenditure was allocated to English education, 8.7% to Malay, 5.6% to Chinese, and 0.5% to Tamil education (Colony of Singapore, *ARDE*, 1948:28). In 1954, English education continued to absorb the bulk of funds at 73.6%. Expenditure on Malay education went down to 4.0%, while that on Chinese education increased to 14.4%. Expenditure on Indian education remained low at 0.4% (Colony of Singapore, *ARDE*,...
There is clearly incongruency between the rapid expansion of all schools and the pattern of expenditure allocated to this expansion. As I noted earlier, this of course in part reflects the higher expense of English education. But this expense itself reflects a higher quality in the facilities and infrastructure of such schools, as well as the colonial government’s strong commitment to English education.

Secondly, figures in this table show that, by 1954, the number of students enrolled in English schools surpassed that in Chinese schools. This clearly indicates a continued strong preference for English-medium education. And the increase in English was not just confined to the English-medium schools. The Ten Years Programme had ruled that English was to be taught as a subject at the beginning of the third year in the Asian-language schools. After Primary 3, the top students in all Asian-language schools were eligible to receive intensive training in the Primary English-medium Schools (1947:2). The appeal of English-medium education was also enhanced by the establishment of Singapore’s first university in 1949, the English-medium University of Malaya (a merger of Raffles College and King Edward VII College of Medicine). A 1945 Report produced by a Commission on Higher Education linked this university with the needs of independence: “In the stage preparatory to self-government, universities have an important part to play; indeed they may be said to be indispensable. To them we must look for the production of men and women with the... capacity for leadership which self-rule requires” (cited in Carr-Saunders, 1961:15). These various policies in support of English clearly showed the colonial government’s desire to establish English as the lingua franca of Singapore.

In conjunction with encouraging English-medium education, the colonial government also attempted to increase its control over the Chinese schools. Many of the Chinese schools were severely short of funds, and had frequently demanded more money from the government. Classrooms were overcrowded (ST 12 Feb 1950), there was always a shortage of teachers, and conditions were often unsanitary. The government used these needs to tighten its control over the Chinese schools. This was done primarily through a grants-in-aid scheme: by attaching aid to policies specifically designed to alter the content and medium of Chinese education. The details of this scheme was outlined in a 1953
White Paper called *Chinese Schools – Bilingual Education and Increased Aid*. In the White Paper, the government argued that the 1947 *Ten Years Programme* did not go far enough in preparing Singapore for self-governance. It failed to provide “instruction in all three vernacular languages in schools where children of different races can mix freely and learn to become good Malayans.” A practical solution was a form of “English-knowing bilingualism” (see Chapter 5): to “make the schools bilingual with English as a common second language taught increasingly throughout the school and to devise a common Singapore-centred curriculum” (Colony of Singapore, *ARDE*, 1953:29). For those schools that complied, the Government promised additional aid. As before, most of the larger Chinese schools chose to forego financial aid in order to remain autonomous. Those who really needed the funds, however, were forced to comply. These two aspects of government policy concerning the increased support for English-medium education and the tightened control on Chinese-medium schools intensified the anti-colonial sentiments building within the Chinese-educated community.

### 4.1.2.2 Nanyang: The Bastion of the East

As the enrolment figures in Table 4.1 show, even though English-medium education was gaining in popularity, there was still very strong support for Chinese education on the part of an increasingly politicised Chinese community. There was also, because of the increasing dominance and prestige of English, a growing and deep sense of bitterness among the Chinese-educated. These feelings intensified with the Communist take-over in China, which closed the last door to higher education. The English-educated were given prestigious careers in commerce and business, while career prospects for the Chinese-educated remained dismal. Many were unemployed or under-employed. David Bell estimated that there were about 65,400 Chinese-educated secondary school age children out of school in 1954, making “the potential for dissatisfaction extremely high” (1972:301; see also Kayes, 1960). This discontent was exacerbated by the fact that the war had left Singapore, since 1946 a separate Crown Colony, hungry, crowded, dirty, sick
and virtually lawless and corrupt. There was a desperate shortage of basics such as clothing and rice and housing.

Given their strong ties with China, and given their resentment against the English-educated, it is not surprising that the Chinese-educated also felt intensely insecure about the future of their culture and language. They regarded the English language as the language of the colonial masters and saw the values and purposes of English-medium education as something foreign, anti-national, and against their communal (ethnic) interests. Even more importantly, these communal interests were more and more defined by pro-Communist activity. Much of this activity was organised by the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM), which had been formed in 1930 by a group of Chinese-educated nationalists (outlawed in 1948). Particularly during "The Emergency" years (1950s and 1960s), the CPM wreaked havoc. They mobilised the trade unions and the radical students from the Chinese Middle Schools to stage often-violent strikes, demonstrations and riots. Two notorious moments were the 13 May 1954 student demonstrations against the National Service Ordinance (ST May-June 1954), and the May 1955 Hock Lee labour dispute (ST 8-16 May 1955; Bloodworth, 1986:116-126). In the former, students strongly resisted a law of national conscription that would require them to protect the interests of the British. Bloody clashes erupted between the police and students. In the latter, students joined the bus workers in the Hock Lee labour dispute, which similarly ended in riots. Both of these turned into militant anti-colonial demonstrations.

Perhaps the clearest expression of these growing anti-colonial and pro-Chinese sentiments was Chinese-medium Nanyang University (also known as Nantah). The establishment of Nanyang in 1956 was completely a community project, largely led by millionaire businessman Tan Lark Sye (who was later stripped of his citizenship for allegedly inciting Chinese chauvinism, see Chapter 5). Even trishaw riders and taxi-drivers joined in by contributing a day’s earnings to the project (Wilson, 1978). Tan Lark Sye spoke of the fears and frustrations that mobilised support for the project: "If we do not take steps to preserve our culture now, ten years from now we may find that the education of our people will be on shaky ground. Twenty or thirty years from now our language or literature may perish. In forty or fifty years perhaps we shall no longer call ourselves
Chinese” (cited in Wilson, 1978:149). What is of particular interest in what Tan had to say is the way the Chinese community began to talk about their language and its meaning for the imagined community. His argument is couched in the view that “a race = a language = a culture”. This equation appears again in the 1956 All-Party Report on Chinese education (4.3.2), and continues to guide language ideologies today.

Fledgling Nanyang quickly became a centre for political activity. Within five years of opening, Nanyang University had 23 communists or pro-Communists elected to the executive committee of their Students’ Union. The Union had taken over all journals issued in the university and filled them with communist policy directives, political texts from China, xuexi (study) briefs, and propaganda. A report on Communism in Nanyang University claimed that:

The student leaders have abused their power to make the Nanyang University a centre (a) for the recruitment and indoctrination of cadres for the CPM, (b) for the dissemination of pro-Communist propaganda, particularly in Chinese schools throughout Malaysia, (c) for the establishment of contacts with international Communist student groups and similar groups in other nations and (d) for direct participation in political activity on public issues exploited by, and in the interests of, anti-national, pro-Communist forces, opposed to the creation of Malaysia and the Malaysian pattern of public life. (1964:21)

Of course, as one executive of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) told me (interview, Dec 1994) in speaking of his experiences at Nanyang, youths are always idealistic and always have “fire in their belly”. They were “radicals” eager to improve their social conditions, to fight the poverty and unemployment that plagued their country, and were fiercely nationalistic. They were thus not necessarily “subversive elements” or “pro-Communist” as the government labelled them. He claimed that many of the students did not even know that the demonstrations and strikes were organised by the communists. It is not my purpose here to determine the extent of communist infiltration in the Chinese schools, nor the degree to which the students were aware of this communist infiltration. What is clear is that the students were organised and used for political purposes by union leaders and others seeking to challenge the Colonial government.
The Chinese-educated also clearly envisioned a nationalist agenda different from that of the English-educated. Most of those educated in the Chinese schools continued to hold strong Chinese nationalist beliefs. Their opposition to colonialism was motivated by their desire to further the interests of China and of their ethnic community. The English-educated, most of whom felt no particular loyalty to China, were similarly anti-colonial. However, they were motivated by the desire for Malayan national liberation. A struggle emerged between the two visions of what Singapore should be: the Chinese-educated, pro-Communist radical left led by people like Tan Lark Sye and Lim Chin Siong (union leader and president of the All-Singapore Chinese Schools Parents’ Association); and the English-educated moderates led by Lee Kuan Yew. Ironically, it was an alliance between the two that ultimately led to the formation of the People’s Action Party (PAP), the party that was to lead Singapore to independence, and that continues to lead Singapore today.

4.2 Independence: “Riding the Tiger”

The story of independence in Singapore is a highly complex one, and certainly cannot be covered in detail here (see Bloodworth, 1986; Josey, 1968). What I want to highlight here is the way in which Lee Kuan Yew managed to secure independence, largely because of the way it parallels his attitude towards the English language (see Chapter 5). The image that Lee Kuan Yew likes to give is one of him perilously “riding the tiger”, based on the Chinese saying “Qi hu nan xia” (“when you ride a tiger, it is hard to dismount”). There are two ways to apply this analogy. The first way, and the way it was used by Lee Kuan Yew, is to describe how he aligned himself with the pro-Communists for his own purposes. The second is to apply the analogy to his use of Malayan nationalism to gain independence.

Sessor (1992) describes Lee Kuan Yew’s “riding the Communist tiger” as follows: he “latched onto the pro-Communist movement, usurped its rhetoric, and seized control of it.” Lee Kuan Yew knew that only the democratic English-educated elite could secure an agreement with the British for independence. However, he needed to gain the support of the masses, which the Communists had. At that time, Lee Kuan Yew could not even put
his speeches into Mandarin himself, revealing how far he was from the grassroots. It also reveals the precarious nature of his alliance with the pro-Communists, and "the narrow corner into which the English-educated had been driven — their dependence on men they could not quite trust to speak for them to men they did not quite understand" (Bloodworth, 1986:248). Thus, while never embracing Communism, he "rode the tiger" to achieve independence. *Straits Times* journalist Tan Tarn How described Lee Kuan Yew's transformation as changing from a "Western-oriented gentleman to a born-again Chinese" (interview, Nov 1995). He became a lawyer for labour unions. He reverted to his Chinese name Kuan Yew and began to learn Mandarin. He aligned himself with nationalist rhetoric and became its voice. He even decried the undeserved status being given to the English language: "When I read Nehru, and I read a lot of Nehru, I understood him when he said, 'I cry when I think that I cannot speak my own mother tongue as well as I can speak the English language'" (Singapore, *LAD*, Vol.1, 12 Apr 1956, Col.1919). The Chinese radicals were willing to work with Lee Kuan Yew as it gave them a legitimate cover to bring forward their revolutionary ideals (Emergency rule in 1948 had forced them underground).

In 1953, George Rendel was appointed by the British government to produce a new constitution in preparation for Singapore's independence. While the ensuing Rendel Report did not bring complete suffrage, it did enlarge the electorate enough to encourage the development of several political parties. In 1954, Lee Kuan Yew and the Chinese radicals joined ranks to form the People's Action Party under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew. With the first elections in 1955, Mr. David Marshall became the first Chief Minister of Singapore. After failing to clinch a deal for independence, he resigned in 1956 and Lim Yew Hock took over his post. The Citizenship Ordinance of 1957 (which notably provided the legal basis for a *Singaporean* nationality6) gave citizenship to 325,000 "aliens". And by 1959, 81 percent of the population aged 21 and over had become registered electors in time to vote for the first legislature (MacDougall, 1982). In the

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spring of 1958, the British had formally agreed to grant Singapore self-government. A Singapore head of state would replace the British governor, and the Legislative Assembly would be fully elected. This time in the 1959 election, it was the PAP that swept to power, making Lee Kuan Yew Singapore’s first Prime Minister (they won 43 of the 51 seats). And on 3 June of that year, the new constitution came into force. Singapore now had internal self-governance.

Even with this first step of internal self-rule, however, Singapore was not intent on nation building in the sense of a sovereign state. In their campaign for independence (The Battle for Merger, 1961), the PAP strongly argued that Singapore was incapable of existing as an independent state. It was too small, had no natural resources, and was vulnerable to the Communist insurgence. Independence could only occur through merger with Malaya. Lee Kuan Yew explained at a Malaysian Solidarity Consultative Committee meeting (18 Dec 1961) that “Malaysia is simply the nationalist answer of cutting short the period of gestation from colonialism to independence in order to deny the communists the use of the time spent in a protracted struggle to build up, not our forces of democracy, but their forces of communism” (cited in Josey, 1980). Given its desire to position itself as a national newspaper, it is significant that The Straits Times strongly supported the aims of the moderates within the PAP to achieve independence through merger with the Federation (Turnbull, 1995:220-257). The Chinese militants within the PAP ranks, however, strongly opposed the Malaysia plan. Merger meant the dominant status of the Chinese would be diminished. They also saw merger as the first step towards the inevitable adoption of the peninsula’s Malay-biased language and cultural policies (see the 1951 “Barnes Report” and 1951 “Fenn-Wu Report”; Bokhorst, 1993). As described in the 1956 All-party Report on Chinese education:

Chinese education is intermingled with, and inseparable from, Chinese culture... In protecting fiercely the continuance of Chinese education, therefore, the Chinese inhabitants of this Island are but voicing the innate fears that once a blow is struck to their language, culture would follow next, and without culture as the basis of its racial existence, no people could preserve its identity and racial dignity. (1956:4)
On 30 July 1961, the Chinese militants left the PAP to form the Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front). And on 16 September 1963, after a national referendum confirmed the support of the people, Singapore gained full independence from Britain by merging with Sabah, Sarawak, and Malaya to form Malaysia.

In the battle for merger, Lee Kuan Yew used Malayan nationalism in the same way he used the communists to achieve internal governance. He had to balance two forces of identity. On the one hand, in the larger interests of full independence from British rule, the PAP needed to identify with the Federation. For this reason, Malay became Singapore’s national language (see section 4.3.3). And for this reason numerous policies were put in place to contain Chinese chauvinism. However, on the other hand, there was also a clear desire to remain a “distinct society”, if I can borrow a term from the Canadian constitutional debates. This desire is evident in the timing of Singapore’s first national census (1957), and in the creation of its national flag and national anthem in 1959. Some have argued that these national symbols were part of the overall effort to combat ethnic chauvinism in the interests of merger (Wilmott, 1989). However, these symbols also speak clearly of an independent nationalist agenda, one that imagined Singapore separately from its neighbour.

The national anthem, for example, is a powerful voice in rallying people into the nationalist agenda. The fact that most Singaporeans even today do not understand the Malay lyrics does not seem to diminish the sense of nationalism that the anthem carries (a 26 July 1991 Straits Times survey showed that 80% of the people interviewed did not know the meaning of the words). As Birch notes, the anthem is a “reminder that Singapore is home and is therefore worth protecting and improving, worth staying in and developing” (1993:2). Presenting Singapore as home to a populace largely made up of transients and immigrants was an important first step in imagining the nation.

Census taking is also a crucial element of nationhood. In her historical account of census taking in the United States, M. Anderson argues that “a history of the development of the American population census is a crucial aspect in the study of the intellectual, political and social development of the nation” (1988:xv). It sets the agenda for the imagining of the nation. The timing of Singapore’s first national census is significant:
around the time of the 1957 constitutional conference and on the eve of merger. Census taking in Singapore began in 1871 with the Census of the Straits Settlements and was conducted every ten years until 1931. The 1941 Census was disrupted by the outbreak of WW2, and the 1947 census was taken as part of a Pan-Malayan Census. However, the 1957 Census was confined solely to Singapore, and Singapore was for the first time responsible for conducting and tabulating the census.

In terms of imagining the nation, then, we see a curious Janus-faced identity emerging. For example, the 1956 *All-Party Report* stated the need to encourage both “a Singapore-centred loyalty and a Malayan-consciousness” (1956:13). The 1956 *White Paper on Educational Policy* similarly conflated these two forms of identity:

> The future of Singapore depends on the triumph of those forces which are trying to build a Singapore or Malayan nationalism, and it is in our schools that the foundations of that nationalism must be built. It must be stated here categorically that the main aim of this Government’s education policy is to build a Malayan nation. (emphasis mine; 1956:4)

The struggle of riding Malayan nationalism at the same time as maintaining a Singaporean identity was a main preoccupation of PAP government throughout much of the pre- and merger periods. One place where this struggle can be most clearly seen is in language ideological debates. The PAP’s slogan of “unity in diversity” in many ways captures their managing of this struggle. “Unity” provided the ideological space to fulfil the demands of Malayan nationalism; “diversity” gave room for their own vision of a multiracialist Singaporean identity.

### 4.3 Unity in Diversity 1959-1965

*If we can all speak the national language at all levels of national life, then we would have overcome a hurdle in the long road to nation-building and national unity.*

> – Minister of State, Education, Inche Rahim Ishak  ST 10 Dec 1965.

The development of language ideologies in Singapore is best seen in contrast to the Malaysian model. In their own preparation for Malayan independence, the Alliance
government had taken a very aggressive pro-Malay direction in its political, social and economic policies. They argued that the *Bumiputra*, the Malay "sons of the soil", had been severely disadvantaged under colonial rule. As such, the Malays needed numerous affirmative action measures to regain their rightful position in society. The government also declared Islam as the national religion, and Malay as the sole national language and medium of instruction in the schools, although English has continued to play an important role in the nation (Bokhorst, 1993). Malaysia’s vision of the imagined community was thus very much guided by this pro-Malay emphasis. As will be shown in this section, this vision of the imagined community stood in stark contrast to Lee Kuan Yew’s, and ultimately the merger failed. Language had no small part to play in this failure.

This section begins with a discussion of the 1956 *All-Party Report* on Chinese education, which Puru Shotam aptly calls “a milestone in the social construction of language meanings in Singapore” (1987:80). In the second part, I will talk about the language ideological debates concerning the Malay language in the imagining of Singapore within Malaysia.

### 4.3.1 The All-Party Report: Multilingualism and Singaporean Nationalism

To take us further in understanding the particular language ideologies operating within Singapore’s Malayan and national identities, it is necessary to step back a few years. In the 1955 Legislative Assembly, Lee Kuan Yew raised a series of questions concerning language in the independent nation:

In a free and independent Malaya in which every Chinese, every Indian, every Malay, will no longer be Chinese, Malay or Indian but Malayan, what language or languages shall they speak? What language or languages shall the Government use? What language or languages will be acceptable to the people? What are the language or languages of an independent and democratic Malaya? They are thorny delicate problems. (Singapore, *LAD*, 1955/1956, Col. 262-264)
The response to Lee Kuan Yew's questions was the formation of an All-Party Committee, of which he also was a member. The purpose of this Committee was to "investigate the situation in Chinese schools in Singapore and to make recommendations for the improvement and strengthening of Chinese education in the interests of Chinese culture and orderly progress towards self-government and ultimate independence" (All-Party Report, 1956:1). The wording of the Committee's mandate is significant in what it reveals concerning the conflicting forces of Singaporean national identity and Malaysian national identity. As Wilson (1978:190) has pointed out, the original proposal put forward in the Legislature included the words "progress towards self-government and ultimate independence in Singapore" (ST 19 May 1955). Lee Kuan Yew argued that it was entirely contrary to the PAP's philosophy "to think of ultimate independence in Singapore as divorced from the wider concept of independence of Malaya" (Singapore, LAD, 1955/56, Col.256). As such, the words "in Singapore" were deleted.

In the course of their investigation, the All-Party committee sought the participation of the various clan and business associations, of educational and political organisations, and of parents. Eighty-seven memoranda were sent to the Committee from 502 various Chinese associations (ST 6 June 1955). The proposals put forward in these memoranda resulted in an active debate in the press about language and education, and about the role of language in the imagining of the new nation. Some, like the Straits Chinese British Association, argued for English to be taught in all schools and to be made the lingua franca of the nation. They argued that, "In any nation where there is a common loyalty and patriotism, there must also be a common language... [in which] all its people although of different racial origins can converse and understand one another" (ST 12 June 1955). That lingua franca should be English. Others, like the University of Malaya Society, presented a vague notion of bilingualism (ST 9 June 1955), where all students should learn an additional language to that of the medium of instruction. Others argued for the parity of all schools and languages of various races. And still others requested that the traditional system of Chinese education and culture be preserved, with an emphasis on Malayan interests.
The Straits Times took a strong anti-Chinese-language stance, and supported the view for a continued prominent role for English. The editor (ST 8 June 1955) criticised the Chinese community leaders for being clearly uninterested in working towards national unity and independence. He accused them of being only concerned with preserving their own ethnic identity, to the danger of perpetuating ethnic segregation and widening the gap between the English- and Chinese-educated. "Chinese education and Chinese culture are not in peril, and never have been", he argued. The nub of the problem was not cultural preservation, but rather, the need to preserve stability in Singapore, which the memoranda failed to address. In a 20 May 1955 editorial, he was sceptical about the need for vernacular education. Citing from the 1951 Fenn Wu Report on Chinese education in Malaya, he wrote, "It is... doubtful whether the vernacular systems are so perfect that they should be preserved." He went on to give his support to English education.

The All-Party Committee released their final report in February 1956. Although the subsequent 1956 White Paper on Educational Policy deviated from the All-Party Report in some important ways (see section 4.3.3), it remains enormously significant for language policy and ideology in Singapore. It was later endorsed in the 1963 Final Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Education Singapore under the PAP government, and as such is particularly revealing of the PAP’s views on language.

The central premise of the All-Party Committee’s recommendations was that diversity was problematic. Apart from a smattering of English and Bazaar Malay, there was no real common language in Singapore. They concluded that “Without one or more common languages officially encouraged in Singapore and fostered in the schools, the ideal of unifying the various races into one common people cannot be realised, and the links of common understanding, outlook and identity of interest cannot be speedily forged” (1956:9). Among their recommendations were the following. First, they recommended that Malay be the national language, while Malay, Tamil, Mandarin and English be given equal status as the official languages of the nation. Concerning education specifically, they proposed that government funding be given to all Asian-language schools, and that student activity in party politics and trade disputes be banned. They also recommended compulsory bilingualism in primary schools (which began in 1960) and
trilingualism in secondary schools. Parents could choose which languages they wanted their children educated in, although it was assumed children would learn their "ethnic" language. Malayan national textbooks should be used in all schools irrespective of their medium of instruction so as to promote a sense of identification with Singapore. And finally, in order to promote inter-ethnic understanding and interaction, the Committee suggested an "integrated schools" programme. These integrated schools would have two concurrent language streams under one principal, with extra-curricular activities conducted jointly by the two streams. By mingling in this way, the gap between the different streams would narrow, especially between the English- and Chinese-educated.

However, as Wilson rightly pointed out, "a policy designed to reduce communal tension does not necessarily lead to social integration" (1978:228). On the one hand, the Committee did regard the chasm between the English-educated and Chinese-educated Chinese as problematic: “There is a grave... fear that antagonism and divided loyalty will increase, unless we bring the two main educational groups - the Chinese-educated and the English-educated - closer together. If this trend is not halted and reversed, it may be impossible to weld all groups into a nation.” On the other hand, practically nothing was done to alter the situation. In fact, as Wilson further notes, “In seeking to remove the deeply felt sense of grievance of the Chinese-speaking community”, the Government ironically “proposed to strengthen the very institutions which tended to perpetuate linguistic divisions within society” (1978:228). In the first place, it encouraged the growing dominance of English. The leaders explained their focus on English by pointing out that it was already used as the common inter-ethnic language and that it was the language of the Commonwealth countries to which they would belong. English also carried commercial and industrial value (*All-Party Report*, 1956:9). However, they never questioned the implications this continued dominance of English had for the place of the Asian languages in Singapore. Neither had anything been done to improve the employment opportunities of the Chinese-medium graduates. And, while the government

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7 By 1968, there were 51 Integrated schools with about 158,400 pupils. (MOE, *List of Schools*, Singapore: 1968). Note that paralleling this integration scheme in schools was the development of the Housing and Development Board (HDB) in 1960 to provide racially integrated housing.
promised equal treatment for the four language streams, support for Tamil schools amount to mostly token gestures, and Malay education continued to be paltry. This is not to say the *All-Party Report* had no positive effect. At least it did attempt to provide “mother tongue” education for the different races, rather than to assert the dominance of one group. And, by including the voices of the Chinese-educated in the formulation of the *All-Party Report*, some of the tensions within the Chinese community were reduced.

But perhaps the greatest significance of the *All-Party Report* lies in its institution of very specific views about language and its role in the imagining of the nation. The main theme of the *All-Party Report* was “Unity in Diversity”, capturing a view of cultural synthesis through Malay while maintaining linguistic diversity. This unity would be visible, it was believed, in the emergence of a common Malayan identity over and above the separate ethnic identities. Lee Kuan Yew captured this dual identity in his speech to the Legislative Assembly (12 April 1956):

> If you were to ask an outsider “What would you do with a country like Malaya (and I am still talking in terms of Malaya and not Singapore) what are you going to do with the language, with the culture and with the administration of this country?”, the only logical answer he would give, if he were a logical person, is that ultimately there will be one dominant language and one dominant culture. Then you have the Legislature, the Administration, the Courts, the schools all speaking, teaching, writing, and thinking one language. Then you will have a unifying force which binds the people together. Nobody would dispute that as a broad proposition.

> But when one gropes, however consciously, for the language, one comes up against all the primordial prejudices of the other groups. So we in the all-party Chinese Education Committee suggested bilingualism in the primary stage and trilingualism in the secondary stage, because it was one way of bringing about the pre-eminence ultimately of one language... Whatever your language in the primary stage, if you have to opt for one more – and you have to opt for one more later – you are bound to include Malay. (Vol.1, Col.1914-15)

Lee Kuan Yew’s remarks present a rather curious twist of logic. In a debate for bilingualism and trilingualism, one might expect an argument for linguistic human rights, or perhaps the protection of linguistic diversity. However, Lee Kuan Yew argues instead
that it was only through multilingualism that one dominant language would emerge. This was his view of “unity in diversity”.

Lee Kuan Yew’s argument carries some very specific assumptions about language. As I mentioned earlier, the *All-party Report* is significant in that it gave the ideological space for language to be tied to culture and race. It laid the foundation for the formulation and institution of the “race = language = culture” equation in the imagining of the nation. The *All-Party Report* defined mother tongue as the language of one’s “racial origin” (1956:40). Because it is not possible to discard one’s race, and because mother tongue is inherent to race, it is also not possible to discard one’s mother tongue. For this reason unity needed to be found outside of the four mother tongues. Through natural processes, Lee Kuan Yew argued, this unity would be found in Malay. Elsewhere he said (1966) the plan was not to put students “through a sausage machine, mince them up, and make them come out in regular lengths at the end of it.” Rather, “to each, what he originally had – his culture, his language, a link with his past, his heritage. And to each something added, so that they can meet and talk and understand... and eventually integrate into one society” (cited in Lind, 1974). This “something added” was to be Malay.

In this argument, Lee Kuan Yew thus manages to fulfil the requirements of both identities. He could argue for multilingualism as being the defining characteristic of Singaporean identity. At the same time, he could argue for Malay as the necessary language for Malayan identity in the new Malaysian nation. The Malay language is thus directly implicated in the dual identities of state and nation. This is not without paradox. For on the one hand, Malay is the racially defined mother tongue of the Malay community. On the other hand, it transcends race to be the language of national unity. Of interest, then, is how the government managed this paradox, and the discourse regarding the Malay language in the imagining of the nation.
4.3.2 Malay: The *National* Language and Malayan Nationalism

(1)
*Come friends let us learn
Malay, our National language*
Surely it isn't hard, if there is a will
In no time we will learn it.

(2)
*Chinese, Tamils and Malays
So that we will quickly unite
And become the people of one state,*
*A progressive and successful state of Singapore*

(3)
*One language, one culture,*
*That is the aspiration throughout Malaya*
Surely Singapore will prosper and succeed
*As long as we do not disunite*

(4)
*One motherland and one nation*
*Oh, peaceful Malaysia*
Come learn quickly,
*The common language of Malaysia.*

-English translation of the National Language Song (ST 23 March 1962)

As I mentioned in the previous section, the Malay language appears to carry Janus-faced meaning. When applied to the Malay community, the Malay language is irrevocably tied to race in the “one language = one race” equation. However, when applied to the nation as a whole, it can be separated from this formula and instead fit into the “one language = one nation” equation circulating in Malaya. What is particularly striking is that, although this duality of meaning regarding Malay is ultimately contradictory, this contradiction is virtually ignored in the discourse. Most of the explicit discourse about Malay focuses on Malay as the national language. In all other references, it is combined with the other languages within the broader discourse of multilingualism. This pattern is completely reversed after the merger failed. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, when Singapore and Malaysia separated in 1965, practically all discussion about Malay as the national language was silenced. Attention instead was placed on Malay as the mother tongue for the Malay community. The fact that this complete reversal happened so quickly highlights the political imperatives involved in this duality. Malay as *mother tongue* supports the discourse of language in the imagining of Singapore; Malay as *national* language supports the discourse of language in the imagining of merger with Malaysia. In this section, I will discuss the socio-political imperatives of Malay and its discursive construction as national language.
4.3.2.1 The Political Imperatives of Malay

As I have already mentioned, the most obvious argument for Malay as the national language was that it would facilitate merger with Malaya. This was very clear in the PAP’s reaction to the 1956 White Paper on Educational Policy. The original recommendation in the All-Party Report for trilingualism, for Malay to be an “additional compulsory language”, was tempered in the White Paper. The reason given was that there was an acute shortage of Malay teachers. As such, Malay could only be implemented on an experimental basis (1956:4-5). The White Paper staunchly supported an increased focus on English. And whereas the All-Party Report allowed parents to choose the languages their children learned, the White Paper specifically stated that students should learn English and their mother tongue. Only those pupils in English schools would be free to choose their second language.

In the Legislative Assembly (Sept 1956) Lee Kuan Yew sharply criticised the White Paper for failing to consider the political climate when formulating these recommendations. He argued that, “Instead of making the emphasis on an Asian language, the White Paper has made the emphasis on the English Language.” This was not in keeping with the Asian revolution: “In every country that has attained independence... the language of [their former] colonial power has not been acceptable.” He accused the legislature of failing to consider the growing support in Singapore for merger with the Peninsula. “We are opposed to accepting an education policy that does not reflect the position of Malay as the common national language of the country”, he said. Nowhere in the White Paper “is there any acknowledgement of the fact that in the years to come, the Malay language will be the language of the country and that this change in trends in Malaya and in the rest of Asia should be reflected in the education policy.” In his view, “not only must Malay education in this country be developed beyond primary school level as soon as possible but... it should also enjoy undisputed priority over any other language as the compulsory second language to be taught in all schools, be they English, Chinese or Indian schools.” He told the legislature that, when drafting the All-
Party Report, the PAP had wanted to go even further than Malaya's United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) leaders. The PAP had wanted to "state categorically that Malay should and must be the predominant language in this country" (Singapore, LAD, Vol.1, 1955/56, Col. 1915-1917; Vol.2, 1956, Col. 71,72).

In numerous statements, the PAP reiterated the need to adopt Malay as the national language in the interests of merger. In their 4th Anniversary Souvenir, the PAP stated, "The people of Singapore strongly desire a political merger with the Federation of Malaya. An important pre-condition for such a merger is that our own education policy in Singapore should approximate, as closely as possible, in essentials, with that of the Federation of Malaya." While Chinese, Tamil and English would be taught in the schools, they "must be subsidiary to the role of the national language" (1958:21-23). Communication Minister Yong Nyuk Lin told his audience at an Anglo-Chinese School Founder's Day gathering (1970) that "Malay was already the official language of the then Federation of Malaya and we were at the time working towards merger with Malaya" (ST 1 Mar 1970). For this reason, Malay was chosen as the national language. And in their 6th Anniversary Souvenir, the PAP wrote: "we have started to demonstrate to three million Malays in the Federation that one million Chinese in Singapore are ready, willing and able to speak Malay" (1960:2).

In addition to merger, a second and related political motivation for Malay as the national language had to do with containing Chinese chauvinism. Lee Kuan Yew's speech at the opening ceremony of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry's building on 20 September 1964 illustrates the government's concerns. In his speech, Lee Kuan Yew allegorised the building to depict the position of the Chinese in Singapore and the region: "this building must be made to blend with the different landscape, the vegetation and climate of Malaysia, upon which it has been irrevocably affixed, otherwise it may become a source of friction" (Lee Kuan Yew, 1991:2). The PAP noted in their party manifesto, The Tasks Ahead (1959), that: "The biggest obstacle in the way of a Malayan nation today is communalism [ethnic-based politics] and political parties based on appeals to racial pride and religious exclusiveness... Our immediate task, therefore, is to combat and expose the communal demagogues and other reactionary forces who in
moments of desperation will not hesitate to use communal passions, hatreds and rivalries to obtain their sordid ends” (1959, Pt.1: 12,13). Their agenda contained two parts: “The first is hold in check the forces of communalism. The second is to try, through positive, constructive measures, to give the people... immunity against the blandishments of communal and racial demagogues” (1959, pt.1:13). Malay was a key aspect in meeting both of these demands. As Yong Nyuk Lim said in his Anglo-Chinese School Founders’ Day speech, “Singapore averted the ‘Third China’ label simply by adopting Malay as the National Language” (ST 1 Mar 1970). With the whole nation speaking the national language, Inche Rahim Ishak (Minister of State, Education) argued, “Communalists [whom he later called pro-Communists] will then find it very difficult to divide the various communities” (ST 24 Sept 1965). That is, Malay as a lingua franca would de-politicise language. Minister for Culture Rajaratnam talked about the neutralising effect of Malay when he said: “The sooner the various communities can communicate with one another through one common language, which is the national language, the sooner we can neutralise the mischief of those who wish to exploit this situation and create misunderstanding between the races” (ST 16 Apr 1965).

In arguing for Malay as the national language, the PAP presented some very specific discourses and assumptions about language. For the most part, the discourse followed very closely with that in Malaysia (Bokhorst, 1993). However, as I will discuss in the next section, there was one key element missing. This missing ingredient speaks volumes about the dual identities operating within Singapore, and ultimately about how “a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand”.

4.3.2.2 Discourses of the National Language

During the years immediately before merger and throughout the brief marriage, Malay language “was given all the paraphernalia of a national status” (Wan Sook Yin, 1979:54). Malay was made a compulsory second language in all schools. Adult Malay language classes were made available in community centres. In November 1964, the first of a series of Malay language lessons in the National language appeared in The Straits
Malay Language seminars and congresses were organised ("Malay Language Seminar", 25 Nov 1962; "The National Language as the Medium of Instruction in the University" forum, 23 Aug 1964). In 1964, the National Language and Culture Institute for the development of the Malay language was established. Also in 1964, the University of Singapore formed a National Language Action Council to promote the National Language. The first Malay Secondary school was opened in 1961. Monetary incentives were given to non-Malay teachers who passed the Malay Standard 2 and 3 exams. A Malay Education Advisory Committee was formed to advise the Ministry of Education (MOE) on Malay education. Television and radio gave increased time to Malay-medium programmes. The business community sponsored various language-promotion events and language scholarships. "National Language Week" campaigns (1-6 Feb 1960; 27 Mar-1 June 1962; 9-15 Sept 1963) soon grew into "National Language Month" campaigns (23 Apr-25 May 1965; 12 Nov-11 Dec 1965; 12 Nov-11 Dec 1966, the last one). Campaign activities included speech, reading and writing competitions, meetings and forums, quiz and variety shows, translation services, and mass pledges to "use the language more".

Much of the government's discourse about Malay also gave Malay the status of a national language. In the first place, Malay was promoted as the language that would foster national unity. The PAP's 4th Anniversary Celebrations Souvenir (1958) endorsed the view expressed in the Razak Report in Malaya "that the ultimate objective of educational policy... must be to bring together the children of all races under a national educational system in which the national language is the main medium of instruction." Lee Kuan Yew told students at Nanyang University (29 Mar 1960) that "Singapore does not have a stable integrated society, nor has it inherited any traditions. So we hear many discordant voices. And the divergences of beliefs and customs are probably greater in our plural society than among any other population of equal size" (the exact words of The Tasks Ahead, Pt.2, 1969:5). He went on to say that he expected all citizens of Singapore to "know Malay, the national language", and to work toward the time when "all speak one language and share common cultural values, although we are of different races and religions" (Josey, 1980:143). This was echoed by Inche Yusof bin Ishak, the Yang di-Pertuan Negara (Head of State), in his speech given at the launch of a National Language
week: “The growth of the national language would be the symbol and the very expression of national unity in the State” (ST 27 Mar 1962). As Tun Yusof bin Ishak put it in his inaugurating National Language Month speech, “Language is more than a means of communication. It is a means of communion” (ST 24 Apr 1965), a slogan cleverly contrasting communalism. The theme of national unity dominated the headlines of newspaper articles covering the national language issue during the period 1959-1965: “National Language will help racial harmony” (29 Mar 1962); “N-language week aim to remove barrier” (21 Aug 1963); “A common tongue will bring unity, says Fong” (24 Apr 1965); “N-language will foster unity, says Raja” (10 May 1965); “N-language is vital as a unifying force: Rahim” (24 Sept 1965).

The second (and related) discursive theme that gave Malay its status as a national language is that of “common understanding”. There is the curious assumption (although not unprecedented; Grillo, 1989:33) that a common language necessarily fosters greater understanding and tolerance. Parliamentary Secretary (Culture) Fong Sip Chee said on the eve of the 1964 National Language Week that, “recent racial disturbances reaffirm the need of a common national language. There can hardly be any greater emphasis on the vital need for a greater understanding among our peoples which can come about mainly through the acceptance of a common language” (ST 21 Aug 1964). On another occasion he said, “Once the people begin to communicate with one another in a common language, understanding and tolerance will replace misunderstanding and intolerance” (ST 24 Apr 1965). The analogy of a bridge has been frequently used to depict this understanding. For example, Inche Yusof bin Ishak said during the 1965 National Language Month that Malay was a bridge between the different peoples and a means “to establish better understanding and harmony” (ST 12 Nov 1965). This image of a “bridge” was echoed in the 1959 Annual Report of Education: “To act as a bridge to span simultaneously the four streams of education and to unify a community composed of different races, exposed to communal suspicion and prejudices, the setting up of one national language is vital. A common link for undivided loyalty to one another and to the State is provided in the National Language.” Through fostering greater understanding, Malay would break down
the "cultural, racial, and other barriers", and thereby "help create a national identity of our own" (Ong Pang Boon, Education Minister, ST 16 Nov 1965).

While "given all the paraphernalia of a national status", Malay fell short of this national-language status in one important way. The more traditional theme surrounding a national language is that it will facilitate a unique and distinct national identity. However, in their desire for merger, the PAP reversed this theme. Malay was needed for Singapore's aspirations of merger with Malaysia, nor for its own unique identity. If anything, Malay was needed to *de-emphasise* Singapore's uniqueness and to *blend in* with its Malay-dominant environment. But perhaps even more importantly, Singaporeans were never told to give up their own languages nor their unique cultural identities. Rather, this 'blending in' was to be above and beyond ethnicity. Reflecting Lee Kuan Yew's earlier comments about a sausage machine, Malay was to be a meeting point, not a melting pot.

As a national language, *Malay* was thus promoted as a necessary *addition to* one's ethnic language. Inche Abdullah Majid, a Malay educationist speaking at a Nanyang University forum on the role of Chinese in establishing a Malayan culture (14 Sept 1959), tried to argue that Malay would replace the other languages. He argued that Malayan nationalism could only come about through the Malay language and that Malay would in the next three or four generations replace Mandarin. However, trade unionist C.V. Devan Nair, speaking at the same forum, presented what was more in line with the PAP view. He saw a continued role for Mandarin in Malayan nationalism. Mandarin was "a window on Chinese culture and civilisation", necessary to the development of Malaya. However, Malay would be learned as an additional "common language" in the context of the nation.

In an argument that continues even today, the PAP's 1959 manifesto says: "acceptance of Malay as the National Language does not contradict but on the contrary supplements the recommendations of the All-Party Committee on Chinese education" (1959, Pt2:4). Once again, the analogy of a bridge was evoked: "The study of the Malay language will not only act as a bridge that will span simultaneously our four streams of education but it will help us to cross the Straits of Johore into the Federation" (1959, Pt.2:4).

For this reason, even with all of its promotion of Malay, the PAP remained firm in its resolution of multilingualism. Education in primary schools continued to be available in
English and all three languages, although higher education was available only in English and Chinese. Television and radio programmes were broadcast in all four languages. Newspapers were published in all four languages. In May 1965, there was even a "Promote mother tongue" campaign. As well, English remained very much the language of commerce, of government, of the courts, and was increasingly popular as the medium of education. A committee set up in 1963 by the SCCCI to review the "problem of decreased enrolment in Chinese-medium schools" found that, in 1960, there were 25,558 students enrolled in Primary One Chinese schools, and 29,938 in English schools. By 1964, the gap had grown with 21,332 in Chinese Primary One classes and 37,947 in English schools (Doraisamy, 1969). The Committee listed the following causes, each reflecting the continued dominance of English. First, English continued to dominate politics, commerce and society. Second, tertiary education continued to favour English-educated students. As a result, Chinese middle-school graduates continued to face under-employment. Finally, current education policy continued the trends set earlier by the Ten Years Programme and Five Years Supplementary Plan in giving higher priority to English.

Ultimately, the divided loyalties that these dual identities demanded could not be sustained. In the first place, the people never did completely buy into it. The PAP noted in The Tasks Ahead (1958:6) that

> pride in Chinese language and culture plus the revival of China as a great power creates a tremendous problem. The idea that Malay should be the national language, occupying a more important place than Chinese is difficult for some to accept. And worse, any attempt to teach Malay in a way so as to make it the national language is resisted. This must be resolved. We cannot afford the luxury of blind Chinese chauvinism.

Reports by The Straits Times also reveal a less-than-committed response to the national language. For example, on 3 April 1962 at the end of a National Language Week, the paper noted that very few billboards contained Malay as they should have, and people soon dropped off using Malay in their greetings on the telephone.

Secondly, the Malaysian government never did buy into it. The Malaysian government made it very clear that Malaysia was to be imagined as a Malay nation.
Tunku Abdul Raman, later to become Malaysia's Prime Minister, unequivocally stated in 1952 that "Malaysia is for the Malays, and should not be governed by a mixture of races" (cited in Josey, 1980:83). Ten years later, after the formation of Malaysia, his position remained the same. In an interview that he gave to *The Asia Magazine* in August 1964, he said: "It is understood by all that this country, by its very name, its traditions and character, is Malay" (cited in Josey, 1980:83). Furthermore, the Alliance leaders in Malaysia managed their racial diversity by encouraging communally segregated political parties, organised along exclusive racial lines - a pattern which Lee Kuan Yew said would never work in Singapore where the Chinese represented such a strong majority.

In contrast to the Malaysian Alliance government's view, Lee Kuan Yew repeatedly argued for a "Malaysian Malaysia", not a Malay Malaysia or any other communal definition. Speaking at a Malaysian Solidarity National Convention, he said: "Malaysia was conceived as belonging to Malaysians as a whole and not to any particular community or race" (*Towards a Malaysian Malaysia*, 1965). The PAP argued against Tunku Abdul Raman's proposition that linguistic diversity was an obstacle to independence and the suppression of other languages: "We repudiate the position that suppression of the mother tongue or their relegation to position of minor importance as a prerequisite for national unity. *Linguistic diversity is in no way incompatible with the interests of a united Malayan nation*" (emphasis mine; PAP, 1964:286). Along the same vein, Rajaratnam was quoted in *The Straits Times* as saying, "I know there are some people who think that the perpetuation of these non-Malay languages is incompatible with the interests of a Malayan culture. It is incompatible only in so far as they encourage loyalty to countries and cultures outside Malaya. But these languages can in the hands of those who are Malayan in outlook and sentiment become a means for enriching Malayan culture" (*ST* 21 Aug 1959). While agreeing to make Malay the *lingua franca* of the

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8 These comments by the Tunku need to be tempered somewhat by situating them in context. When the notion of "Malaysia" was first proposed, Malaya was reluctant. One important reason (in addition to fears of increased Communist activity) for this reluctance was Singapore's predominantly Chinese population, which would drastically alter the racial composition of the nation. The Chinese had managed to secure considerable economic strength during colonialism relative to the Malays. As such, any effort by Singapore to increase its advantage in the merger was met with mistrust and often reactionary rhetoric.
united nation, they argued for Mandarin and Tamil to be given official status along with English and Malay.

The fundamental differences between the two views of the nation could ultimately not be resolved. Race relations were worsening and there were frequent racial riots on both sides of the causeway. Finally, on 9 August 1965, Lee Kuan Yew tearfully announced to the people of Singapore that the merger failed, and that Singapore was now an independent state.9 There “commenced Singapore’s struggle to survive and prosper on its own and to build a national identity and national consciousness among a disparate population of immigrants” (Singapore 1983:26).

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have followed Singapore’s journey from colonialism to complete political independence. The colonial story told of the emergence of Singapore’s ethnic and linguistic diversity, and of the social, political and economic divisions that emerged in relation to such diversity. This “hangover” thus explains the internal social, political and economic complexities, and relates them directly to language ideology and policy. Second, this chapter shows the early murmurings of Singapore’s attempts to understand itself and itself in relation to the world, and in particular how it defined its independence. As Singapore moved closer towards merger, it struggled with attempting to authenticate a dual identity: a Malayan identity amiable towards merger, and at the same time, a unique, multiracial identity. Language ideologies began to take on particular forms. Malay was taken out of just its ethnic association to take on new meanings as the national language, as a bridge across the causeway between Singapore and Malaya, and as

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a bridge between the diverse ethnic communities within Singapore. Yet, at the same time, multilingualism became increasingly tied into the politics and ideology of multiracialism, and as something that ultimately set Singapore against the Tunku’s vision of the “ideal” society.

This chapter thus also establishes a contrast to post-colonial and post-merger national and language ideologies. For, as we will see in the next chapter, immediately after independence, Singapore abandoned its pre-merger focus on Malay. With independence, “multiracialism” became a cornerstone of the new government’s agenda. With “multiracialism” came a policy of national multilingualism, and in practice, individual bilingualism – ultimately defined as English plus one’s “mother tongue”.

I end this chapter with Lee Kuan Yew’s recollection of the unlikelihood of Singapore’s nationhood:

when we started in 1954, and when we formed the government in 1959, we did not have the basic elements to be a nation. The attributes of nationhood were missing: A common ethnic identity – we will never have ethnic homogeneity – but we did not even have a common ethnic identity; we saw ourselves as disparate Hokkiens, Cantonese, Hakkas, Teochews, Hainanese... we did not have a common language... Nor did we have a common experience, a common sharing of historical events that creates a common culture. (ST 22 Jan 1980)

Looking forward to Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong’s question in 1991 (Chapter 7), the question arises, “How then can we ever build a nation?”
CHAPTER FIVE

BILINGUALISM: "QI HU NAN XIA"

In its party manifesto, The Tasks Ahead (1959), the PAP noted: “The Malayan nation is still in the process of formation. We have a long way to go before this task of nation building is completed” (pt.1:12). The assumption here is that the government is working towards a finished product, a nation, although no completion date is envisioned. Even though nations are not “built”, and in fact are incompletable projects, governments around the world talk about “nation building” as something they can uniquely attain, as something to mobilise the people into, and as something to legitimise their particular policies and style of governance. With the failed merger, the PAP government has similarly been relentless in its efforts to rally the entire nation in its nation building agenda. Singapore’s leaders believe they alone understand the deep complexities and full scope of national problems, and they alone have the dedication and ability to come up with viable solutions. Lee Kuan Yew’s words set the tone: “We cannot help thinking, calculating and planning for tomorrow, for next year, for the next decade, for the next generation” (ST 16 July 1968). This “thinking, calculating and planning” occurs through the complex interaction of some very powerful discourses.

At the crossroads of this interaction stands language, both implicating and implicated in the imagining of the nation. In the previous chapter, we saw how the Tunku’s and Lee Kuan Yew’s differing views of the imagined nation found much of its expression in their differing views of language. It is significant that, in the negotiations for merger, Lee Kuan Yew insisted that Singapore would maintain control over its educational and language policies. This insistence demonstrates the point made in my earlier discussion in Chapter One about the centrality of education and language to the
imagining of the nation (section 1.3). For, in maintaining control over education and language, the Singapore leaders were in effect maintaining control over the imagining of their nation. Not surprisingly, then, this prominence given to language and education in the imagining of Singapore continued in the immediate post-Independence years as well.

The importance of the immediate post-Independence years concerning language and language ideologies in the imagining of the nation cannot be understated. It was during this time that the blueprint for the nation and the initial foundations were laid. The visions, the policies, the ideology, and the discourses that were formed during this time continue to shape the direction of the imagining of the nation today.

I will begin this chapter by discussing the nation building activities of the PAP government and its style of governance under Lee Kuan Yew during the immediate post-Independence years. All along, Lee Kuan Yew had argued that Singapore as an independent nation was an impossibility. Now this impossibility was reality. The PAP leaders thus had to work hard to establish the nation’s authenticity in order to be seen as a legitimate state. Two conflicting issues pre-occupied the Singapore government. The first concern had to do with Singapore’s survival as a nation. Being such a small country with no natural resources, how could it position itself in relation to the world? The second issue had to do with its image of itself. With none of the ingredients of nationhood such as common language, common peoples, or common religion, how could authenticity be achieved? Particular attention will be given to the various discourses that have emerged to address this need for authenticity, and to how their interaction organises a sense of national meaning and identity.

I will then move on to consider the language ideological debates that began to form within this imagining of the nation. In the previous chapter, I showed how language was tied to the government’s view of the nation as being imagined through unity in diversity. Much of this discourse became irrelevant with the emergence of new meanings of the nation that came with Independence. Instead, there was the implementation of bilingualism and the production of specific language ideologies within this policy and within the discourses of the nation. The bilingual policy, better known as “English-knowing bilingualism” placed language at the centre of the government’s need to achieve
legitimacy at home and at large, and at the centre of many of the paradoxes that emerged from this need to balance these different needs of authenticity. The result has been a form of bilingualism characterised by “Qi hu nan xia” (“when your ride a tiger, it is hard to dismount”).

Lee Kuan Yew’s 1972 speech to the Singapore Teachers’ Union established the basic premises of language ideology in the new nation. Discourse analysis of this speech will reveal how these ideologies are constructed and how they relate to the imagining of the nation. I will also look at the various changes in language policy within the schools that came about as a result of these language and national ideologies.

5.1 The Lee Kuan Yew Government

Immediately after Lee Kuan Yew’s tearful announcement of the failed merger, the leaders had to dry their tears and get on with the realities of their new circumstances. All along, the premise of Lee Kuan Yew’s argument for merger had been that Singapore on its own as an independent country was an impossibility. However, in 1965, this impossibility became reality. One word captures Singapore’s new circumstances as viewed by the government: vulnerability. Singapore is vulnerable because it is a tiny island nation: there are 2.93 million people of various origins living on an island of 586.5 square kilometres (a population density of 4,535 persons per sq. km.; Singapore Facts and Pictures 1995). It is so small that, as PM Goh Chok Tong noted in his 1995 National Day Rally speech, the moment you take off from Changi Airport, you are flying in someone else’s airspace. It is vulnerable because it has nothing but its human resources to fall back on, dependent even for its water on Malaysia. It is vulnerable because of its predominantly Chinese population existing in an Islamic region. It is vulnerable because of its economic dependence on the global market: a global ripple can cause a tidal wave in Singapore. It is vulnerable because of its fantastic multiracial, multilingual, and multi-religious population, always existing precariously on the brink of rivalry, and always a threat to the viability of the nation. “One of our tragedies [sic!”], writes Basskaran Nair (1989), “is that we don’t have a mainstream” – no one language, no one culture, no
homogeneous people. What this means for vulnerability was explained by PM Goh Chok Tong in his 1995 National Day Rally speech: “We are an island, not a continent. We have no safety margin for mistakes.” While in America a race riot in one city will barely affect the rest of the country, “a single race riot in Singapore would be a national disaster.”

There is no doubt that Singapore’s vulnerability is real. However, as sociologist Chua Beng Huat argues (personal communication), what is even more significant is how this vulnerability has been used by the government to legitimise its style of governance and to produce its image of the ideal nation. This vulnerability makes Singapore unique, they argue, and thus unique measures are required in the imagining of the nation. The government has capitalised on this discourse of vulnerability to the point that it has been called Singapore’s sixth, unofficial “shared value” (drawing upon Singapore’s five official “shared values”; Chapter 6; ST 31 Dec 1994). In this discourse of vulnerability, survival becomes an excuse for policy. And because Singapore’s vulnerability is materially visible, because people can see it, they agree with it. To many Singaporeans, it is unquestionable common sense that Singapore is uniquely and permanently fixed in insecure circumstances, in an environment where conditions can deteriorate rapidly without much warning, a society always balancing on the precipice of some future crisis.

In the midst of such vulnerability, the PAP government began a rigorous and intense campaign to make each and every citizen responsible for the success of the nation. Early speeches by Lee Kuan Yew were riddled with images of a rugged and disciplined nation: Singapore must be a “rugged, robust, disciplined effective society, a hard society, a tough rugged society” (ST 11 Aug 1966), otherwise it would perish. In this ruggedness, there were, and still are, no free hand outs. “It is not just physical and psychological ruggedness alone which is required”, Lee Kuan Yew admonished. “When we talk of leanness, it means that we carry no passengers. Every single person in Singapore... must either pull his weight or he deserves what he will get” (ST 1 June 1967). As depicted in Figure 3.1 in Chapter Three, the government expects all institutions and citizens to work as constructive partners towards nation building. All must be prepared to sacrifice for the collective good of the nation.
In a newspaper column written amidst the furor over the caning of an American car vandal in Singapore, Stan Sesser talked about how the PAP government has developed such a disciplined nation. "Singapore is free of violent crime and graffiti not because of the cane", he said, "but because its authoritarian government has otherwise minimised discontent and instilled an ethos of obedience that goes beyond the fear of punishment" (International Herald Tribune (IHT), 3 May 1994). It has done so in two ways: "one Orwellian, the other progressive".

The Orwellian measures of the PAP government are well known. The late David Marshall (first Chief Minister of Singapore) summarised the areas of PAP control in a 1969 Law Gazette article. In the first place, with the Barisan Sosialis' boycott of parliament in 1966, the PAP had become the only party in parliament. Their monopoly continued until 1981 when J.B. Jeyaretnam of the Workers' Party was elected into parliament. However, even today, political participation is almost suicidal for the opposition. Most political opponents face obstacles such as setbacks to their career, having their personal records exposed, bankruptcy, and so forth. They also run the risk of being sued by Lee Kuan Yew and other PAP members as Jeyaretnam has been, and as happened to Workers' Party candidate Tang Liang Hong in the aftermath of the 1997 election.

Marshall also noted how the PAP had put in place a law making expulsion from the party also expulsion from parliament and how the Prime Minister was empowered to make appointments to the High Court. Under the Internal Security Act (ISA), originally introduced by the British Colonial government in 1948, the government can imprison its political opponents without trial on a two-year renewable basis. The government is empowered to revoke citizenship. As I discussed in Chapter Three, the government exercises considerable control over the mass media. The PAP government has relentlessly muzzled all trade unions. Today it controls the one big labour union, National Trade Union Congress (NTUC). In the early years, the government effectively terminated school demonstrations by arresting students involved in pro-Communist activities. This harnessing of student activism is ironic given that, just a few years earlier, Lee Kuan Yew
was the zealous lawyer defending student and trade union rights. And until 1978, students needed “suitability certificates” to be eligible for higher education.

The government has also been Orwellian in its social policies. They have tried to improve the genetic composition of society in an effort to increase the collective intelligence of the Singapore population (Benjamin, 1984; Chee and Chan, 1984). They have produced relentless propaganda and myriad campaigns to instruct Singaporeans in detail how they wish the people to behave, and have meted out fines to those who do not comply. Lee Kuan Yew has carefully selected leaders to maintain these policies. It has also been Orwellian in its recent practice of linking government services (such as flat upgrading) to voting patterns (ST 18 May 1992; 28 Oct 1996). Social legislation such as bans on chewing gum and fines for toilet-flushing delinquents may be anecdotal curiosities that bring a smile, but they too are part of the broad paternalistic mode of governance that has produced caution and self-censorship among the citizens. This is not to say Singaporeans live in an oppressed society. Singaporeans have access to most sources of information (see Chapter 3), have freedom of religion, are generally free to choose their careers, life styles, and so forth. Yet, for the most part people play it safe. I caught a glimpse of this voice as I stood among the book stacks in a local library, listening to a librarian whisper his dissatisfaction with the limited space for alternative voices to that of the Government. Wilson (1978:238) compares the kind of society that was beginning to emerge under Lee Kuan Yew’s leadership with Plato’s perception of the ideal city-state in which “the wise shall lead and rule, and the ignorant shall follow”.

The second means by which the PAP government has produced a disciplined society is through what Sesser calls a “progressive strategy”. This strategy is designed to give all Singaporeans a stake in society. For example, one of the purposes of mandatory national service (involving all males ages 18 to 40) is to create loyalty and national consciousness. Public housing through the Housing Development Board (HDB) gives

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1 HDB housing has been central to the government’s attempt to mould what it sees as an ideal society. This has been most evident in the ethnic quotas attached to HDB homes. About 84% of each HDB town and 87% of each apartment block is the maximum for Chinese residence; 22 and 25% respectively for Malays, and 10 and 13% for Indians/Others. Promoting a Good Racial Mix in Public Housing Estates (Singapore: HDB, 1989). While the official purpose of these quotas was to eliminate ethnic enclaves through integration, they have also had the effect of ensuring a Chinese majority throughout the island.
most Singaporeans a stake in the country through a comprehensive plan of home ownership (Hill and Lian Kwen Fee, 1995). About 81 percent of Singaporeans own their homes (Singapore 1994). Education has been another key agent in this progressive strategy. Even though it is not compulsory, it has been central to developing Singapore’s “most precious assets”. Enrolment and expenditure figures attest to this commitment: in 1965, education involved more than half the population (You Poh Seng and H.K. Yeh, 1967), and even today absorbs 17 percent of the GNP (Singapore, Dept. of Statistics, 1983, 1989; Singapore 1995). The Central Provident Fund (CPF) is yet another way to give everyone a personal stake in the country. Under this mandatory savings scheme, employers and employees must each contribute 20 percent of the employee’s salary to the fund. These funds are used to pay for housing, approved investments, insurance, education and retirement. By giving everyone a personal stake in the country, the government has also been able to further the notion of individual sacrifice for the sake of national good. Everyone, including ministers, was expected to take a pay-cut when the country was going through an economic slump in the 1980s. And when unemployment rates ran dangerously high in the early years, overtime was abolished in order to expand the labour market.

In addition to these two strategies identified by Sessor, the leaders have also produced some very powerful discourses within which to imagine the nation. I have already talked about the notion of vulnerability. Added to this are three other powerful discourses: multiracialism, pragmatism and meritocracy. These discourses do not operate independently, but rather, work in complex interaction with each other to together organise knowledge and meaning in the imagining of the nation. As these discourses play a central role in the development of language ideologies in the imagining of the nation, I will spend a moment here to discuss them in more detail.

As I discussed in the last chapter, the PAP’s key disagreement with the Malaysian government was its pro-Malay policies. The PAP government had resisted such ethnic-

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based politics and promoted the notion of an ethnically inclusive Malaysian Malaysia. With political independence in 1965, the PAP continued to distance itself from particularistic racial groups, and to present itself as speaking for the interests of all social groups. Sociologist Chua Beng Huat explains the PAP’s strategy this way: “This distancing from specific groups enabled the government to redefine the political space for race through the concept of ‘multiracialism’. ‘Race’ is held in abeyance politically by an explicit recognition that Singapore is a multiracial society and that racial tolerance is to be safeguarded in the law” (1995:106). The different communities are guaranteed “mother tongue” education within the bilingual policy, and each of the main religions have been given representation in the allocation of national holidays (Buddhist Vesak Day, Islamic Hari Raya Puasa and Hari Raya Haji, Hindu Deepavali and Christian Good Friday and Christmas). However, while multiracialism gives the appearance of equality for all racial groups, I would not go as far as Vasil (1995) in saying the government instituted a policy of “multiracial cultural democracy”. As we unpack the negotiations of language ideologies in Singapore, it would be very difficult to sustain an argument that multiracialism is totally democratic. However, the government did appear to support the notion of Singaporean Chinese-Indians-Malays, rather than taking an assimilationist stance of Chinese-Indian-Malay Singaporeans.

As Chua has argued, this neutral stance insulates the government from pressures that may be generated by race. Race cannot be considered a legitimate basis for special claims. Any attempt to do so tends to be labelled as ethnic chauvinism, which is portrayed as an attempt to de-stabilise the society from within. This was evident in Lee Kuan Yew's very harsh reaction against the SCCCI’s request to have the official status of Mandarin guaranteed in the new constitution (ST 2 Oct 1965). Lee Kuan Yew interpreted their request as dangerously chauvinistic: they had exaggerated the size of the Chinese community as being 80% of the population, when in fact, they made up only 75%. He reminded them about Chinese chauvinist Tan Lark Sye whose Singapore citizenship was revoked the previous year. The new constitution, he said, would simply reiterate former multiracialist policy (which was their request in the first place), with four official languages
and Malay as the national language. Similarly, those who opposed the closure of Nanyang University in 1980 were called Chinese chauvinists (Goh Keng Swee, 1980).

In a paradoxical way, ethnic boundaries have been heightened in this discourse of multiracialism, rather than expressing an attempt to merge or blur the lines. According to Benjamin (1976), the logic of multiracialism has made “race” a “social institution woven almost invisibly into the fabric of the nation’s life... an unchangeable and irreducible fact of life” (1976:116). Everyone in Singapore must have a race: Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian (Asian and Portuguese descent), or Other. To not have a race is virtually inconceivable, and to have any racial identity other than these categories is impossible. The ethnic category is determined by one’s father’s ethnicity, such that those with mixed parentage (other than Eurasians) take their father’s ethnicity. Virtually every official form demands one’s race: it is inscribed on one’s identity card, in national censuses, in the reports of Government departments concerned with social policy, and in surveys. With that race comes a language. Even the Babas (see footnote 2, Chapter 4), recognised throughout Singapore as a distinct cultural group, must classify themselves as ethnic Chinese, and declare Mandarin as their mother tongue, although most speak Baba Malay as their first language. Furthermore, race is considered biological, with specific characteristics inherent to each race. Malaysian PM Mahathir’s book The Malay Dilemma (1982) is indicative of this geneticist view of race:

Races are differentiated not merely by ethnic origin, but also by many other characteristics... The Jews for example are not merely hook-nosed, but understand money instinctively. The Europeans are not only fair-skinned, but have an insatiable curiosity. The Malays are not merely brown, but are also easy-going and tolerant. And the Chinese are not just almond-eyed people, but are also inherently good businessmen (1982:84).

This racialist discourse is not unique to the government, but most Singaporeans too are absorbed with issues of ethnic difference, making ethnicity very much a part of everyday “social grammar” (Clammer, 1983) and central to their own sense of social classification.

Tied very closely to this discourse of multiracialism is that of pragmatism. Chua Beng Huat describes pragmatism as an ideology that embodies a “vigorous economic development orientation that emphasises science and technology, and centralised rational
public administration as the fundamental basis for industrialisation within a capitalist system” (1983:30). Elsewhere he talks about “instrumental rationality” as being the “conceptual kernel” of the PAP’s political pragmatism (1985:31) – an ideology usually voiced in the argument that “it works”, with very little ideological space for moral discussion. Much of this pragmatism is grounded in Confucian ideology, particularly the notion that unrelenting economic growth is the best guarantee of social and political stability (Confucius, 1979). The overriding goal of PAP pragmatism has been to ensure continuous economic growth, harnessing all aspects of social and political life to this relentless pursuit. Hence economic growth has been used as the singular criterion for initiating, defending and assessing all government activities, including those involving language.

Fundamental to the logic of pragmatism is the notion of meritocracy. The PAP leaders promote meritocracy as a pragmatic means by which to extract the best from each citizen in pursuit of economic growth. So, for example, because intelligence is seen to be genetically determined, early streaming (Primary 3) within the school system poses no moral problem (Chua Beng Huat, 1995). Nature is, by definition, beyond human intervention. The earlier one is able to detect its course, the more one can save resources. And thus, instead of channelling resources to help those who are historically or structurally disadvantaged, resources are used to enrich those who are already in a privileged position (see Chapter 7, section 7.3). According to Lee Kuan Yew, no more than five percent of the population is capable of leading the nation. “It is on this group”, he said, “that we must expend our limited and slender resources in order that they will provide that yeast, the ferment, that catalyst in our society which alone will ensure that Singapore shall maintain its pre-eminent place in the societies that exist in South East Asia – and the social organisation which enables us, with almost no natural resources, to provide the second highest standard of living in Asia” (cited in Chee and Chan, 1984:8).

It is within this agenda of building a rugged and disciplined nation, guided by a paternalistic and authoritarian government, and operating within the discourses of vulnerability, multiracialism, pragmatism and meritocracy, that very particular language
ideological debates emerged. And it is within this agenda that dominant discourses of language and the role of language in the imagining of the nation were formed.

5.2 Language in the Imagining of the Nation

Clearly, the views of language postulated before independence could no longer be sustained in independent Singapore. The notion of “unity in diversity” through the Malay language no longer made sense. All along, the argument for Malay had been premised on the view that it was necessary for merger. While the Chinese community had agreed to it under those conditions, it would be more problematic to gain their acceptance within the new circumstances of independence. And so the call for Malay as the national language as we saw in the previous chapter was silenced in the imagining of the nation. There were still remnants of a National Language Month campaign in late 1965. The last one took place in November 1966. However, it was a spent voice, one that no longer held resonance with the people. Parliamentary Secretary (Education) Inche Ghazali Ismail even qualified the 1966 campaign with a reminder that “The Government is still pledged to its policy of multilingualism, where the other languages will continue to be used as official languages” (ST 3 Sept 1965). It was now possible for the Minister of Law and National Development to state what would have been outrageous a few months earlier: in such a multiracial society as Singapore, “a nation based on one race, one language and one religion... is doomed for destruction” (Constitutional Report, 1966:1). Similarly, trade unionist C.V. Devan Nair unequivocally ruled out language, religion and a common culture as unifying factors in nation building (ST 19 Sept 1969). To argue for national identity through one language and for one common culture was virtually impossible, as it now raised communal questions of “what language?” and “whose culture?” Even the rationale for Malay as being necessary for regional identification was displaced by a proposal from Minister of State (Foreign Affairs) Inche Rahim Ishak that English be the regional language (ST 15 June 1971).

The silence surrounding the discourse of Malay in the halls of nation building, both in historical and contemporary discourse, is conspicuous. The official historical
recolleciton of the role of Malay in the imagining of the nation is quite narrow. Its narrative is primarily limited to the story of how Malay was needed for Singapore to avoid being called the “Third China” and that it was essential to the goals of merger (ST 1 Mar 1970). Other accounts portray the position of Malay as the national language as symbolically reflecting “historical continuity with the past” (ST 4 July 1971). The story told in the previous chapter of Malay as the language for national unity and identity is not given voice in the official historical account.

There has also been little contemporary discussion in Singapore about Malay as the national language. Instead, the present-day meanings of Malay have been narrowed within a multiracial discourse as being the mother tongue of the Malay community. This was most obvious in the silent removal of any mention of Malay as the national language from the Constitution in 1979. Most Singaporeans (including leaders) are not even aware of this constitutional change, and still refer to Malay as the national language. The March 1982 Malay language campaign demonstrates very clearly the shift in language ideology. It was to be a Malay language campaign, not a national language campaign. The campaign was initiated by Malay cultural organisations rather than by the government (although it did receive government support). Its purpose was to “revive interest in the Malay language among ethnic Malays” which was seen to be under siege by the increasing dominance of English and of Mandarin, and not to promote the language across all ethnic groups nation-wide. Furthermore, since the late 1960s, the Malay-language syllabus for the non-Malay communities has been abridged to a collection of nineteen words: the national anthem.

Thus, in the newly independent nation, imagined through the discourses of multiracialism, gone is the notion of unity through one language. Gone is the perceived need to establish a single national identity based on the breaking down of cultural and racial demarcations through a common and national language. The Malay language is once again contained within its ethnic meanings. Bilingualism is ushered in. As I will discuss in the next section, bilingualism has very particular meanings in Singapore, meanings that can only be understood in relation to the authenticity needs of the nation.
5.2.1 Bilingualism: Policy

Speaking within the discourses of multiracialism, Lee Kuan Yew said to members of the Indian community in early 1966, "I am constantly reminded that people cling tenaciously to the culture of their people... it is their link with their past. Let them carry on. We accept the fact that everyone wants the right to keep a link with his past" (ST 21 Feb 1966). However, he added, "if we are to survive we should accept one further condition. We should try to reach a wider common ground with each other – you must learn one other language efficiently, one other language of your choice." This loose definition of bilingualism, namely "one other language of your choice", was narrowed to one of "English-knowing bilingualism" (Kachru, 1983) later that year. As explained by MP Yeo Choo Kok, the government wants "future Singaporeans to be bilingual in their mother tongue and English" (ST 10 May 1971).

This policy of English-knowing bilingualism was part of the government's overall objective to unify and nationalise the education system as outlined by the earlier 1956 All-Party Report. All students in the Asian-language-medium schools would learn English as their second language, and all those in English-medium schools would learn the language associated with their ethnicity (Malay, Tamil, Mandarin) as a second language. The allocation of the media of instruction was subject-bound: Math and Science in non-English primary classes and all technical subjects in secondary schools were to be taught in English; and Civics was to be taught in the Asian languages in the English-medium schools. As will become evident later in this discussion, the significance of this allocation has to do with some very specific assumptions about language and about the role of language in Singapore's nationalist agenda. It is worth noting that under this scheme, only the English-medium students had a real choice of the second language. However, even then, they were expected to choose their "mother tongue". English was to be the second language for those in the non-English streams. Most importantly, this policy of English-knowing bilingualism established English as the lingua franca of Singapore.

In subsequent years, a number of changes relating to language were implemented in the education system. What is particularly striking is that, while bilingualism was made
policy at all levels of education, its implementation was not uniform throughout. There is a striking gap between what was happening at the primary level and what was happening at the secondary and tertiary levels. Most of the policy changes in the primary schools had to do with strengthening the position of the bilingual policy. In 1969, the second language was made an examination subject at the School Certificate level. In 1970, the teaching of Primary 3 History in the mother tongue was introduced in English-medium schools (this was stopped one year later as it turned out the language used in the textbooks was too difficult). In 1973, “Language Exposure Time” (LET) in Primary schools for the second language was increased from an average of 18 percent to 25 percent in 1973, and to 43 percent in 1974. Also in 1973, double weightage was given to the second language for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). These changes in the PSLE and LET were the result of a 1971 MOE addendum to the presidential address. In this addendum, the MOE stated that primary school students would be spending more time on learning their first and second languages than they would in studying other subjects (ST 27 July 1971). “Education for Living” classes were introduced in the lower primary classes in 1974, integrating Civics, History and Geography and taught in the mother tongue.

Most of the policy changes at the higher levels of education, however, seemed to involve more a move towards giving English greater dominance than to promoting bilingualism. This was most evident in the changes at Nanyang University. While Nanyang had been “for long a bastion of Chinese culture and a defender of Chinese language” (Lee Yong Leng, 1980:129), its role as such was steadily declining with the increasing presence of English. In 1978, Mandarin-medium Nanyang University announced (ST 11, 12 Feb 1978), on order of Lee Kuan Yew, that it would officially adopt English as the language of instruction and examination (some courses were already being offered in English-medium prior to this policy). They also introduced a “Joint Campus” scheme. Under this scheme, courses common to the University of Singapore and Nanyang University were combined and offered in English medium at the University of Singapore’s Bukit Timah Campus. The purpose of this scheme was to give Nanyang students increased exposure to English. However, as Mary Tay, a prominent linguist in Singapore, noted, most students ended up speaking in Hokkien for inter-campus communication, as it
was the language they were most comfortable with (interview, Dec 1994). And in 1980 (ironically, around the same time as the launch of the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*), the Government announced that Nanyang and the English-medium University of Singapore would be merged to become the National University of Singapore (NUS).

The government cited the steady trend of declining enrolment as the reason for the NUS merger. However, this trend itself was partly because of the declining space given for Mandarin in higher education. Already after the move to make English a key language of instruction in Nanyang, Chinese-medium Pre-university programmes were restructured to improve the English-language proficiency of the students. Three options were offered to the students: a Pre-university course over two years in English, except for the General Paper which could be taken in Chinese; a course over two years in Chinese and an additional year in English; or a three-year course entirely in English. An extra-curricular Supplementary English Language Programme (SELP) for non-English medium secondary schools was also introduced, and language proficiency became a requirement for admission into Junior College and Pre-university. And in 1979, all Pre-university classes adopted English as the primary medium of instruction.

On their own, these disparities in the implementation of the bilingual policy at the different levels of education seem rather paradoxical. However, upon closer examination, they actually capture the complex negotiation and struggle over meaning within the imagining of the nation. It is to these meanings I now turn.

### 5.2.2 Bilingualism: "Qi hu nan xia"

*The question leaders of the less developed countries have to answer is not whether or not to modernise... The question these leaders have to answer is how rapidly they can modernise their societies and equally important, how much of their traditional past they can retain, so that they are not just poor imitations of the West, with all the fads and fetishes, the disorders and aberrations of contemporary Western societies... The leadership of each new country must make up its own mind just how much to keep and how much to jettison of the old, to make progress and yet to keep enough to be one's own distinctive self.* (Lee Kuan Yew, Dillingham Address, 11 Nov 1970)
The official rationale for the bilingual policy is that it would "level the playing field". As was discussed in the previous chapter, educational policy under colonialism had resulted in a large socio-economic economic gap between the English-educated and the Asian-language educated. It had also left large social gaps between the different ethnic groups with each group isolated in their own education systems. Like many post-colonial governments, the PAP leaders needed to address these inequalities and the friction they caused. While other post-colonial nations such as Malaysia chose to reject English and to find unity and equality through a single and national language, Singapore took a more "pragmatic" approach by choosing bilingualism as the tool. Within the discourse of multiracialism, bilingualism was expected to enable the different races to understand each other and to guarantee mutual understanding, tolerance and social cohesion. Lee Kuan Yew told students at the Raffles Institute that

The monolingualist is a bigot because he does not know that there are other languages and other cultures as great if not greater than his own. A bilingualist has an aperture, a window open in his mind, into other worlds and when all of Singapore understands that and all of them have windows opening on to each other's worlds, then we will have a truly more tolerant, more understanding, and for that reason, a more peaceful and prosperous future. (ST June 1969)

Senior Minister of State (Foreign Affairs) Lee Khoon Choy similarly explained that the bilingual policy aims to "open the minds of people to views and perspectives of life from other cultures, making them more tolerant and aware of their emotional, cultural or religious sentiments, so that they will live more harmoniously together while still preserving each person's own cultural roots" (ST 18 Apr 1977).

These views have largely become commonsense in Singapore. Following the government's discourse, sociologist Chiew Seen Kong (1983:47) gives bilingualism three main functions. First, bilingualism is needed to break down ethnic boundaries by destroying the previous (perceived) overlap between ethnicity and language. Second, it is needed break down ethnic boundaries by providing the linguistic resources for inter-ethnic communication and understanding through shared meanings of the linguistic resources. Third, bilingualism is necessary to reduce the previous stark inequalities in occupational
opportunities and income between the English educated and the Asian-language educated by reducing the differences between the two streams. However, given that the bilingual policy is one of English-knowing bilingualism with each person learning English and their “mother tongue”, it is very difficult to sustain an argument that the bilingual policy will open windows into each other’s cultures and promote understanding. Never have the leaders encouraged Singaporeans to learn each other’s languages; if anything, the policies they have set up discourage it. Thus, these general statements about bilingualism tell very little about what the goals and meanings of bilingualism really are, and how bilingualism is perceived within the larger objectives of the imagining of the nation.

Rather than looking at the function of bilingualism as a whole, what would be more useful is to unpack the construction of bilingualism itself. By looking at the positioning of language within bilingualism and the discursive meanings accorded to the different languages in relation to each other, it is possible to see the role of language in the imagining of the nation. Lee Kuan Yew has taken a very personal interest in language and has placed the discourse of language ideologies at the centre of the nationalist agenda. From 1978 until early 1980, he was the key speaker in five television forum/panel discussions concerning bilingualism, in addition to numerous other speeches on the issue (see Chapter 3, Appendix A). In each, he reiterated, elaborated, and fine-tuned his ideas about language and about how they were to operate within the nationalist agenda. A logical place to begin when considering the ideological construction of bilingualism within the imagining of the nation is thus the words of Lee Kuan Yew himself.

Thus, to take us to these ideologies, I turn to Lee Kuan Yew’s first formal address on bilingualism, entitled “Bilingualism is more than just learning two languages” which he delivered at the 1972 Singapore Teachers Union’s anniversary dinner (10 Nov 1972; Appendix A). In this analysis, I will consider the grammatical and narrative features of Lee Kuan Yew’s text as outlined in Chapter Two (section 2.4), and examine how these features contribute to the construction of language ideologies. I will begin by looking at the overall structure of his argument, and noting the themes that emerge. These themes bring the text out of the context of pedagogy alone to the greater concerns of the imagining of the nation. Lee Kuan Yew’s use of particular lexical features and conditional
statements are also worth consideration, as it establishes much of the tone of the text: that of a national crisis. Through such similar devices he also establishes the solution to that crisis. From this argumentation structure, he goes on to establish his definition and rationale for the bilingual policy. In effect, then, the structure, tone and lexicon of his speech places language and language ideologies within the very centre of the imagining of the nation.

Lee Kuan Yew’s speech is clearly more about placing before the teachers their calling as participants in the imagining of the nation than it is about pedagogical or union matters. In fact, of the 195 lines comprising his speech, only about 48 are spent on pedagogical issues (30-61, 73-84). Furthermore, although his immediate address is to the teachers, the location of this speech in the mass daily press “nationalises” his audience and his message. At the very outset, Lee Kuan Yew gives the teachers the mandate of realising his vision of the imagining of the nation. In lines 1-4, he notes the role of teachers historically in the nationalist agenda. And in lines 9-10, he directly challenges his audience of teachers and union members with that same role. The increasing number of English schools bestows enormous responsibility on these teachers to continue what their predecessors began (5-16). Furthermore, he argues, the challenge facing them is particularly strong because of the destabilising effects of English: “especially when confusion of values and selfishness of purpose are now perversely affecting men in many developed English-speaking countries” (14-16). In light of the nationalist mandate placed before the teachers, the sense one gets is that Lee Kuan Yew’s disapproval of strikes (which he talks about in the fourth paragraph) is not for their monetary demands, but rather for their “mutiny” in the imagining of the nation (20-28). This ties in with Lee Kuan Yew’s later mention of the mutiny in Trinidad (127-148). Both the strikers and the mutineers are seen as deserters in the imagining of the nation.

His rather curious comment in lines 57-58 again suggests the larger nationalist agenda. After discussing the practical aspects of classroom shortages and so on, he identifies two targets: to lower the birth rate and to get “well-balanced” and “well-trained”

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3 All numbers in parentheses refer to the line number of Lee Kuan Yew’s text (see Appendix A).
teachers to discharge their duties to students. "Then", he says, "we will have a society with much more ballast." While the link to the aforementioned targets is not immediately obvious, it is with this comment that he launches into the argument that will carry us right through his speech. For even his question about on-going learning and literacy in lines 60-61 is not really an issue of education or literacy. Rather, he uses it to establish Singapore's unique challenge concerning language learning and his view of the importance of language (65-66, 82-84). His argument for bilingualism is also not pedagogical. Rather, it concerns his vision about the role of language in the larger nationalist agenda (86-195). Thus, Lee Kuan Yew's speech is essentially about language and the imagining of the nation, about the role of the teachers in realising his vision for this relationship, and about communicating this vision to the masses. What is of interest then is his specific understanding of bilingualism, which both explains his concerns about English, and explains why he sees bilingualism as the answer to the threat of English.

Lee Kuan Yew's speech is framed by the logic of Singapore's unique vulnerability, and is voiced in the tone of crisis management. In line 86-90, he both establishes the national crisis, as well as places language central to the definition of this crisis. Speaking of bilingualism, he says:

I am convinced that this effort has to be made, if we are to survive as a distinctive society, worth the preserving. Or we will become completely deculturalised and lost. If we become like some societies, speaking pidgin English, mindlessly aping the Americans or British, with no basic values or culture of their own, then, frankly, I do not believe this is a society or nation worth the building, let alone defending.

The message and words used are strong: convinced, effort, survive, distinctive, worth preserving, deculturalised, lost. At stake here is the value of the nation. His use of hypothetical conditionals frame the type of society Singapore might well become. This is intensified in lines 109-111 when he says (again, using a hypothetical conditional statement): "If we fail to resolve effectively our problem of languages, and preserve what is best in our respective cultural values, we could become an even more enfeebled version of the deculturalised Caribbean calypso-type society." According to Lee Kuan Yew (113-115, 127-148), Caribbean society's defining feature is that it has no culture of its own.
They try to imitate the Americans, they speak only a debased pidginised form of English, and they have no basic values of their own. They have no rigorous economic agenda. Their only achievement is leading an "island-in-the-sun, steel-drum-beating and rum-brewing-and-drinking, happy go lucky life." Such a "calypso-type" society is, in his view, not worth building or defending. This then is the scenario Lee Kuan placed before Singaporeans. If this were to happen, if Singapore were to become an English-knowing monolingual society, then, Lee Kuan Yew told parliament, "we are in deep trouble" (ST 26 Feb 1977). Lee Kuan Yew's argument is based on his notion that common languages can lead to common social behaviour. In lines 99-107 he talks about how the language and culture shared by the Americans, British, Canadians, and Australians resulted in anti-Vietnam war demonstrations and riots in their countries. In the same way, if Singapore follows the Caribbean's path of language development, there is a very real likelihood that it will also emulate the same social characteristics.

What Lee Kuan Yew seems to be suggesting in his anthropologically problematic notion of deculturalisation⁴ is that an English monolingual Asian person has no culture of her or his own; at best, s/he can only imitate that culture associated with English. Already in 1966, Lee Kuan Yew expressed concern about the "detrimental effects of deculturation", of producing a society of "anaemic, uprooted floating citizens without... social cohesiveness" (cited in Josey, 1980:345-346). With no culture, such a person would be reduced to "mindlessly aping" other cultures. In C.V. Devan Nair's words, such persons would be "neither fish, flesh nor fowl"; they "will cease to be Asians. But neither will they be Westerners. They will belong nowhere" (ST 15 Jan 1979). They would be indistinct people, leading indistinct lives, and moving towards an indistinct future. In Dr. Goh Keng Swee's (Deputy PM) words, such a person is in a state of "anomie". He uses sociologist MacIver's definition of anomie to explain what he means: "Anomie signifies the state of mind of one who has been pulled up from his moral roots, who has no longer any standards but only disconnected urges, who has no longer a sense of continuity, of

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folk, of obligation” (1980:31). Singaporeans are threatened by the dangers of anomie because of their “wholesale adoption of a Western language”.

The spectre of becoming a Caribbean-type society (86-90, 109-148) captured the essence of Lee Kuan Yew’s definition of the crisis. This was not lost on The Straits Times in their summary report of his speech (11 Nov 1972). The bold headlines on the front page read: “PM Explains Why Bilingualism Is Necessary... Beware the Calypso-type Society”. The report began dramatically with the words: “The Prime Minister has warned Singaporeans to beware of the dangers of a Caribbean calypso-type society.” It is significant that in this opening statement, Lee Kuan Yew is referred to by his title, establishing his authority and the seriousness of his speech. Furthermore, while Lee Kuan Yew presented his speech to members of the teachers’ union, the newspaper extended his warning to all Singaporeans. This is a national crisis, a national warning.

Having frankly and unequivocally established the crisis, he then moves on to talk about how such a national crisis can be circumvented (92-97). “The minimum we must achieve”, he says, “is to teach enough, in the mother tongue, of the basic values and culture.” Only then will each person have “imbibed enough to know” when confronted with Western culture, that “they are they and we are ourselves. This is absolutely crucial” (94-97). It is the mother tongue that is capable of rescuing the nation from deculturalisation. For, when it comes to the mother tongue, “it is not just learning the language”. Rather, “with the language goes the fables and proverbs. It is the learning of a whole value system, a whole philosophy of life, that can maintain the fabric of our society intact, in spite of exposure to all the current madnesses around the world” (165-168). And “only when we first know our traditional values, can we be quite clear the Western world is a different system, a different voltage, structured for purposes different from ours” (191-192). The mother tongue is the “ballast” (58). And this learning must start already when the child is young. Lee Kuan Yew gives two personal anecdotes: one of himself, the fact that he started late and must now suffer the consequences; and one of his children as evidence that learning at a young age can work. What is interesting is that he remains silent on an obvious gap in his argument. If indeed an English-knowing monolingual would be deculturalised, then from where did he learn his cultural values? He
himself learned his "mother tongue" only later in life. Following the logic of his argument, this would mean that he had no values or culture until he learned Mandarin, a view he would undoubtedly deny. This gap is never addressed in any of his speeches.

In considering the structure of Lee Kuan Yew's argument, it is instructive to note the contrast in the words he uses. A calypso-type society was described with loose and run-on phrases such as deculturalised, island-in-the-sun, steel-drum-beating, rum-brewing-and-drinking, happy-go-lucky-life, having a jolly good time and its members as slaves, servers and hangers-on and as having lost any trace of African (114-115, 139, 144). However, the words used to talk about Singaporean society are serious and rigid. The reason why Singaporeans have achieved what they have is because of their hard framework of basic cultural values, tightly knit Asian family system. The focus is on achievement (3x:121-125), and the urge to work and save. There is talk of economic planners and of industry (plumber, bricklayer, electrician). In line 157 he says, "We are determined to succeed." The contrastive effect is powerful in establishing and legitimising his vision of the ideal nation.

In his speech, then, Lee Kuan Yew established both the national crisis and the solution to that crisis (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 A National Crisis Defined and Solved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause: failed bilingualism</th>
<th>Means: mother tongue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely deculturalised</td>
<td>Distinctive society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost</td>
<td>Rooted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindlessly aping</td>
<td>Knowing; identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>No basic values or culture</td>
<td>Basic values and culture</td>
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| Judgement: not worth building; not worth defending | Judgement: absolutely crucial; worth preserving |

If the bilingual policy were to fail completely, Singaporeans would be in danger of becoming completely deculturalised, lost, having no basic values or culture of their own, and able to only mindless ape those cultures associated with English. Such a society, Lee Kuan Yew argues, is not worth building or defending. In contrast, through the success of
the bilingual policy, and especially through learning their mother tongue, Singaporeans would know who they are, and would have the basic values and culture that would give them a distinct identity. This was crucial, he said; such a society would be worth preserving. Out of this dichotomy Lee Kuan Yew derives his particular definition and understanding of bilingualism. In his words (150-155):

Please note that when I speak of bilingualism, I do not mean just the facility of speaking two languages. It is more basic than that, first, we understand ourselves, what we are, where we came from, what life is, or should be about, and what we want to do. Then the facility of the English language gives us access to the science and technology of the West. It also provides a convenient common ground on which... everybody competes in a neutral medium.

In an earlier speech given to Pre-university students, he told of his goal to have all Singaporeans “rooted in their traditional values, but effective in English, a key to the advanced technology of the West” (ST 29 Feb 1971). And elsewhere he summarised it this way: while English is for new knowledge, to support the development of a modern industrial nation, mother tongue is for old knowledge, an accumulation of a few thousand years of wisdom (ST 24 Nov 1979).

This view of bilingualism has been described by Pendley (1983) as the “functional polarisation” of language, and by Kuo and Jernudd (1994) as the “division of labour between languages”. While these terms are ultimately inadequate in fully reflecting the complex relationship between the different languages within the bilingual policy, they nonetheless are useful in capturing the notion of “pragmatic linguistics” that the government leaders have tried to project. Visually, it looks like this.\footnote{I am grateful to Dr. Lionel Wee for this model which emerged from our many conversations on the topic.}
On the one side of this "functional polarisation" of language is English. The meanings of and rationale for English within this polarisation have largely been determined by the logic of pragmatism discussed earlier. Speaking about English-knowing bilingualism, Inche Rahim Ishak (former Minister of State, Foreign Affairs) said: "In Singapore, rapid industrialisation has been chosen as the key to progress, hence language and culture will have to fit in with this pattern of priorities" (ST 27 Mar 1972). Singapore prides itself in its pragmatic approach to English, hailing the language of the former colonial power as "a useful legacy of empire" (Lee Kuan Yew, ST 9 Nov 1971). One potent reason for continuing with English was that it would ensure power remained with the English-educated leadership. Continuing with English also meant continuity in the records, administration, and law. Furthermore, English was needed for instrumental and pragmatic purposes.

Professor Jayakumar, former Minister of State (Law and Home Affairs), outlined three pragmatic functions for English (ST 19 Aug 1982) drawn on two main notions of English. The first assumption about English is that it is the key to economic survival. This assumption operates at both the national and the individual levels. At the national level, Jayakumar argues, "English is the major international language for trade, science and technology, and proficiency in the language is essential as Singapore becomes a leading financial and banking centre." A focus on English would also help Singapore maintain a competitive edge in the region. Education Minister Goh Keng Swee made this argument
in parliament (27 Mar 1979) when he introduced his recommendations for a restructured education system. The need for English "relates to our competitive position, both in Southeast Asia and in relation to countries like South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan", he said. The "edge we have over all of them, except for the Philippines, is the large number of Singaporeans who can understand and use the English language. This would give us an advantage in the service and high technology industries which we shall retain for a long time" (PDS, Vol.39, Prt. 2, Col.11, 27 Mar 1979).

At the individual level, English is the "key to the productivity concept. With increasing modernisation, skilled workers who know English will be in greater demand... it is the key to acquisition of skills and training and career advancement." The promise given is that proficiency in English will guarantee a person better employment opportunities. Lee Kuan Yew takes this pragmatic argument further by adding the element of meritocracy. In his 1970 Dillingham address he takes a critical view of other countries that have given only limited access to English:

The deliberate stifling of a language which gives access to superior technology can be stifling beyond repair. Sometimes, this is done, not to elevate the status of the indigenous language, so much as to take away a supposed advantage a minority in the society is deemed to have, because that minority has already gained a greater competence in the foreign language. This can be most damaging. It is tantamount to blinding the next generation to the knowledge of the advanced countries.

The English language is thus presented as available to all Singaporeans. Not only is it available to all, but it also puts every one on an equal playing field. Quoting again from Lee Kuan Yew, English "is our common working language... It provides a neutral medium, giving no one any advantage in the competition for knowledge and jobs" (The Mirror 19 June 1978). Given the emphasis on pragmatism at both the national and individual levels, it is not surprising that the growing stress on the need to learn English coincided with the massive and rapid development of technical and vocational education (Doraisamy, 1969). Neither is it coincidence that educational policy concerning secondary and tertiary education concentrated on strengthening the position of English rather than focusing on the other languages within the bilingual policy. In the terms of pragmatic
rationality, proficiency in English was crucial to the economic and development needs of nation.

The second assumption of English is that it is a neutral language with respect to the three main ethnic groups in Singapore. Thus, at the community level, because English does not belong to any of the major ethnic communities, it can be the language for inter-ethnic communication and racial harmony. Jayakumar argues that when English “is the common language here, it will enable all Singaporeans – regardless of race – to communicate with one another.” Former Education Minister Dr. Tony Tan made a similar comment in his speech to parliament (16 March 1990), arguing that through English “there is a greater understanding among Singaporeans of all races”, which has “helped substantially to build the peaceful harmonious Singapore that we have today.” This follows the argument we saw earlier about bilingualism being a “window” into each other’s worlds. However, for all its cultural rhetoric, the very strong pragmatic overtones given to the meanings of English seem to suggest that economics is the common denominator shared by all communities, rather than anything cultural. As the pragmatic discourse of English gives no room for the cultural element, inter-ethnic communication would also seem to bear no cultural relevance.

Underlying both these notions of English is the view that it is possible to separate language, culture and technology such that it is possible to adopt English for technological advantages without adopting its culture. As Lee Kuan Yew put it:

I don’t think I want to model my life on the Anglo-Saxon. I want to catch up with his material and scientific progress. I want to pick up and emulate some of his methods of organising society. But I am not accepting as superior his culture or way of life. In fact, I view some of the present day values and practices in [the West]... as deplorable, [and] which indeed should be strenuously avoided at all cost. (ST 8 Jan 1988)

The image that comes to mind is that of Lee Kuan Yew once again (see Chapter 4) precariously riding the tiger, of “Qi hu nan xia”. He usurped the meanings of English, without accepting the appropriacy of English en masse for the nation, and used them for his own purposes in the imagining of the nation.
This pragmatic argument has effectively closed any ideological or political space that might have been used to challenge the dominance of English in Singapore. While there have been demands to increase the status of the other official languages, there has never been any concurrent demand to reduce the status of English.

Positioned on the other side of this polarisation of language ideologies are the three “mother tongue” languages, Malay, Tamil and Mandarin. Unlike English which supposedly can be separated from culture, the mother tongue languages are embedded in the logic of multiracialism, captured in the equation “a race = a language = a culture”. Therefore, the argument goes, one must have an ethnicity as prescribed by the government, which means you have a mother tongue as prescribed by one’s ethnicity, and which means one then has a culture transmitted by that mother tongue. In his televised discussion on bilingualism (6 Apr 1978), Lee Kuan Yew said, “Surely it is of relevance to [a student’s] life to know what these characters are, what they signify and how it formed part of his culture. And it is part of his culture whether he likes it or not. He was born into a home, born into society where these things became part of him” (ST 7 Apr 1978). Unlike English, which can be separated from culture, this heritage and culture are inherent to the mother tongue. The analogy frequently given is that of computer programming. Through mother tongue education, MP Choo Wee Khiang argued in parliament, children would be “inculcated with good eastern values and cultures... These values will be thus programmed like a computer in the children and form their basic principles in dealing with society and with problems” (PDS, 17 Jan 1989, Vol.52, Prt 1, Col.152).

This functional polarisation of language meanings has been a main characteristic of language ideologies in the imagining of the nation and in the control over and valuation of knowledge in that imagining. Pendley (1983) notes how the functional polarisation of language both conceals and legitimates the socio-economic dominance of English over the mother tongue languages by delegating the latter to the domain of culture and family life. What is being implied here, he argues, is that socially and economically useful and

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6 A Straits Times (8 November 1982) column tells a fascinating story of a movement to learn Mandarin and promote Confucian ethics through Mandarin in Singapore more than 80 years ago. This movement came out of a group of English-educated Straits-born Chinese, led by Dr. Lim Boon Keng, who were concerned about losing their cultural roots and were becoming “de-nationalised”.
important knowledge, and the power and status this knowledge confers, is becoming ever more associated with the English language. Such knowledge is divorced from the cultural realm. As I will show in Chapter Seven, this argument becomes even more powerful with the continued dominance of English throughout the "Asianising of Singapore".

While this polarised structure may look unproblematic and the lines between the languages may seem clear, there is actually considerable ambiguity. The basis for definition is not always consistent. With respect to English, the view is that the language can be separated from culture so that it is possible to adopt the technology accessed through English without necessarily accepting its culture. In contrast, the "mother tongue" is seen to somehow inherently embody one's ethnically defined culture such that language and culture cannot be separated. This inconsistency produces a certain amount of ambiguity and paradox. Not only is it difficult to separate culture from technology, but it is also difficult to completely divorce culture from language. Yet at the same time, it is difficult to sustain the argument that language inherently embodies culture. Rather than seeing it as problematic, this blurring of boundaries within the functional polarisation of language ideologies has been used by the government to further their view of the imagined community. This became first apparent in the mid-1970s, when some of the negative effects of Singapore's economic growth began to appear.

5.2.3 Bilingualism: The Management of Ambiguity

During the mid-1970s, there was a growing concern expressed in the press and in government speeches that traditional Asian values and belief systems may have somehow been sacrificed in the torrent of economic development. A strong consumerist and individualist orientation was increasing at an alarming rate in society, giving rise to the self-deprecating characterisation of the "ugly Singaporean", driven by "kiasuism" (fear of loosing out), and ruled by the religion of "moneytheism". According to Ho Wing Meng (NUS, Philosophy dept.), during the 1970s "when the economy grew by leaps and bounds", Singaporeans "appeared to be fast developing a system of values according to which the worth or significance of any person, object or activity was calculated exclusively
in terms of his or its potential or actual pecuniary value” (1989:678). The late Dr. Tay Eng Soon (Minister of State, Education) noted in a speech at NUS in 1982 that there was an increase of such undesirable qualities as “hippyism, a libertine pre-occupation with self-gratification, the cult of living for today and for myself and to hell with others” among the youth (ST 13 Dec 1982). As Chua Beng Huat (1995) has noted, this denouncement of individualism is rather ironic, given that it was actually encouraged in the government’s earlier characterisation of a “rugged” nation. Individualism is also the logical outcome of meritocracy and pragmatism. However, the argument is now made that individualism would almost certainly lead to demands for the protection of individual rights. This in turn would provide grounds for the translation of social disadvantage into welfare claims on the state. And welfarism, the leaders believed, would lead to a decline in work ethics and economic competitiveness.

Singapore’s rapid economic growth also made English-medium education increasingly popular. One of the results of the bilingual policy was that, as Puri Shotam (1987) noted, the Asian-language streams were actually made redundant. For why send your child to the Asian-language stream schools when the timetable of an English-medium school ensured exposure to the mother tongue for up to forty percent of curriculum time? Parents thus had nothing to lose, but much to gain, in sending their children to English-medium schools. A 1978 survey by The Straits Times revealed that, as long as there were economic advantages to English proficiency, parents would continue to choose English-medium schools over Asian-medium ones (ST 5 May 1978). What Lee Kuan Yew said of the status of English during colonialism remained true in independent Singapore: “There were no English-educated trishaw riders or rickshaw pullers, labourers or coolies, as they used to be called, because whoever became English-educated need not become a coolie or a trishaw rider. Other more profitable avenues of employment were open to them” (ST 17 Aug 1959). It is not surprising that enrolment in the English-medium schools soared from 51 percent in 1959, to 65 percent in 1972, and 91 percent in 1979.

In light of the concurrent growing popularity of English-medium education and increase in undesirable social behaviour, the meanings of English within the functional polarisation of language began to shift. Playing on the ambiguity within the functional
polarisation of language, the government has paradoxically argued that rather than being neutral, English carries cultural meaning as well. Only, the cultural values associated with English are undesirable. The supremacy of English, they argue, has allowed the spread of Western values and lifestyles among Singapore’s youth. There has been perceived erosion in their commitment to their languages and cultures. The result has been “the ugly Singaporean”, defined by Lee Kuan Yew as someone holding little regard for things Asian, someone who has had their “innards taken out... by having English cultural values being pumped in” (ST 26 Feb 1977). C.V. Devan Nair (then NTUC Secretary General) put it this way: “Through the English language we are enabled to absorb all that modern science and technology can offer us.” However, at the same time, most younger Singaporeans also imbibe “the mindless pop culture of the West”. This culture and way of life, he says, is one “in which the centres of cognition, perception and feeling are not located in the cerebral cortex, or even in the heart and its cultured emotions. On the contrary, they are located below the waist, and primarily in what may be called the lower vital centres (ST 15 Jan 1979). Along the same vein, Labour Minister Ong Pang Boon blamed English education for the “foolish imitation” and “thoughtless acceptance” of Western culture – the long and unkempt hair, drug taking, fun and party loving, way-out dresses and rock and soul music seen among the teachers and students. Such behaviour and fashion, he noted, were not present in the Chinese schools (ST 24 Oct 1971).

And so English is no longer merely a neutral medium for access to technology, or for inter-racial communication. Rather, it is the gateway to decadence, liberalism, and Westernisation. Because of the functional polarisation of language, and because of the ambiguity in its definition, the government was able to define the negative consequences of its economic and development policies as being something “alien”, as imported through English, the non-mother tongue. The government thus took the blurred lines of functional polarisation, turned it on its head, and used it to create a tension between the pragmatic needs for English in the imagining of the nation, and the potential threat that it carries to that imagining. This tension has become a powerful tool in the rationalisation of government policy, and in the ability of the government to present their solutions to the problem as being the only rational and appropriate ones. This strategy is also powerfully
evident in discussions and analyses about the increasingly apparent failure of the bilingual policy, and about the government's proposed solution to this failure. And so once again we have the discourse of crisis management, whereby the mother tongue languages are presented as necessary to provide cultural ballast, not just against deculturalisation, but against Westernisation.

Already in 1976, Senior Minister of State (Education) Mr. Chai Chong Yu noted that the lack of language proficiency in the schools was “serious” (ST 1 Sept 1976). He cited statistics showing that 10 percent of students admitted to Junior College had failed to get an “O” level pass in their first language, and 23 percent failed in their second language. But it was not until 1978 that more serious attention was given to the problems facing the implementation of bilingualism. On 6 April 1978, Lee Kuan Yew spoke at length on bilingualism and its impact on society in a televised two-hour discussion with four educationists and one journalist. The transcript of this discussion was published over two days in The Straits Times (7 & 8 April 1978) as well as compiled in a Ministry of Culture publication titled “Bilingualism in our Society”. Using the Ministry's publication, of the 551 lines of text, 436 (79%) were Lee Kuan Yew's and the remaining 115 (21%) shared among the four panellists and chair. All but two of the exchanges in the discussion involved a panellist-to-PM exchange. This televised discussion was thus very clearly a platform for Lee Kuan Yew to delineate what he saw as the key issues and challenges regarding bilingualism, rather than a forum for the exchange of ideas.7

In this discussion, he assessed the state of bilingualism among the Chinese students as being a “very patchy, uneven achievement”. At the top, there are about three to five percent of students who are “effectively bilingual”, fluent in both school languages. About ten to fifteen percent are “very much at home in one language and perhaps adequate in the other”. The bulk of students, forty to fifty percent, are adequate or fair in the first language, meaning they can speak, write and read the language. However, “they are

7 In his analysis of televised political interviews, Fairclough similarly notes how interviews are used by leaders to present their political ideas, rather than to answer or debate the questions put to them. See Media Discourse (London: Edward Arnold, 1995). Also see his paper presented at the “Political Linguistics” conference (Antwerp, Dec 1995) together with Anna Mauranen, entitled: “The Conversationalisation of Political Discourse: A Comparative View”. In this paper, they provide a comparative analysis of interviews with the Finnish and British Prime Ministers.
unable to have that same command, that same facility in the second language. They can understand it because understanding is easier than articulation. They can read because reading is easier than writing. They can write but very patchily and not as well or anywhere as well as their first language.” The rest, those who are unable to get from primary to secondary school (which was 28% in the Chinese stream and 32% in the English stream in 1977) can only cope at best with one language. This patchy achievement, he said, cannot be equalised “because human endowments are not equal.” What is significant here is the link made between language learning and intelligence – a link that was to become crucial in the development of language-based streaming in 1979.

Already in his opening statement, Lee Kuan Yew conceded that one of the reasons for this patchy development was that education had become a political football, with the government not really understanding the challenges facing language learning. However, the even more potent reason, and one that was to dominate all discussion and policy concerning language in the years to come, was the continued use of dialects in the home. Already in his 1972 teachers’ union address, Lee Kuan Yew highlighted the dialect problem. “The average Chinese boy who goes to an English school is really learning two non-mother languages”, he noted. “He learns English which is not his mother tongue. He learns Mandarin as a second language. It is also not his mother tongue because often the dialect is the language of the home. This presents us with a very grave challenge” (68-71). In effect, each child was forced to become at minimum trilingual: learning a dialect at home and Mandarin and English (what University of Singapore vice-chancellor Kwan Sai Kheong called two “step-mother tongues”, ST 18 Apr 1978) at school. It is significant that Lee Kuan Yew presents dialects here as an obstacle to the bilingual policy when only a few years earlier, writers of the All-Party Report (including Lee Kuan Yew) saw dialects as facilitating the learning of Mandarin. The report stated: “We are also reliably informed that [dialect] versions in literary as opposed to colloquial Chinese... have very close affinities to the Mandarin version, and these no doubt help the Chinese child to adopt Mandarin as the common medium of communication in schools and outside them” (emphasis mine; 1956:41). In contrast, the argument put forward now was that parents
needed to make a choice between Mandarin and dialects. And, in order for the bilingual policy to succeed, that choice must be Mandarin.

These views were essentially repeated in another televised two-part panel discussion a few weeks later (20 & 21 April 1978). However, this time Lee Kuan Yew also explicitly suggested a revised curriculum, one that took into account the different language learning capacities of the students. The effectively bilingual students would be given places in university. In this way, "the leaders in Singapore, the leaders of government or of the various sectors, would then have the traditional norms, the Oriental norms, in addition to their mastery of Western science and technology" (ST 21 Apr 1978). Those who do not do well in the first and second language would be refused entry into university.

In August 1978, Lee Kuan Yew sent a directive to Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Goh Keng Swee, commissioning him to conduct a thorough evaluation of the education system and the bilingual policy. He selected a group of systems engineers from the MOE to form an 'Education Study Team' to work with Dr. Goh. There were no surprises in their findings and recommendations (Report on the Ministry of Education, 1978; the Goh Report, 1979). To a large extent, their observations and recommendations were merely a compilation of Lee Kuan Yew's views expressed throughout the 1970s. However, the Goh Report remains significant in that it gave these views formal status in parliament and became the grounds for subsequent policy.

For the purposes of this discussion, two findings published in the Goh Report are significant. First of all, the bilingual policy was declared a failure. Under a section called "Ineffective Bilingualism", the committee presented statistics showing that more than 60 percent of the pupils who sat for the PSLE (Primary Six) and GCE "O" level examinations (Secondary Four) had failed in one or both languages in their written and comprehension skills. Secondly, the Goh Committee noted that the "large scale movement to education in English" led to the loss of traditional values and the acquisition of the "spurious fashions of the West" (1979: 1.5). As a result, Singapore was seen to be on the brink of a moral crisis. This crisis was further intensified by the apparent failure of the bilingual policy. For, without a strong grasp of the mother tongue, the acquisition of the "spurious
fashions of the West” could only escalate. In Lee Kuan Yew’s mind, the failure would most certainly result in English-knowing monolingualism, and thus in either deculturalisation or cultural decadence. Thus, using the blurred lines of language ideologies within the functional polarisation of language, the image was given of a national moral crisis.

The crisis facing Singapore as a result of the failed bilingual policy was not a moral crisis only. Given the centrality of language to the economic objectives of the nation, the failure of the bilingual policy with respect to English also posed an economic crisis. After seeing the problems of language diversity in Luxembourg and Mauritius during a recent visit, Lee Kuan Yew drew two conclusions (ST 24 Oct 1979). First, he concluded, “it will be one, two, three or four generations before all of us can speak proper, Standard English.” And second, if nothing is done to support the bilingual policy, “the result will be the failure of our bilingual policy.” That is, people will speak only “Pidgin English at the lowest level” and dialects. The purpose of the government’s policy, he said, was to ensure that the languages used in Singapore would be languages “of some international value, and not Mauritian Creole or Jamaican pidgin, or our own special particular sub-language.” Without such language skills, Singapore’s economic interests would be threatened.

In response to these two crises, the government embarked on a massive and sustained effort to redirect Singapore’s cultural and political developments towards “traditional values”. This effort, which has come to be called the “Asianising of Singapore”, continues to characterise and guide government policy today, particularly as it tries to balance the two faces of authenticity: at home and in the world. There have been essentially two key phases within this “Asianising of Singapore:” the first beginning with the release of the Goh Report; and the second beginning in the late 1980s to early 1990s, marked by the formulation of a set of “core national values”. The distinction between these two moments is rather artificial, in that in many ways the latter is merely an elaboration of the first. They share many of the same elements, are based on many of the same assumptions, and aspire to the same image. Each has been articulated as being a response to a perceived national moral crisis. However, as the two phases do occur in different historical contexts, they also carry different emphasis with respect to how
language ideology is negotiated within the imagining of the nation. It is these moments of shifting ideologies that bear particular significance. As I will discuss more fully in the next chapter, the Speak Mandarin Campaign, which marks the beginning of the “Asianising of Singapore” in 1979, is in many ways a catalyst for these shifting ideologies. It is the story of the Speak Mandarin Campaign that thus needs to be heard.

In the remainder of this chapter and the next, I will focus on these two stages of the “Asianising of Singapore”, and consider the shifting language ideologies within this discourse. The rest of this chapter will primarily set the stage for my more detailed analysis of the Speak Mandarin Campaign in Chapter Six. First, I will briefly discuss what I mean by the “Asianising of Singapore”. And then I will go on to talk about education policy within this Asianising discourse, with a particular focus on moral education and the implementation of language-based streaming.

5.3 The “Asianising of Singapore”

The “Asianising of Singapore” has been the focus of a number of studies, each providing a different interpretation of the term. For example, it has been discussed as the PAP’s management of ethnicity (Vasil, 1995), as an alternative vision to liberal democracy (Emmerson, 1995; Harries, 1988; Kausikan, 1996; Mauzy, 1996, Mahathir, 1996), and as the foundation of Singapore’s economic success (Lodge and Vogel, 1987). While these different perspectives do tell important aspects of the story, what is perhaps more interesting for this analysis is how the “Asianising of Singapore” can be seen discursively within the imagining of the nation. As discourse, the “Asianising of Singapore” can be seen as a “frame of reference” (Simon, 1992) within which Singaporeans and Singapore’s leaders seek to “define, organise and regulate a particular sense” of themselves within the imagining of the nation. It is also a way to “define, organise, and regulate” a particular sense of themselves in relation to the West and in relation to the region. Discursively located within the imagining of the nation, the “Asianising of Singapore” thus becomes a means of articulating markers of social meaning. It is historical, socio-political, embedded
in power relations, and it is ideological. It is in this sense that I will be discussing the "Asianising of Singapore".

Like the discourse of multiracialism, the "Asianising of Singapore" can be seen as taking on two seemingly contradictory forms. On the one hand, it represents a continued effort by the government towards the maintenance of multiracialism, whereby the different races are kept distinct and whereby racial identity is inherent to social and national meaning. On the other, it represents an effort to homogenise the races under the label of "Asian". In the former, the evocation of the "language = culture = race" equation encourages the various ethnic groups to become firmly rooted in their respective cultures and languages. In the latter, the emphasis is on a more pan-ethnic sense of "Asian", whereby ethnic difference is subsumed by "Asianness" in contrast to "Western". These two contradictory forms continually interact with each other and with language ideologies within the imagining of the nation.

5.3.1 Moral Education and the "Asianising of Singapore"

I have already talked about how Singapore's economic development resulted in increasing acquisitiveness, individualism and consumerism, and how these perceived negative developments elicited a response from the government to Asianise Singapore. However, there were also significant changes within the region that allowed for the government's particular response to this "national moral crisis". Perhaps the most important event during the 1970s was the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam in 1975 and the end of the Vietnam War. During the war, Singapore had to be extremely careful in how it presented itself. Chinese chauvinist sentiments still brewed beneath the surface, and any encouragement of the various ethnic groups to nurture their cultures could easily have allowed such sentiments to resurface. In all likelihood, this would have been construed by Singapore's neighbours as support for the communist effort. The end of the Vietnam War thus gave the political and ideological space for the Asianising discourse to emerge. This space was also created by the fact that the geopolitical environment within the region had stabilised considerably since the mid-1960s (Vasil, 1995). Singapore had
developed good relations with its ASEAN partners and its existence as a separate, sovereign nation was fully recognised and accepted by its neighbours. Singapore's predominantly Chinese population was no longer seen as the threat that it once was. Taken together, it was no longer necessary for Singapore to de-emphasise its Chineseness as it had before.

It is in this context that the Goh Committee released its evaluation of the bilingual policy and warned that Singaporeans were in danger of losing their traditional values and of becoming deculturalised. And it was in this context that Lee Kuan Yew, in his acceptance letter attached to the *Goh Report*, explored the idea of Asianisation as a means by which to shape and define his vision of “good citizenship and nationhood” in response to such crises. His questions offer a taxonomy of this vision (*Goh Report*, 1979, iv-v):

What kind of man or woman does a child grow up to be after 10-12 years of schooling? Is he a worthy citizen, guided by decent moral precepts... the litmus test of a good education is whether it nurtures citizens who can live, work, contend and co-operate in a civilised way. Is he loyal and patriotic? Is he, when the need arises, a good soldier, ready to defend his country, and so protect his wife and children, and his fellow citizens? Is he filial, respectful to elders, law-abiding, humane, and responsible? Does he take care of his wife and children, and his parents? Is he a good neighbour and a trustworthy friend? Is he tolerant of Singaporeans of different races and religions? Is he clean, neat, punctual, and well mannered?

The answer to these questions, he argued, rested with the schools. The role of education was to provide the students with the “basic common norms of social behaviour, social values, and moral precepts which can make up the rounded Singaporeans of tomorrow.” And especially, students “must be made to place group interests above individual interests.” Lee Kuan Yew was very clear that the way to guide the development of the ideal citizen was specifically through the inculcation of the different aspects of one’s ethnicity, culture, language, and religion. “No child”, he said, “should leave after 9 years without having the ‘soft-ware’ of his culture programmed into his subconscious.” Through being Asian, each child would realise that ideal state of “good citizenship”.

In the *Goh Report* and in a subsequent 1979 *Report on Moral Education (Ong Report)* authored by Minister for Communications and Acting Minister for Culture Ong
Teng Cheong in June 1979, this taxonomy was translated into the recommendation that "moral education" be made a compulsory school subject. Ong Teng Cheong made the following recommendation: "Emphasis should be placed on the inculcation of the desired Eastern and Asian moral concepts, values and attitudes so as to help in the preservation and strengthening of our cultural heritage" (1979:10). He also noted that "Religious studies help to reinforce the teaching of moral values" (1979:12). The two reports thus led to the incorporation of religious values in a moral education syllabus. By 1982, moral education was to be taught in all secondary schools through a compulsory Religious Knowledge course. Students would be able to choose from Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikh Studies, and, added at the request of Lee Kuan Yew, Confucian Ethics (ST 4 Feb 1982). While offered as a residual option for those who professed none of the religions, Lee Kuan Yew's assumption was that "for most Chinese students, Confucianism not Buddhism will be what parents would prefer their children to study" (ST 8 Feb 1982). There was at the same time a sustained effort to link Chinese identity with Confucianism throughout the Chinese community. The intensity was so great that one scholar has even called 1982 the "Year of Confucianism" (Kuo, 1992). Ironically, there were no Confucian scholars within Singapore to guide this campaign. Confucian scholars had to be brought in from the US to develop the teaching materials for the schools and to give public lectures.

However, moral education alone was not enough. The writers of the Goh Report noted that, "While moral education would help to give school children a set of values which could guide them in their adult life, this may not be sufficient to provide the cultural ballast to withstand the stresses of living in a fast changing society exposed to influences, good and bad of an open society such as ours" (1979:1.5). What was necessary was the teaching of the "historical origins of their culture" in their mother tongue. Lee Kuan Yew made the same argument in his reply to the Goh Report: "The principal value of teaching the second language is the imparting of moral values and understanding of cultural traditions." Speaking specifically of Mandarin, he said, "The greatest value in the teaching and learning of Chinese is the transmission of the norms of social or moral behaviour. This means principally Confucianist beliefs and ideas, of man, society and the state"
(1979:iv-v). This brings me to the second element in the “Asianising of Singapore”: language ideologies and language policy.

Because of Lee Kuan Yew’s central proposition that a “race = a culture = a language”, it is not surprising that he made language central to the Asianising process. The overall gist has been to make the three Asian official languages the mother tongue of the respective ethnic communities. This effort has come in two ways. One is through a restructuring of the education system through language-based streaming. For reasons that will be discussed in the next chapter, the Chinese community has been especially targeted in this Asianising effort. And so, the second effort has been through an annual Speak Mandarin Campaign that began in 1979. In the next section, I will briefly outline the restructuring of the education system. This discussion will then set the stage for the next chapter, which will focus on the Speak Mandarin Campaign and the ideological debates about language and the meanings of language that operate within the campaign.

5.3.2 The New Education System

As openly admitted by Lee Kuan Yew, a key problem with the implementation of the bilingual policy was that the government failed to take into account differential learning abilities. In a talk organised by the Joint-campus committee, he told students that the government is now aware of “the limits or levels of competence that the average person can achieve in two languages” (ST 11 Jan 1979). The Goh committee thus recommended a restructured education system to replace the current single curriculum. The philosophy underpinning this restructuring was that of meritocracy and the notion that intelligence is genetically determined. “Much of the prejudice against streaming of school children derives from an egalitarian philosophy fashionable in the Western World”, the committee wrote (1979:1.5). In their view, this egalitarian philosophy “rests on a prejudice against the pursuit of excellence” and was therefore inappropriate for Singapore. They recommended instead that the MOE accept “the logical consequences of the fact that different children have different capacities to acquire knowledge.” Because this knowledge is imparted through language, proficiency in the school languages should be
made a key determinant in the streaming of children. After a 4-day heated debate in parliament, these recommendations formed the core of the 1979 New Education System (NES; Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2 Education Ladder of the New Education System, 1979**

*Source: Singapore, Ministry of Education, 1986*
The objective of the NES was "to make students as bilingual as they can be" (ST 31 Mar 1979). It was to enable above average and average pupils to be proficient in English and at least literate in Malay/Mandarin/Tamil. Director of Education Chai Kai Yau told parents that they had to face the "hard facts" that there will be "children who cannot learn so many things" (ST 5 July 1979); only the bright pupils can be effectively bilingual.

Under this new system, about 50 percent of curriculum time during the first three years of Primary schooling was to be spent on language learning as opposed to factual knowledge. On the basis of their final results at the end of year three, Primary students would be streamed into either the *Normal Bilingual* course (3-year programme) involving two languages (EL1 and MT2), *Extended* bilingual (4 years) also involving two languages but at a slower pace, or the *Monolingual* course (5 years). The medium of instruction in the Monolingual course would be English for Malay and Indian students, and until 1981 when they could opt for English, Mandarin (with some instruction in oral English) for Chinese students. The student allocation for the three streams was to be about 60, 20, and 20 percent respectively.

At the end Primary Six, students in the *Normal* and *Extended* course would sit the PSLE, which streams them into either the *Special*, *Express*, or *Normal* Secondary Course. Monolingual students would sit the *Primary School Proficiency Exam* (PSPE), which takes them to vocational training to learn a trade. The *Special Bilingual* stream (the top 10%) was to be reserved for "those pupils who are ablest" to do two "first" languages (EL1+CL1) and possibly a third language (like German or French). This stream would be offered only at the nine Chinese-medium Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools. These SAP schools were selected by the government to be elite, "effectively bilingual institutions", responsible to protect the Chinese heritage and to produce the next generation of "social brokers". The *Express* stream was for the above average pupils who would do a "first" and "second" language (e.g. EL1+CL2). The *Normal Bilingual* stream was for the average students who would also do two languages but at a basic level. After four years, *Special* and *Express* students would sit for their GCE "O" level examinations, which streams them into a 2-year course in junior colleges or a 3-year course in school centres. Which stream one would be placed into was again contingent on language. The
2-year programme required proficiency in English, and a pass in the second language. And the 3-year course was for those weak in English, and focused on language skills. Students in the Normal stream would sit for the GCE “N” exam, which led to vocational training. However, if they did well, they could sit for the GCE “O” level exam after one more year.

The rationale behind this streaming is Lee Kuan Yew’s views about bilingualism and its relationship to intelligence. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Lee Kuan Yew developed some very specific ideas about language learning, that there was only limited “space” in the brain for languages. As such, only the most intelligent would be able to cope with two languages at the highest level. While this language-based form of educational streaming was based on an acknowledgement that children have different learning abilities, at the same time, it entrenched language-based meritocracy in the structuring of Singaporean society. The weaker students could only make do with a working knowledge of English. Given the government’s views of language, without mother tongue education, they would be deculturalised and rootless. They would thus be outside the imagining of the nation. In contrast, the brightest students were offered full opportunities to be effectively bilingual. They are the future decision-makers, the keepers of the “key to an internal stabiliser in the form of cultural heritage” (ST 31 Aug 1989), the keepers of the key to the imagining of the nation. The language ideologies employed in the structuring of language-based streaming thus separate the nation-builders from the non-nation-builders. What is particularly curious, yet indicative of a trend that has followed since, is that the proposed restructuring was based primarily on problems facing the Chinese community. It was the continued use of dialects in the homes of the Chinese that hindered their effective learning of languages at school. As most Malay students spoke Malay at home, and most Indian students spoke Tamil or English at home, they did not face the same problems that the Chinese community did. Nonetheless, the proposed solutions in the restructuring of education were implemented across all groups.

Furthermore, the Goh Report and NES also provided a framework within which to further the “Asianising of Singapore” and to solidify the polarisation of language within the imagining of the nation. Because English could potentially lead to deculturalisation,
the argument goes, Singaporeans needed to be “re-culturalised”. They needed to have their Chineseness, their Indianness, and their Malayness restored to them. And because English carried the threat of decadent Westernisation, Singaporeans needed a cultural ballast to ground them and protect them. The answer to both of these threats lay in the meanings of the mother tongue. And so, in addition to restructuring the education system so as to ensure at least minimal bilingualism within the populace, the government embarked on an all-out effort to make each person’s ethnic language their mother tongue. As the next two chapters will show, the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* has been the most visible location for this effort.

5.4 Conclusion

I began this chapter by discussing the nation building activities of the PAP government and its style of governance under Lee Kuan Yew during the immediate post-Independence years. In this discussion, a number of key discourses were identified by which the government leaders have attempted to imagine the nation in Singapore: multiracialism, pragmatism, meritocracy and vulnerability. These discourses have worked powerfully to establish the authenticity of the government and the nation and hence the legitimacy of Singapore to exist as an independent nation, and largely through language.

Through the use of English, the government has sought to pursue Singapore’s modernisation, and to position Singapore in the world. The discourse of the neutrality of English legitimised the choice of English for these purposes. However, at the same time, English was a vice: while necessary for modernisation, it also carried the threat of social decadence. If unrestrained, the decadence brought with English would ultimately undo its economic benefits. By placing language ideologies within a crisis framework and as a strategy of “qui hu nan xia”, the leaders harnessed the English language and subordinated it to the nationalist agenda. Thus on the one hand, they were able to gain legitimacy in the world by showing they were willing to take on English (an important strategy in attracting foreign investment). They were also able to position themselves within the world wherein the worldliness of English operated. On the other hand, by portraying English as
dangerous, the leaders also used English as a way to establish their own legitimacy at home. They were able to demonstrate that they were not selling out to their worldly position, but that they were still in control of Singapore’s destiny.

Related to the last aspect, English also allowed the government to pursue its policy of multilingualism, a pedigree of multiracialism. In the functional polarisation of language, the mother tongue languages also had their place in the imagining of the nation. It allowed the government to downplay Singapore’s Chineseness and instead to demonstrate its Southeast Asianess. It also gave each of the three main ethnic communities a place within the nation. And, perhaps even more importantly, it gave each of the three main ethnic communities an apparent equal place in the nation.

This balancing of the various faces of authenticity and legitimacy was done in part the ambiguous and contradictory manipulation of language ideologies. In particular, the view that values and language could be separated with respect to English, but not with the mother tongue languages, allowed the leaders to establish this functional divide and the language ideology that supported it. In practice, however, this balancing act began to run into some difficulties. According to the Goh Report, the bilingual policy was not working. Given the construction of language ideology, this failure of the bilingual policy was tantamount to a national crisis. And so we saw a flurry of activity in the restructuring of the education system, in the implementation of a moral education policy, and in the emphasis that the mother tongue languages were necessary to balance the negative effects of the English language. All of these efforts are captured in the discourse of the “Asianising of Singapore”. At the same time, with language-based streaming, English was firmly rooted in the structuring of Singaporean society. In the next chapter, I will look in detail at the language ideological debates concerning this functional polarisation of language, and its relationship to the imagining of the nation.
Appendix A

Summary8 of Mr. Lee’s Speech
at the Singapore Teachers’ Union Dinner:
“Bilingualism is more than just learning two languages”

The Straits Times
11 November 1972

Thirty years ago, there was not in Singapore the same equality of opportunities which we
have today. As a result, men with considerable ability and dedication to their society went
into the teaching service. In the years prior to independence, they played a significant role
in the fight for self-determination. Many today are social and political leaders. Now with
universal education, free primary schools, nominal fees for secondary schools, and ample
number of scholarships and bursaries, the sieving process has become more thorough. It
is much more difficult to get some of the best into the teaching service.

I would like to pose to you, not the role which as unionists alone you should concern
yourselves with, but your role as teachers.

The English stream has now nearly 9,700 teachers; the Chinese stream about 6,000.
Unless this trend is reversed, the ratio will widen in favour of the English stream which
you represent. This fact confers on you greater responsibilities, especially when confusion
of values and selfishness of purpose are now perversely affecting men in many developed
English-speaking countries.

Function

We now read of teachers and doctors of developed countries on strike — a sign of a
disordered society. We have not come to such a sad situation. I hope we never will. As a
union, your function is to see that teachers acquire their fair share of material rewards.
But in the context of the Singapore of the 1970s, I believe it is more important that their

8 Although the newspaper headline says “summary” of Lee Kuan Yew’s speech, it is in fact the complete
status in society is enhanced. No amount of monetary rewards can match what an enterprising man can get in the private sector. It is status in society, the respect which fellow-citizens hold you in, which is crucial in attracting to and retaining within, the teaching service, a hard core of men and women in the schools who can maintain high standards.

The accent in the next five years is on quality. How do we achieve this in the schools? The professionals in Education Ministry say we have done marvellously. In 1971, 53 per cent (47,000) passed their Primary School Leaving Examination. This year, nearly 62 per cent (53,000) or 6,000 more pupils have passed the Primary 6, and are entitled to enter Secondary I. Does this reflect an increase in teaching quality? Or was it the dropping of history-geography as an examination subject and the testing of basic intelligence and learning capacity in the first and second languages, mathematics and sciences to go on to Secondary I?

In the English stream, nearly 63 percent passed. In the second language, in Chinese 62 per cent passed; Malay 82 per cent passed; Tamil 62 per cent.

We are now suddenly faced with 6,000 more students for Secondary I next year, a shortage of classrooms, a shortage of teachers. We have to improvise – gymnasiums, extra classrooms, and other facilities. Schools which have single sessions will be used by other schools for Secondary I classes. All this we can do and more, provided we keep the birth rate down.

The other simple alternative was to do what the Finance Ministry said we ought to do – decide on a “cut off” point. Last year, 47,000 went into Secondary I. So, 47,000 ought to be the “cut off” point. I believe it will be wrong to do this.

We have to respond to the consequences of adjustments we have made, more Primary 6 passes partly because of the better teaching in the English schools where most of the pupils are, and partly because of adjustments in the examination syllabi.

The first basic target is to lower the birth rate. The second is to get teachers, who are well balanced and well trained to discharge their duties to our children. Then we will have a society with much more ballast.

How to teach enough to a child so that he or she wants to go on reading and learning after the years in school are over?

Dialect

With one language, and that the mother tongue in a British, a French, or German society, it is difficult enough. In our society it is doubly difficult.
The average Chinese boy who goes to an English school is really learning two non-mother languages. He learns English, which is not his mother tongue. He learns Mandarin as a second language. It is also not his mother tongue because of then the dialect is the language of the home. This presents us with a very grave challenge. It is possible of solution, provided we understand that we cannot expect all those who passed – the 62 per cent – to be simultaneous translators. A language is first heard and spoken before it is read and written. Teach our children enough for them to understand and to speak freely in two languages. But let them choose which one to use as the master language to articulate their thoughts effectively in. It is important that this is done very early in the schools. It is easier for a European to command two languages, perhaps English and French, or English and German. These are cognate languages.

**Effort**

But English and Chinese are completely different, one Greco-Roman and Anglo-Saxon in its base, the other not spelt or pronounceable from the ideographic script, monosyllabic and tonal. To be able to speak both fluently requires a great deal of effort.

I am convinced that this effort has to be made, if we are to survive as a distinctive society, worth the preserving. Or we will become completely deculturalised and lost. If we become like some societies, speaking pidgin English, mindlessly aping the Americans or British, with no basic values or culture of their own, then, frankly, I do not believe this is a society or nation worth the building, let alone defending.

The minimum we must achieve is to teach enough, in the mother tongue, of the basic values and culture. Even if the boy or the girl is unable to recite a Confucian classical passage or a pantun or whatever its equivalent in Tamil poetry, he has imbibed enough to know, when he looks at the cinema or the television screen, or more and more the young people who come through on charter flights from Australia and Europe, that they are they and we are ourselves. This is absolutely crucial.

Americans rioted in their universities, in their capital, because their soldiers were being killed in Vietnam. They could not lick the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese as easily as their “think-tanks” had prophesised they could. Canadians and Britishers unconnected with this problem imitated and joined in demonstrations. Australians who have a vital interest in a favourable outcome of the war in Vietnam also demonstrated and rioted.

The nexus of the common language and a not very dissimilar culture gave them a common net. Or, if you like, the lowest common denominator pulls them down, as sometimes it raises them up in nuclear and astro-physics.

If we fail to resolve effectively our problem of languages, and preserve what is best in our respective cultural values, we could become an even more enfeebled version of the deculturalised Caribbean calypso-type society.
They were brought over as slaves and have lost any trace of the African in them. The few Indians and the Chinese amongst them have also been deculturalised: the island-in-the-sun, steel-drum-beating and rum-brewing-and-drinking, happy go lucky life.

**Values**

I do not believe we can survive in Singapore with that way of life. Eventually we may evolve a common culture for Singapore. Meanwhile, it is the hard framework of basic cultural values and the tightly knit Asian family system that have enabled us to achieve what we have. The achievement was not that of economic planners alone. Every time you pass a construction site, cast your eye and see who is the bricklayer, plumber, electrician. Who is the man who gives the finish to your woodwork and tiles? They have that urge to work, to save, and to achieve.

We sent two military officers to sit in two courts martial in Trinidad nearly two years ago. A mutiny had taken place. They had only one battalion. Yet they mutinied. I read the reports of our two officers with great interest. They had never been to that part of the world, nor had they been to Britain where one could meet people from the Caribbean. These two officers came back and recited their experience, not only of the courts martial, but of a way of life. A court martial that could have taken two weeks dragged on for more than three months.

**Holiday**

Every now and again they have a fiesta. Everyone enjoys himself for weeks on end. A holiday is not just for one day. A holiday runs for whole weeks. So the court martial was suspended and everybody had a jolly good time.

Well, if we were in the Caribbean maybe we could survive doing our own thing. You have a wealthy and benign American civilisation that likes to seek holidays in the sun. So you build hotels by the beaches, and large part of your population consists of nothing but servers and hangers-on.

That was one of the reasons for the mutiny. It is Black Power in an island where Blacks are in political control. But the Blacks found themselves in an unsatisfying position as servers to Whites who have the cash.

Please note that when I speak of bilingualism, I do not mean just the facility of speaking two languages. It is more basic than that, first, we understand ourselves, what we are, where we came from, what life is or should be about, and what we want to do. Then the facility of the English language gives us access to the science and technology of the West. It also provides a convenient common ground on which the Chinese, Indians, Ceylonese, Malays, Eurasians, everybody competes in a neutral medium.

We are determined to succeed. I know it can be done and it must be done early in life.
I paid for it bitterly because I was foolish enough, when I was young, not to listen to my grandmother who sent me to Chinese school to learn Chinese because the method of teaching was wrong. I spent only two years in a Chinese school. They made me recite passages parrot-fashion. I scrubbed it out of my mind when I went to English school. And I have had to study Chinese since the 1950s and I am still doing so.

And it is not just learning the language. With the language goes the fables and proverbs. It is the learning of a whole value system, a whole philosophy of life, that can maintain the fabric of our society intact, in spite of exposure to all the current madnesses around the world.

Balanced

My wife and I took the decision to send our three children to Chinese school and also get them educated in English. I know it can succeed. I will not accept anything less from our teachers. It is your responsibility as a union of teachers not only to find adequate material rewards and status for your members. I think this is necessary if we are to attract, recruit, and retain people who can educate our young in a balanced and rounded way, and also instil in them that desire to work and to achieve. Unless we do this, we will slide downhill.

Life in Singapore is not just more hotels and more dinners, bigger and bigger banquet halls, more motor cars, more flyovers, more one-way streets, more pay, more 13-month payments – all these are necessary. But all these will lead to futility if in the process we lose our way, if we are unable to identify ourselves, and confuse ourselves with that which we are not.

Whilst we may speak English, whilst we may use the English language, whilst we may watch what the English-speaking world in America and Canada, in Britain, in Australia and New Zealand, are doing, either in person by visiting them or they visiting us, or on the TV screen, in the cinemas, much of it is not us.

Only when we first know our traditional values, can we be quite clear the Western world is a different system, a different voltage, structured for purposes different from ours.

If you discharge this second responsibility as a union of teachers, then I shall help you discharge your first responsibility to teachers as union members.
CHAPTER SIX

THE SPEAK MANDARIN CAMPAIGN: “A HISTORICAL MOMENT OF DISCURSIVE ACTIVITY”

Guo jia yao jin bu, yu yan yao gou tong
jiu cong jin tian qi da jia shuo hua yu
bu fen nan he nu, bu fen lao he shao
bu zai yong fang yan da jia shuo hua yu
ting yi ting ji yi ji kai kou shuo ji ju
duo qin qie dou bianli jian dan you rong yi

For our country to progress, we must have
a common language to communicate with each other
From now on, let’s speak Mandarin
Regardless of gender and age, let’s not use dialects.
Let’s all speak Mandarin; Listen and remember,
let’s start to speak a little Mandarin.
Then we will feel closer and it will be easier
to understand one another.

Zho yi zhao shou, dian yi dian tou
gan jie yi hao shou
wo yao xiang, wen yi wen hou,
bu zhi ru he kai kou zai
zhe ge she huiwomen xu yao yu yan
lai gou tong rang
women jie jin jie jin suo duan juli
da jia shou hua yu
xian kai kou jiang hua yu, jie da huan xi (2x)

Say hello to each other, the feeling will be good.
I would like to greet you and ask how are you doing,
But don’t know what to say.
In this society, we need a language to communicate.
Let’s close the distance between us.
Everyone speak Mandarin.
When you start to speak, use Mandarin;
Everyone rejoice (2x)
- The “Speak Mandarin Campaign” song;
(translated by Alice Heng)

6.1 Introductory Thoughts

In the previous chapter, I examined the functionally polarised structure of language
ideologies within the bilingual policy. On the one side, English has been rationalised
largely on the basis of pragmatism, as being the language for commerce, for development,
and for inter-ethnic communication. On the other, the “mother tongue” languages have
been rationalised through the logic of multiracialism, as being the language for cultural
identity. However, this divide is ultimately difficult to sustain, as the lines separating the

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functions of the two languages are very ambiguous. Yet, rather than seeing it as problematic, the PAP leaders have used this ambiguity as a key means by which to respond to the perceived moral crisis facing the nation. They turned meanings around to argue that, through both its cultural neutrality and cultural essence, the presence of English was responsible for the increase in unwholesome Western elements in society. In response to these negative effects of the English language, the government embarked on a very aggressive campaign to re-ethnicise and de-Westernise the people through the “Asianising of Singapore”. Language has been central to this Asianising process. And so, while in no way diminishing the dominant position of English (and while even enhancing it), the government has campaigned to make the “ethnic” languages of the three communities their respective “mother tongue”.

Although all three communities are the focus of this Asianising effort, the Chinese community has been especially targeted. This has been rationalised by the claim that the Chinese community is uniquely fragmented by linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity. MP Dr. Ow Chin Hock made this argument in a recent speech to the Catholic High School alumni: “Unlike the Malay community, Chinese Singaporeans do not have such uniting factors as a common language and religion.” In fact, he argued, there is no such thing as a Chinese community in Singapore. Rather, “there are three sub-communities: the English educated Chinese, the Chinese educated, and the less educated, dialect-speaking Chinese” (ST 16 Oct 1990). The headline captioning Ow Chin Hock’s speech in The Straits Times read, “Chinese Singaporeans face crisis in values and culture”. In the late 1970s, it was the divisive multiplicity of dialects that particularly concerned the government. Lee Kuan Yew made this argument in his 6 April 1978 televised panel discussion on bilingualism, noting that the patchy results of the bilingual policy were mostly evident among the Chinese. This was, he said, because of the continued presence of dialects in the home. “The fortunate thing is, of course, that for the Malays and the Indians, they don’t face this problem”, he said. “Otherwise, we might be in a worse position today” (ST 7 April 1978).

Nowhere was this argument put forward more forcefully than in the 1979 Goh Report. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that there were two significant findings published in the Goh Report: the failed bilingual policy and the moral crisis. Both of these problems were
traced back to "the dialect problem". The committee wrote: "The majority of the pupils are taught in two languages, English and Mandarin. About 85 percent of these pupils do not speak these languages at home. When they are home, they speak dialects. As a result, most of what they have learned in school is not reinforced" (1979:4.4). Because of their continued use of dialects in the home, students in the English stream schools (where increasingly the majority were going) were unable to cope with learning Mandarin. Given the language ideologies embedded in the bilingual policy, the failure of bilingualism to take hold in the Chinese community meant the Chinese were particularly vulnerable to the effects of deculturalisation. Hence, direct intervention in the re-ethnification of the Chinese community was seen by the government to be of national importance.

It was for the purposes of making Mandarin the "mother tongue" of the Chinese community within the overall agenda of "Asianising Singapore" that the Speak Mandarin Campaign (hereafter SMC) was launched in 1979. Major Fong Sip Chee, Minister of State (Culture), told participants at a Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) meeting: "Strictly speaking, there is no common mother tongue as such among the Chinese in Singapore... Therein lies the importance and justification of the Speak Mandarin Campaign" (ST 19 Apr 1983). This is not to say the SMC has no relevance for the non-Chinese communities. As I will discuss more in the next chapter, because of the logic of multiracialism, the government has pledged to support the languages and cultures of the Indian and Malay communities as well. However, at the same time, the non-Chinese communities have interpreted the SMC as evidence of an increase in Chinese dominance. Their disconcertion can be found in the SMC and in the language ideological debates that have been generated by the campaign (section 7.5.1).

The SMC has been the focus of a number of studies. Althenger-Smith (1983) and Ng Kah Meng (1980/81), for example, looked at the campaign as an aspect of the government's language planning policies. Kuo (1984) and Platt (1985) looked at the involvement of the press in promoting the campaign, and at some of the themes that emerged in the government's rationalisation for the campaign. Newman (1986, 1988) also looked at some of the government's arguments for the campaign, and noted the contradictions in the campaign's messages. What I want to do here that is different from
these approaches is to consider the Speak Mandarin Campaign as an 18-year "historical moment of discursive activity" (Blommaert, 1997) in the imagining of the nation. For the most part, the government's efforts to re-ethnicise the Chinese through the "Asianising of Singapore" find their nexus in the language ideologies and discourses enacted within the SMC. The SMC has been the framework of policy interpretation, legitimisation and implementation, as well as the location for resistance to these policies and to the language ideologies associated with them. It is where language ideological debates and the ideological foundations of the nation meet, together organising a sense of how Singapore is to be understood, and understood in relation to the world.

In this chapter and the next, then, my discussion of language ideologies within the imagining of the nation will be anchored in the SMC. As a way to organise this discussion, I find it helpful to think of the development of language ideologies within the SMC as being analogous to that of the flow of a river: ever moving through the landscape, yet always comprising the same substance. It meanders, at times is intermittent, at other times is a torrential force, and at times is a set of rapids with eddies countering the flow. The river is the discourse of language ideology; the riverbanks and the landscape are the social, historical and political circumstances within which this river flows. While the emphasis of the campaign may vary at times, the various ideological debates pertaining to language are continually present and even presumed. Continuing with this analogy, one cannot say the landscape determines the path of the river, nor that the river determines the shape of the landscape; rather, it is their interaction that shapes the total "scenery" or "historical moment". It is this river that we will travel, noting where the bends are, the contradictions and eddies, and noting how these interact within the overall imagining of the nation. At all moments, the "river" is central to establishing Singapore's authenticity and legitimacy as a state in an ever-changing world - both with respect to the world, and with respect to the electorate. It has to do with what the leaders perceive to be the "ideal" society for Singapore to imagine.

There are three major sections of this river; each is located within specific moments of historicity. The first is the period around 1979 with the launch of the SMC to about 1985. During this time, language ideologies were concentrated on the "use more
Mandarin, less dialects” debate. The second is about 1985 to 1990. This period is characterised by a growing confidence within the Chinese community about expressing their Chineseness and about the status of Mandarin within the nation. Finally, the third section, which will be the topic of the next chapter, is the period from about 1990 until today. During this period, language ideologies primarily revolve around the ‘Mandarin versus English’ debate. Part of this analysis will also involve the language ideological debates concerning English. As English began to take an increasingly prominent place in Singaporean society, there was a corresponding growing debate concerning Standard Singapore English versus Colloquial Singapore English. Thus, we will see a common regression equation run through all of the various language debates: “more Mandarin, less dialects”; “more Mandarin, less English”; more Standard Singapore English, less Colloquial Singapore English”.

As we begin this analysis, it is important to keep in mind that, while it is possible to see three distinct “sections” in this river, all of the various ideological debates concerning language are also always active and assumed in the current particular debate. In this chapter, I will begin by describing the main features of the “river”, looking at the campaign’s marketing strategies, implementation, and its genre as a national campaign. This discussion will also foreshadow some of the contradictions inherent in the campaign vis-à-vis its location within the “Asianising of Singapore”. The rest of this chapter and the next will be a journey on this river, noting the shifts in language ideologies and the reasons for and effects of these shifts, and locating these shifts within their socio-political and historical contexts. Because the SMC has been largely a textual event, I will also use the various features of discourse analysis described in Chapter Two (section 2.4) for specific government speeches that have appeared in the press to anchor this discussion. This analysis will allow us to see the process of constructing language ideology in the imagining of the nation as the government leaders seek to legitimise their image of the “ideal” society to the people. It is in the relationship between language ideology (in this case, as expressed in the Speak Mandarin Campaign) and the nation (the Asianising of Singapore) that we are able to see the process of the imagining of the nation.
6.2 The Speak Mandarin Campaign

It is not exactly clear who first proposed the idea of a *Speak Mandarin Campaign*. Dr. Mary Tay, a prominent linguist in Singapore, seemed to think it did not matter: “Why do you need to know? A decision was made and the government sets a policy; everything and everyone adjusts to meet and support that policy” (interview, 7 Dec 1994). The more generally-held view is that expressed by Singapore’s ambassador to China and a former *SMC* committee member, Cheng Tong Fatt (interview, 16 Nov 1995). He argues that, like most government policy and given his personal interest in language issues throughout the 1970s, Lee Kuan Yew was the direct source of the campaign. The first specific mention of a *Speak Mandarin Campaign* was at a 12 August 1979 forum organised by the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) on “Promoting Mandarin among the Chinese”. At this forum, SCCCI chairman Teo Liang Chye suggested that, in keeping with Lee Kuan Yew’s recent stress on Mandarin, a “promote the use of Mandarin” campaign should be launched. From there, events happened quickly. Five days later, on 17 August, *The Straits Times* announced that “A committee has been formed to carry out a systematic, nation-wide campaign to make Mandarin the common language of the Chinese... [to] promote the habit of speaking more Mandarin instead of dialect.” And just three weeks later, on 7 September, Lee Kuan Yew launched the first campaign.

The SCCCI was quick to rally behind Lee Kuan Yew. In their first meeting after the launch of the *SMC*, a vote was held concerning what the official stand of the Chamber should be regarding Mandarin. “Almost a thousand hands shot into the air at once, in the glare of TV lights”, *The Straits Times* dramatically reported. “The silent ayes were decisive. Not a limb wavered... It was a historic moment, for the representatives – from Chinese clan, trade and civic organisations – unanimously voted to adopt Mandarin as the *lingua franca* of Singapore’s multi-dialect Chinese community” (24 Sept 1979). Their stand is significant in that the SCCCI was largely responsible for the organisation of the first campaign, and has been a permanent feature of the secretariat ever since. Being a prominent leader of the Chinese business community and its association with grassroots
clan leaders, the support of the SCCCI was crucial in bringing the campaign to the community level. As well, the different clan organisations traditionally used dialects in their meetings; dialects are what distinguished one group from the other. Their agreement to adopt Mandarin at clan meetings was thus enormously significant in setting the precedent for a more unified (i.e. homogenised) Chinese community.

The government has appealed to three main arguments for the campaign. First, there is the *educational* argument. Because the continued use of dialects created a burden for children having to learn two languages at school, the use of dialects at home must be restricted and replaced by Mandarin. Second is the *cultural* argument. The dominance of English, and the threat of deculturalisation and Western decadence that came with it, made it necessary to “re-ethnicise” the Chinese Singaporeans and equip them with cultural ballast. This was best done through Mandarin. Through this re-ethnicisation, they would also be able to form a united Chinese community. Finally, there is the *communicative* argument, which contends that the multi-dialect Chinese community needs a *lingua franca*. The most logical choice was Mandarin, as it was neutral to all dialect groups and the *lingua franca* in China. While these arguments have been the mainstay of the government’s official rationale, given what has already been said about language ideologies within the bilingual policy, it is clear that the issues are in fact much more complex. These complexities will be discussed in section 6.3. But first I will turn to the structural and administrative aspects of the campaign.

### 6.2.1 The Campaign: Genre and Paradox

If we take into account Kuo and Chen’s (1983:100) observation that “Singapore is known to be a planned society, and its planning framework is, in general, a centralised one”, then it is perhaps not surprising that “the national campaign” has become the most common form of government-to-people communication. In his analysis of campaigns in Singapore, Tham Kok Wing (1983) identified sixty-six national campaigns between 1958 and 1982. National campaigns are all planned by the Prime Minister’s office. They have been used to direct and influence public awareness of certain issues. Campaigns have been
used to encourage people to behave in specific desired ways and to control the spread of certain "undesirable" practices or values. They have also been used as an instrument for policy implementation, to consolidate mass support, and ultimately to psychologically build up the citizenry for the task of nation building. Their scope has been wide, including Anti-Spitting, Courtesy, and more recently (1996/1997), a Smile campaign. While diverse, the campaigns nonetheless exhibit a certain stable and generic form, such that they can be seen as a speech genre (Bakhtin, 1986). As described by Bakhtin, while "each separate utterance is individual... each sphere within which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances" (1986:60). These "stable types" he called speech genres. When a person speaks within a particular genre, "he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances... with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or other (builds on them, polemicises with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener)" (1986:69). And so "any utterance is a link in a very complexly organised chain of other utterances."

As a genre, there is a general sense of predictability about national campaign speeches. Regardless of the speaker, and even regardless of the specific campaign, there is a stable pattern of argumentation and of the style and tone. The general framework is that of crisis management: drawing upon the discourses of Singapore's eternal vulnerability, a crisis is presented, and the government's answer to that crisis is rationalised through various rhetorical and linguistic means as being the only answer to that crisis. Thus, when leaders choose the campaign genre to organise their message regarding language for the Chinese community, they are also organising how the message will be read and anticipating what assumptions their audience will bring with them. This structure is also essentially the same as that followed by Lee Kuan Yew in his 1972 speech to the teachers' union that we saw in the previous chapter. The similarity has led some scholars to suggest that the SMC began already in the early 1970s (Newman, 1988).

It is significant to note that, while the SMC has been targeted at only the Chinese community, it has been presented in the genre of a national campaign. In the first place, the campaign has its precedence in the pre-Independence national language campaigns
It has followed the objective of national campaigns to alter behaviour in its intensely prescriptive effort to *make* Mandarin their mother tongue rather than dialects or English. The *SMC* speeches warn of an impending national crisis should the Chinese community fail to unite through the use of Mandarin. In fact, in many ways, the *SMC* has been even *larger* than the national campaigns. In terms of duration, it has been by far the longest running campaign. The original time frame for the campaign was ten to fifteen years: that in five years all young Chinese would drop dialects, and that in ten years Mandarin would be the established language in coffee shops, hawker centres, and so forth (Lee Kuan Yew, *ST* 24 Nov 1979). However, it is now in its nineteenth year. And although it has toned down in recent years, it shows no sign of conclusion (although some *SMC* committee members whom I spoke with thought that, since the campaign’s focus is to replace dialects with Mandarin, the campaign might die off together with the ageing dialect-speaking generation). In terms of organisation, it has its own secretariat, comprising of four or five members from the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA) which co-ordinates and monitors the campaign. Within this Secretariat there are four sub-committees (Ho Kwon Ping, chairman of the *SMC* Secretariat, interview 10 Jan 1995): the Opening Event committee; Business Outreach; Media and Public Relations; and the ongoing Cultural co-ordinators and Planners, comprising of members of government bodies such as the MOE, Home Affairs, Health, and HDB, mass media, community associations, grassroots organisations, and interest groups related to the focus of that year’s campaign.

And its visibility is far greater than any other campaign. As put succinctly by Harrison, “The campaigning for Mandarin has not, as far as can be established, used sky-writing. To find such an omission has been difficult” (1980:177). Banners, posters, air balloons, mascots, and stickers with campaign slogans in both Mandarin and English (for the sake of English monolingual speaking Chinese) encouraging the Chinese to speak Mandarin are displayed in public places. Scarves, T-shirts and buttons have been distributed to front-desk clerks in government offices and to hawkers as a way to identify Mandarin speakers. Campaign supporters distribute various sorts of paraphernalia such as bookmarks and pencils bearing campaign slogans. Campaign advertisements appear on
television, radio and in the cinemas. Numerous activities have been organised by public and private sector organisations and various constituencies, including workshops, essay writing contests, story telling and oratorical contests, and xiangsheng (comic cross-talk dialogues). MPs and members of grassroots organisations (e.g. Citizens’ Consultative Committees, Community Centre Management Committees, etc.) visit residences, markets, and food centres and shops to distribute publicity materials. Mandarin lessons have been made available in community centres, on television and radio, on cassette tapes, and even via telephone and, since 1996, the internet (http://www.gov.sg/spkmandarin). As I discussed in Chapter Three, both the Chinese and the English presses have diligently provided full coverage of all campaign events, conducted surveys and interviews relating to campaign issues, and provided educational support through their bilingual pages, Mandarin lessons, and feature stories. No other campaign has seen such a sustained and extensive presence in Singapore.

While on the one hand, the use of a national campaign as the genre within which to organise its message to the Chinese community has granted the SMC incredibly sustained intensity and national scope, on the other hand, it has also created a number of potentially explosive paradoxes. In the first place, the genre of a national campaign for the promotion of Mandarin within the Chinese community has created an explosive blurring of the lines marking what is for nation and what is for ethnic community within the nation. And secondly, for the most part national campaigns are concerned with public and social behaviour; yet the SMC is ultimately about making Mandarin the “mother tongue”, the language of the private domain. There has thus been an incendiary contradiction between what is public and what is private. As the incongruity between a national, public genre for community-level, private behaviour reveals itself most powerfully in the voices of resistance, I will discuss these conflicts in greater detail in that discussion in the next chapter. However, it is useful to be aware of these potential conflicts as the story of the campaign unfolds.

So far I have talked about the campaign in terms of its marketing features and described some of its organisational aspects. In the next section, I will move on to the implementation strategies directing the campaign. Essentially, while the ultimate target
has been the home, the campaign strategists have worked hard to make Mandarin a necessary and highly visible aspect of everyday life in Singapore. In so doing, the hope has been that the use of Mandarin will naturally infiltrate into the homes of Chinese Singaporeans.

6.2.2 The Campaign’s Strategy: “Homing” In

As I mentioned, the SMC is part of the overall objective of “Asianising Singapore”, of restoring to the Chinese their Chineseness, to make Mandarin the “mother tongue” of all Chinese Singaporeans. This effort is based on the belief that a “race = a language = a culture”, translated into campaign slogans such as “hua ren hua yu” (literally “Chinese people, Chinese language”), “Mandarin is Chinese”, and, “If you are Chinese, make a statement – in Mandarin”. This effort has involved two related approaches: one, to increase the linguistic space for Mandarin, and two, to decrease the space for dialects. According to Lee Kuan Yew in his 1984 SMC speech, these changes in language behaviour needed to occur in the two key areas responsible for influencing the language habits of children: the home and the everyday world outside the home – the food centres, streets, shops, buses and playgrounds. The home, he argues, is more difficult to influence as “administrative action could not reach there” (1979 SMC speech). The campaign has therefore focused on the second environment, on the public sphere, where administrative action is most effective.

This view guided the campaign’s strategy from the beginning. In fact, already in his 6 April 1978 televised discussion on bilingualism, Lee Kuan Yew outlined his plan to create a Mandarin-speaking environment “by making sure that at peak hours, viewing time over the radio [sic] and TV, in the schools, in the camps, at government counters, they are speaking Mandarin. And I hope by social pressure, slowly to get it spoken amongst the young in the shops, in the buses, in the cinemas and the hawker centres” (ST 7 April 1978). He continued this theme in his 1979 SMC speech. He pledged that, once it was clear parents were willing to stop using dialects in the home, the government would ensure that: “All government officers, including those in hospitals and clinics, and especially those
in manning counters, will be instructed to speak Mandarin except to the old, those over 60.” Furthermore, he said, “All Chinese taxi-drivers, bus conductors, and hawkers, can and will be required to pass an oral Mandarin test, or to attend Mandarin classes to make them adequate and competent to understand and speak Mandarin to their customers.”

Following the strategy detailed by Lee Kuan Yew, each year the SMC Secretariat decides on a different domain of human activity to be the campaign’s focus (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Annual Focus of the Speak Mandarin Campaign (1979-1989)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Target group/Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Hawker stalls, bus workers, department stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>no specific focus given; much the same as last year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Public Places: coffee shops, hawker centres, markets, restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Work Places — workers and “work sites”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Markets and Hawker Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Chinese Parents and their Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Public Transport Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Coffee Shops and Restaurants; Seventh Month Auctions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Shopping Centres; Seventh Month Auctions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>White Collar Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Chinese Community in General</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from 1984, when the focus was more directly on parents, the annual target of the campaign concentrated on those areas of everyday interaction within the public sphere. Of course, the ultimate target remained the home, to make Mandarin the “mother tongue”. National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) secretary-general Mr. Lim Chee Onn was quite candid about this when he said: “If Mandarin instead of dialects is used by them in their work places, it is natural that they will extend the use of Mandarin to their homes and families” (ST 18 Sept 1979). Following the line of logic in the Goh Report, when Mandarin has replaced dialects as the main language of the home, then children would have only one language to learn at school, and then the bilingual policy would be successful. I have mapped these different domains of activity that have been targeted by the campaign in relation to the home in Figure 6.1.
As I mentioned earlier, and as will be discussed in greater detail later in my discussion about voices of resistance in Chapter Seven, the close proximity of the public and private spheres resulted in considerable tension. It is also worth noting here already that during the first ten years of the campaign, the focus was largely on the everyday world of average, working class Singaporeans. This contributed to the view that Mandarin carried less status than English, the language of the professional and business sectors (ST 4 Nov 1986). Leaders of the Chinese community were to take issue with this, and to demand a greater commitment from the government to increase the status of Mandarin. Particularly since 1990, the campaign has placed greater emphasis on increasing the status of Mandarin by targeting the professional and business sectors. And so, in line with Lee Kuan Yew’s views about the “dialect problem”, the earlier years of the campaign were very much concerned with the elimination of the dialects. In fact, the campaign was first called the “Speak More Mandarin and Less Dialects” campaign. This was softened a bit after it became clear that public reaction was overwhelmingly negative to this blatant call to eliminate dialect (ST 24 Nov 1979; 25 June 1981; see Chapter 7). After 1981 the slogans were modified to read: “From now on, speak Mandarin, please” and “Let’s speak Mandarin”, and the campaign’s name changed to the Speak Mandarin Campaign.
However, the objective to eliminate the use of dialects through the regression equation of “more Mandarin” and “less dialects” continued to be the most aggressive feature of the campaign. In the early years of the campaign, those who could not speak Mandarin were told to go to the end of the queue in government offices. This was stopped when it became apparent that it was primarily the elderly who were being penalised (Noss, 1984). Some schools imposed penalties on students who continued to use dialects while at school (Newman, 1988). Since 1979, new ethnic Chinese applicants for taxi-driving licences must pass an oral Mandarin test, and hawkers must use Mandarin on their food signs in order to be granted a vendor’s licence. The censorship board stopped authorising dialect films and videos. And on 18 September 1979, RTS announced that dialect programmes over radio and television would phased out and replaced by Mandarin.

Regulations were also put in place concerning the written form of Chinese. Rather than using the dialect romanised spelling, all sectors of society were required to switch to the romanised version for Mandarin, Hanyu Pinyin. Special committees were set up within the Ministry of Culture to standardise the Pinyinisation process of various sectors such as food items on signboards in the hawker centres and markets, the names for new companies and businesses, new HDB towns, new street names, and private estate and building names. As such, fried *kuay teow* (Hokkien) became *chao guo tiao* (Mandarin), and the HDB town *Nee Soon* (Hokkien) became *Yishun* (Mandarin). Parents were even urged to give their children Mandarin names, rather than dialect (*ST* 26 Nov 1979), and the necessary legislative changes were made to enable parents to do so (*ST* 2 Dec 1980; 14 Apr 1981).\footnote{The law on the registration of births requires all children to be registered with their father’s surname. Because the Hanyu Pinyin name is different from the dialect name, the law had to be changed.} While the government never legislated what language was to be used for names on birth certificates, it did make it mandatory to use Mandarin names in the schools. This policy came through a directive from Chan Kai Yau, the Director of Education, in late November of 1980. From the following year, all Chinese Pre-primary and Primary One pupils “will be known in school by their Hanyu Pinyin names... in a MOE move to take the Speak Mandarin drive one step further” (*ST* 20 Nov 1980). As
such, children were in essence given names at school that differed, often radically, from their birth names. For example, the surname Heng (Hainainese) becomes Xing (Mandarin). I will come back to this policy change in my discussion in Chapter Seven of voices of resistance.

The regression equation of "more Mandarin" and "less dialects" also framed the evaluation of the campaign's progress. For example, in his 1982 SMC speech, Lim Chee Onn (Minister without Portfolio and NTUC secretary-general) noted the campaign's progress by saying: "If we are a little more observant, we should notice that at the hawker centres, travelling in a taxi, at the bus stops, markets, shops, cinemas and shopping centres, more and more people speak Mandarin and fewer and fewer people speak dialects." Thirteen of the fifteen speeches given between 1979 and 1994 included detailed statistics, either provided by the MOE, The Straits Times, the Census bureau, or the SMC secretariat. The statistics always attempted to measure the degree to which Mandarin had replaced dialects in the home, workplace, marketplace, and so on. For instance, Lee Kuan Yew cited MOE statistics in his 1984 campaign speech showing that the percentage of Primary One students from predominantly Mandarin-speaking families had increased, while the percentage of those from mainly dialect-speaking families had decreased.

Having looked at some of the more practical aspects of the campaign, in the next section I will concentrate on the language ideological debates that have been used by the government to put forward their views about language and about language within the imagining of the nation. The most natural place to begin would be the voice of Lee Kuan Yew himself – the man who engineered the campaign and the campaign's discourse, and the man who launched the first campaign.

6.3 Lee Kuan Yew: "Mandarin or Dialect?"

Of course, the campaign's implementation and measurement does not happen in a vacuum, and in fact are tied to powerful discourses of language. The regression equation of "more Mandarin" and "less dialects" set the meanings of Mandarin and dialects in a contrastive relation to each other through the manipulation of some very specific
assumptions about language. Furthermore, these ideologies concur in very significant ways with the government's overall agenda of the "Asianising of Singapore" and their ideal image of the nation. In this section, I will look at the meanings of Mandarin and dialect within this regression equation. To anchor this discussion, I will draw largely upon Lee Kuan Yew's speech delivered at the launch of the 1979 SMC (see Appendix A). His speech is significant in that his is the first SMC speech, and the one marking the beginning of the "Asianising of Singapore". Being the first, it also set the tone for subsequent speeches and dialogue about language ideologies in this Asianising process. His speech also incorporates many of the arguments that he presented in his previous speeches and televised forum discussions during the 1970s (see Chapter 5), and thus assumes a recollection of these discussions.

In my analysis, I will look both at the themes presented in his arguments and his construction of language ideologies, as well as some of the linguistic strategies he uses in constructing these ideas. The schematic structure of his text, for example, is formed largely by the use of repetitive themes, whereby he builds his framework of a national crisis. The ultimate aim of his text is to present parents with a "choice" of language behaviour: dialects or Mandarin. Lexicon, conditional statements, metaphor, and contrast are all additional linguistic devices that he uses to construct the terms of this choice, and bring his audience to the logical decision to eliminate the use of dialects from their homes and lives. For example, through the use of conditional statements, he is able to contrast dialects with Mandarin in a regression equation: that the use of one will exact a cost on the other. It also enables him to control the space given to voices and views other than his own, and to create a sense of crisis. His use of metaphors reinforces this regression equation, bringing to his audience very tangible evidence of the logic of his argument. His choice of lexicon is a powerful means by which he expresses his tone and authority to his audience, and by which he builds a contrast between Mandarin and dialects. Words like "dilemma", "coping", and "burden" are examples of how his lexical choices contribute to the tone of his message, this time one of darkness and a sense of crisis. And through the use of pronouns and the positioning of voice in the text, he places the onus of this choice on the audience. Throughout Lee Kuan Yew's text, these various discursive features interact to confront the audience with the regression equation of "more Mandarin" and
“less dialect”. And together they assign to the audience the responsibility of making a “rational choice”.

6.3.1 The Dilemma Is …

A useful place to begin this analysis would be to consider the schema of Lee Kuan Yew’s text. By schema, I mean how the text is organised according to authorial intent. Following the “crisis” framework that we already saw in the previous chapter, Lee Kuan Yew’s speech follows the structure of a problem, a problem consistently described as a national crisis. Kwok (1983) notes a similar textual strategy in Lee Kuan Yew’s 1981 May Day Message. In his analysis of Lee’s speech, Kwok argues that the text can be conceived as an argument which propounds a problem and then provides a solution to that problem. The constitution of the problem “involves a sequential ordering of events, simultaneously employing various devices so as to prepare for the eventual suggested solution as the only rational solution” (1983:71). Similarly, in his SMC speech, Lee organises his text within the framework of a crisis, and uses this framework to advocate his recommended course of action as being the only rational one.

The crisis schema framing Lee Kuan Yew’s speech is obvious right from the first statement: “Chinese Singaporeans face a dilemma” (1). The greater part of his text is devoted to unpacking this dilemma. The dilemma is the multiplicity of languages fragmenting the Chinese community (1-3). The dilemma is the incongruence between the languages used at home and the languages taught at school (2-3) and the limited learning capacity of children to be effectively bilingual (3-5; 63-69). The dilemma is that the more one speaks dialect, the less proficient one will be in Mandarin (9-13; 20-22; 65-66). The dilemma is that children are victimised by the dialect burden as they have to learn two step-mother tongues at school (23-25; 44-46; 57-59). The dilemma is that the continued

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2 All numbers in parentheses refer to the line number of Lee Kuan Yew’s text (see Appendix A).
use of dialect gives opportunity for English or a Hokkien patois to become the *lingua franca* of the Chinese community (5; 13-16; 68-69). Thus the main theme giving this speech coherence is that of a crisis and dilemma.

In constructing this dilemma, he also incorporates some very specific assumptions about language and language learning. Central to Lee Kuan Yew’s argument against dialects is his space-management concept of language learning. By this he means that there is limited room in the brain for language, and that a focus on the one will necessarily exact a cost on the other. He has evoked a number of metaphors by which to access the logic of his argument, including that of computer programming and a bookcase. At a talk organised by the Joint Campus Students’ Association (5 Jan 1979) and entitled “The Importance and the Limits of Bilingualism”, he said:

If I can use a broad metaphor, the more powerful the mind, the greater will be its storage capacity, the better its retrieval capacity, and the more permutations and combinations it can do using words according to accepted rules of grammar. If you have two pocket calculators – one with a seven-digit capacity, the other eight-digit – you know that on the seven-digit calculator, if you put in eight digits, it will blink. That is for just pure storage and retrieval. If you have to programme the rules of grammar, you know that some mini-calculators can take more programming than others. With bilingualism, we are putting into one calculator, two language systems – FORTRAN, COBOL. (ST 11 Jan 1979)

A few years later, he used the same analogy when he said, “No child, however intelligent, has unlimited data storage capacity. The memory space is finite... And the more one learns dialect words, the less space there is for Mandarin words” (ST 26 Oct 1981). Also drawing on the theme of limited memory space for language is his metaphor of a bookcase. In a televised discussion on bilingualism shortly after the launch of the SMC, he said (ST 24 Nov 1979):

At any one time, your immediate recall capacity – and language means immediate recall – is limited. For an average person, it may be 3,000 words. If you are a genius, it may be 30,000 words. If you can’t pass Primary 6, it may be 1,000 words. You have to choose: do you want 1,000 Mandarin or 500 of Mandarin and 500 of dialect? Because that’s the choice. It’s like a bookcase in your library. You may have in your
storeroom thousands of books. But your bookcase in your sitting room can only have say 1,000 books. You’ve got to make up your mind.

“500 Mandarin and 500 dialect” words essentially translates into his idea of Pidgin English at the lowest level and a patois Hokkien that we saw in Chapter Five. In his 6 April 1978 televised discussion on bilingualism, he compared the number of words a person can immediately recall to the number of grains of sand or pebbles that can be grasped with one hand. All of these metaphors emphasise the limited capacity for language and hence the logic for his regressive view of language: Mandarin must increase; dialects must decrease. Through these, then, Lee Kuan Yew uses logical deductive reasoning to structure his argument. In order for the bilingual policy to succeed, the use of Mandarin must not just increase, but the use of dialects must decrease. His metaphors make this “obvious”. Furthermore, they validate his argument that the use of dialects is an unnecessary burden on those trying to master Mandarin. Only a genius would be unaffected by the presence of dialects. His argument thus legitimises the language-based streaming (and meritocracy) in the New Education System that we saw in the previous chapter (Figure 5.2).

In constructing these metaphors, he also draws upon the “common knowledge” of his audience: he uses “you know” twice in his speech to the Joint Campus Association. He also constructs his argument with an extensive use of hypothetical “if” statements to direct his argument (three times in the 5 Jan quote, twice in the 24 Nov quote) – a key strategy used in his 1979 SMC speech as well. Through these various devices, he presents his audience with the need to make a decision: “you have to choose... You’ve got to make up your mind.”

Going back to his 1979 SMC speech, after establishing the dilemma, Lee Kuan Yew then goes on to present the solution to this dilemma. A sacrificial choice needs to be made: to use English and Mandarin, or English and Dialect (22-23; 69-70). English cannot be sacrificed; it is necessary for the purposes of inter-ethnic communication (13-14). Thus it is Mandarin or dialects that must go. Given his construction of the dilemma, that dialects are hindering the success of the bilingual policy, it is clear that of the two, dialects must be sacrificed. Nowhere in his speech does he provide room for any discussion as to how dialects might still fit into the nation’s linguistic landscape. Nowhere
does he discuss how dialects might be perceived outside this dichotic structure of Mandarin versus dialect. Through the logic of the regression equation, for Mandarin to become the lingua franca of the Chinese community, dialects must be sacrificed.

All through his text, Lee Kuan Yew confronts parents with this need to choose between using Mandarin or dialects. It is in the title, and seven times in the text he explicitly states the need to replace dialects with Mandarin (22-23, 25-26, 32-33, 45, 58-59, 63, 69-70). And it frames the entire text. While he began his text with “Chinese Singaporeans face a dilemma”, he ends his text with, “Let us face the problem and make our decision to use Mandarin, not dialect... This is the stark choice – English-Mandarin, or English dialect.” There are also numerous other linguistic devices that he uses to construct this “choice”. As I mentioned earlier, he makes extensive use of hypothetical conditionals to control his argument and direct his audience to the “obvious” choice:

| If we continue to use dialects, | then English will tend to become the common language between Chinese of different dialect groups (14-16) |
| If they allow, or worse want, their children to speak dialects, | then their children will find their work in school very burdensome (23-25) |
| If you can speak dialect, | it is not difficult to learn to understand Mandarin (26-27) |
| If you make some effort, | then learn to speak it (27) |
| If, however, the majority of parents secretly believe they can have English-Mandarin plus dialect for their children, | then administrative action will not be wholly successful (47-49) |
| If our ancestors had come from northern China, | most parents will be Mandarin speaking. Then the few who do not will soon pick it up (55-56) |
| if the majority of parents decide to lighten their children’s learning load | We can create this Mandarin-speaking environment (58-59) |
| if we revert to dialect outside the school | We can go on for another two generations teaching Mandarin and we shall make as little progress (66-67) |
Of these eight conditionals, four of them portray the inevitable negative consequences that would follow from not adhering to the campaign's message. If parents continue using dialects, then all of the government's efforts will be wasted, little progress will be made, children will continue to be over-burdened at school, and the result will be an English-dialect form of bilingualism. The images are dark, with words like dilemma, load, coping, and burden overshadowing the passage. Three of the four other conditionals balance the argument the other way: with some effort, and with a previous knowledge of a dialect, and with compliance to the campaign's message, then Mandarin will become the lingua franca of the Chinese community. The fourth conditional justifies his argument: if Chinese Singaporeans had come from northern China, they would all be Mandarin-speaking, and then this issue would not have been raised. The source of the problem is thus presented as an element of historical circumstance.

Through the use of conditionals, then, Lee Kuan Yew is able to control the questions and the direction of his answers. It is a closed discussion, rather than open-ended, and controlled by the voice of Lee Kuan Yew alone. It is significant that in each of these conditional statements, Lee Kuan Yew uses the very strong modal of "will". In fact, he uses "will" twelve times in his text. There is certainly no ambiguity in Lee Kuan Yew's mind about his message and about his authority in giving this message. This same amount of certainty is expressed in his use of "is" which he used fourteen times. The message that Lee Kuan Yew is giving is very intense, very immediate, very aggressive, and very directed.

Lee Kuan Yew's choice of pronouns is also significant in the way he establishes "the problem" and the solution to that problem. It is helpful here to think of Rees' (1983) scale of pronominal distancing (Maitland & Wilson, 1987; Urban, 1988):

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I/My</td>
<td>2x/0x</td>
<td>We/Us/Our</td>
<td>You/Your</td>
<td>He/His</td>
<td>They/Their</td>
<td>Those</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9x/1x/2x)</td>
<td>(2x/1x)</td>
<td>(0x/1x)</td>
<td>(8x/14x)</td>
<td>(1x)</td>
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What is striking about the distribution of Lee Kuan Yew's use of pronouns is the sharp disparity between the number of pronouns used by Lee Kuan Yew which include himself,
and the number which exclude him. The first person pronouns “we”, “us”, and “our” are used altogether 12 times, of which “we” was used 9 times. However, it must be noted that in each case, it is not always clear who is included in this reference. As Urban notes (1988), often in political discourse, “we” is referentially indefinite. It is generally interpreted as meaning “the speaker plus others”, but it is not always clear whom these “others” may refer to. In most of Lee Kuan Yew’s references to “we”, the assumption seems to be that he is referring to the Chinese community collectively. At times, however, the references are less clear (3,45,66-68); they appear to be the government, although they could possibly also mean the parents, or Singapore as a unit.

In contrast to the limited and vague usage of “we”, the second and third person pronouns “they/their” and “you/your” are used together 25 times, more than twice as often as the first person pronouns. In all instances, the reference is very clear; there is no ambiguity at all. By using such direct and definite second and third person pronouns, Lee Kuan Yew is very clearly separating himself from the source of the problem. Of these 25 references, 20 refer to “Chinese parents”. This is in addition to the six direct references to “parents”. He is very clear that the source of the problem is in the home, and that the ultimate responsibility of diverting this national crisis lies with the choices that parents make. In this respect, it is also instructive to note that when he is establishing the logistics of his argument and identifying the source of the problem, Lee Kuan Yew generally uses the detached third person pronoun. However, when it comes to the call for action, he becomes more direct through the use of “you”. This is particularly evident in the paragraph entitled “Learning Burden” (18-28). All through the paragraph, he talks about “a person”, “Chinese parents”, and “they/their”. However, in lines 25-27, he suddenly switches to “you”: “Therefore, actively encourage your children to speak Mandarin... If you can speak dialect... if you make some effort.” He uses the same tactic in the last paragraph. The finger is thus pointed directly at “you”; you must take action; it is the assignment of responsibility.

Furthermore, the onus is on the parents to make the first move. The government is limited by the action of the parents. In lines 32-34 he says: “Once it is clear to the Government that parents want their children to learn and to use Mandarin, not dialects,
the Government will take administrative action to support their decision.” Later in his speech, he says: “Once parents have decided that their children’s learning load must be lessened by dropping dialect and concentrating on English-Mandarin, we can dramatically alter the language environment. Students will hear and speak Mandarin in the streets, on the buses, in the shops, in the hawkers’ centres” (44–47). And a bit further into his speech he says: “we can create this Mandarin-speaking environment, if the majority of parents decide to lighten their children’s learning load” (57–59). Thus, in his speech, Lee Kuan Yew identifies the problem and the source of the problem, provides rational evidence of the problem, presents his solution as the only viable one, and assigns responsibility to parents for the execution of that solution.

While Lee Kuan Yew’s 1979 SMC speech concentrated primarily on the regression equation itself as the means by which to achieve the full success of the bilingual policy, also built into his speech are some very powerful assumptions about language. These assumptions have been developed through a dichotic structuring between Mandarin and dialects, whereby the one is pitted against the other. By placing Mandarin and the dialects in contrast with each other, government leaders have reinforced both the validity of Mandarin within the imagining of the nation and the inappropriate presence of the dialects, and hence the legitimacy of the regression equation. In the next section, I will look at some of the campaign and government speeches to show the centrality of this dichotomy to the formation of language ideology.

6.3.2 Mandarin versus Dialects

So far, we have looked at how Lee Kuan Yew constructed his argument of “the dilemma”. We also saw how he used various techniques in his speech to direct the “choice” he gave parents towards a logical conclusion. The general structure of the debate is framed by “Mandarin versus Dialects”, and in the regression equation that the use of Mandarin must increase and the use of dialects must decrease. In this section, I will broaden this analysis to other speeches given by government leaders in the “Mandarin
versus dialects" debate, and see how they pitted Mandarin and dialects against each other in order to establish the legitimacy of Mandarin in the imagining of the nation.

*Diakets are vulgar and associated with the uneducated; Mandarin is refined and part of the literary culture.* The vulgarity associated with dialects was noted by Mr. Rahim Ishak, then Senior Minister of State (Foreign Affairs) in a speech at a community centre. Although he does not speak Chinese, he said, he learned some of the swear words in Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew and Hainanese. He went on to note that "in Mandarin, the swear words are less common as the language is supposed to be for the refined people" (*ST*, 11 July 1980). And because of the refining effect it would have on the Chinese-speaking community, he supported the *SMC*. In his 1986 campaign speech, Goh Chok Tong even called Mandarin a "language of courtesy". He observed that, according to a survey conducted by the SNPL Research Department, "customers of departmental stores and restaurants who spoke in Mandarin tended to be more polite than those who spoke in dialects".

The high culture associated with Mandarin was also noted by Lee Kuan Yew when he said, "We must keep the core of our value systems and social mores. To do that, we must have our children literate in Chinese and English. To be literate, they must be Mandarin-speaking, able to read the books, the proverbs, the parables, the stories of heroes and villains" (*ST* 13 Mar 1978). Notice here that Lee Kuan Yew very specifically defined bilingualism as involving literacy in Mandarin and Mandarin-speaking. As Chinese dialects do not have their own unique literate form, dialect-speaking cannot be considered a component of bilingualism/biliteracy, and so once again dialects are barred from holding a legitimate place in the imagining of the nation. In this context, dialects have been described as "polluting" Mandarin. At an NTUC meeting, some members noted that "dialects have spoiled the integrity of Mandarin and its pronunciation, making Singapore Mandarin deviate from standard Mandarin" (*ST* 8 Oct 1979). And in a televised forum discussion, Lee Kuan Yew made a similar observation that "During general elections when I spoke the Hokkien dialect every day, my Mandarin was polluted by the dialect" (*ST* 17 Nov 1980).
Dialects are divisive, fragmentary, and a major cause of miscommunication and misunderstanding; Mandarin is the language of unity, cohesion, and a bridge between the different members of the Chinese community. Goh Chok Tong (then Second Defence and Health Minister) pointed out at the opening ceremony of the SMC in his constituency that, “The spoken and written form in Mandarin are in unison and do not create problems, unlike dialects where one word can have several meanings depending on the dialect it is spoken in” (ST, 9 June 1981). A slide presentation at the opening of the Health Ministry’s SMC at the School of Nursing also showed the mayhem dialects create when misunderstanding occurs in a hospital context. It concluded with the happy ending of patients and nurses communicating in Mandarin (ST, 2 Oct 1985). On other occasions, Mandarin has been referred to as being “a bridge” or a “link” language within the Chinese community, uniting the different dialect groups (ST 8 Sept 1979).

Dialects are a burden on the young, forcing them to learn two languages when they go to school; Mandarin facilitates academic success. As we have seen already, Lee Kuan Yew believes very strongly that the continued use of dialects will hinder a child’s learning of Mandarin. “To speak dialect with your child is to ruin his future”, he has said (ST 17 Nov 1980). Goh Chok Tong provided statistics in his speech at the launch of the 1986 SMC showing that those students who speak Mandarin at home score higher in both languages than those who speak dialects at home, and those effectively bilingual in Mandarin and English score well in all their courses. Lee Kuan Yew has also made a link between intelligence and language learning. He noted in his 1978 National Day Rally speech that “The paradox of bilingualism is that the brighter you are, the easier it is” (ST 19 Aug 1978). And so, as we had already seen with respect to streaming in the NES, the assumption was that the ability to learn any other subject is the same as the ability to master a language. A 1984 analysis of the overall school performance of the PM’s Book Prize winners (given to those with the highest exam scores in their two languages) showed that 74 percent of the winners scored at least five distinctions in their “O” level exams, and 44 percent scored distinctions in all four “A” level subjects. All but one were admitted into university (ST 20 Sept 1984).
Therefore, the argument goes, it is possible to say that effective bilingual (meaning English and "mother tongue") speakers are more intelligent than those individuals with weaker bilingual skills or monolinguals. A bilingual person, Lee Kuan Yew has argued, would have "binocular vision", seeing "the world in 3-D" (ST 26 Feb 1977). At a PM's Book Prize award ceremony, Communications and Second Defence Minister Yeo Ning Hong told the winners that "effective bilingualists" like themselves, "thoroughly bilingual, conversant in their mother tongue and in the language of international communication", were "shining examples of the new Singaporean" (ST 20 Sept 1984). It has even been argued that such a person would have "twice the usefulness to the nation and twice the productivity" of the monolingual person (Chew, 1976:153; ST 13 Nov 1966). Significantly, proficiency in any of the dialects is not included in this discussion. Because dialects have no place in the meanings of mother tongue and of bilingualism, they carry no significance in the definition of the ideal citizen or in the objectives of the imagining of the nation.

*Di*alec*t*s have no value, neither culturally nor economically; Mandarin is linked to a 5,000-year old history, rich in culture, and bears immense economic potential with the opening up of China's markets. In his November 1980 television forum, Lee Kuan Yew stressed that, unlike Mandarin which "has cultural value and will also have economic value twenty years later", dialects "have no economic value in Singapore. Their cultural value is also very low" (ST 17 Oct 1980). And in his 1984 campaign speech, he called the link that Mandarin gives to that 5,000 year-old civilisation "a deep and strong psychic force."

*Di*alec*t*s represent the past and are primitive; Mandarin is the future. This theme was developed in two televised programmes in 1980. The first was a SBC Current Affairs documentary tracing Singapore's history. The commentator noted that in the past, the use of dialects by the early immigrants "sufficed for the market place". But, "these conditions have changed... [As] the future of Singapore lies not as a trading outpost but as a financial, commercial centre, the language competence demand is higher" (ST 15 June 1980). The second was a televised forum entitled "Language Competence and Multilingual Society" (9 Jan 1980). In this forum, Lee Kuan Yew argued that Singapore
“must depend and rely on and choose a more valuable and high-quality language”, and that dialects were “dead-end” languages. This theme was picked up by one of the participants, Nanyang Siang Pau reporter Goh Choon Kang: “As the PM said just now, Mandarin is a developing language; on the other hand, dialect is a stagnant language... The difference between them is: one is a high language while the other is a low language (ST 10 Jan 1980).

By contrasting the meanings of dialects with Mandarin, dialects are clearly denied validity in the imagining of the nation and community, and even in the home. Faced with the choice of Mandarin or dialects, the choice is “obvious”. As the campaign progresses, this choice becomes an imperative. At an awards ceremony for civil servants who had taken a proficiency test in Mandarin, Lee Kuan Yew emphatically stated, “Indeed, wise parents will never let their children speak dialect at all” (ST 26 Oct 1981). This was reported in The Straits Times as a reflection of the government’s determined stance against dialects: “Mr Lee Kuan Yew last night underlined the government’s determination that no Chinese Singaporean should speak dialect” (ST 26 Oct 1981). Thus, although in 1979 Lee Kuan Yew had assured parents that the choice was theirs as to what language they wanted their children to speak in the home, it is very clear what that choice should be.

6.3.3 Mandarin versus Dialects and the Asianising of Singapore

To complete this discussion, I want to bring us back for a moment to the language ideologies within the functional polarisation of the bilingual policy, and the Asianising of Singapore. The definition of English-knowing bilingualism, English plus one’s “mother tongue”, gave no room for dialects. Yet, given the wide usage of dialects in the homes, it would seem that dialects were the “true” mother tongues according to more conventional meanings. By denying any status to dialects in the structuring of language ideologies, the government essentially created a void, leaving the dialect-speaking Chinese community with no mother tongue. However, at the same time, they filled that void by prescribing Mandarin as the mother tongue. What this means is that an English-dialect speaking
person would be no different from an English monolingual speaker in that both would be equally vulnerable to the threats of "deculturalisation". Thus, by establishing the Mandarin versus dialects dichotomy, the leaders have not only established the validity of Mandarin over dialects, but also established the validity of Mandarin as the answer to the threats of English.

First of all, through knowledge of Mandarin, Chinese Singaporeans would have an identity; they would be re-culturalised and re-ethnicised. Quoting from Lee Kuan Yew's speech at the 1972 Teachers' Union dinner (Chapter 5, Appendix A; emphasis mine):

But all these [economic successes] will lead to futility if in the process we lose our way, if we are unable to identify ourselves, and confuse ourselves with that which we are not (182-184)...

Only when we first know our traditional values can we be quite clear the Western world is a different system, a different voltage, structured for purposes different from ours (191-192).

The minimum we must achieve is to teach enough in the mother tongue, of the basic values and culture. Even if the boy or the girl is unable to recite a Confucian classical passage or a pantun or whatever its equivalent in Tamil poetry, he has imbibed enough to know when he looks at the cinema or the television screen, or more and more the young people who come through on charter flights from Australia, New Zealand, Britain, America and Europe, that they are they and we are ourselves. This is absolutely crucial (92-97).

In knowing their "mother tongue", Singaporeans will automatically know all the traditional values, the fables, and the culture that go with it. They will be automatically rooted in a rich historical heritage. Surrounded by so great a history and culture, Singaporeans will thus know who they are in relation to the Western world, and will understand that "they are they, and we are ourselves". Only then would Singapore have an identity and be a "distinctive society" worth preserving (ironically, by identifying with something vast and ambiguous, with 'Asia'). The "mother tongues" are the antidote to deculturalisation, and the sum and substance of a distinctive society.

In addition to being the answer to deculturalisation, by absorbing this Asian culture and Asian values through the "mother tongue", Mandarin is seen to provide cultural
ballast against the decadent values and Westernisation annexed to the English language. Labour Minister Ong Pang Boon concluded that, because the students in the Chinese schools did not exhibit the same manifestations of Western decadence as those in English-medium schools, “the Chinese language was a shield against the drug culture of the West and Chinese cultural and ethical values had proved to be an impregnably stabilising force.” Mother tongue will thus “provide the cultural ballast against the undesirable influences of Western cultures” (ST 24 Oct 1971). According to Lee Kuan Yew, “we can’t live just by new knowledge. You’ve got to have your roots in some old wisdom.” For the Chinese, “Mandarin gives us that link... to old knowledge – the nature of man, the relationship between father and son, man and wife, man and ruler, man and another man as friend.” And because the Chinese “have been using the same language for three, four thousand years, there are almost no human situations which cannot be expressed in an eloquent aphorism and it has got a lot of human wisdom.” Drawing from a metaphor of war, he says this ancient wisdom “can’t be followed blindly, but it does act as a kind of compass to chart our way as we go through the technological mine-fields of the future” (ST 24 Nov 1979).

For these reasons, the bilingual policy was regarded, in the words of Senior Minister of State (Education) Mr Chai Chong Yi, “a major national policy... on which Singapore’s survival would depend.” He assured parliament that the policy would be “pursued relentlessly until it was fully successful” (ST 22 Mar 1978). And for these reasons, Ow Chin Hock (then Parliamentary Secretary, Culture, and Chairman of the SMC Secretariat) urged government leaders to be “relentless” in their “efforts to promote Mandarin” (ST 17 Nov 1980). This relentlessness was seen in Ho Kah Leong’s (Parliamentary Secretary, Education) swift response to a perceived slackening in the campaign’s implementation. “I hope we don’t have to take stern administrative measures to force people to speak Mandarin”, he said. “This would be unpleasant” (ST 24 Oct 1982).

In this first section of the “river”, language ideology centred on the regression equation of “more Mandarin” and “less dialects”. By pitting the two against each other, the superiority of Mandarin over dialects was effectively established. At the same time,
the importance of entrenching Mandarin as the “mother tongue” of the Chinese community was validated. The net effect has been one of homogenisation, where the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Chinese community has been silenced according to the official blueprint of the PAP’s multiracialist discourse (see also Section 7.5.2). What is interesting to note is that in none of these discussions was there any mention of decreasing the status of English, even though it was blamed for deculturalisation and for bringing into Singapore the negative effects of Westernisation. I will discuss the place of English in the Asianising of Singapore in greater detail in the next chapter; however, I will give it some attention here already, at least in terms of the changes in language policy that occurred at this time. This account is important in both foreshadowing our later discussion in Chapter Seven, as well as in helping us understand the increasing and increasingly vocal insecurity of the Chinese community concerning the government’s real commitment to their language and culture. What we find is an considerable increase in the dominance of English, and that, for all its emphasis, Mandarin actually gained little value in socio-economic terms. Rather than uniting the Chinese- and English-educated, the campaign seemed to be a smoke screen for the increasing status of English and for the widening gulf between the two groups.

6.4 What About English?

In spite of the emphasis on Mandarin given by the Speak Mandarin Campaign, educational policy continued to favour English. At the tertiary level, in June 1981, the MOE announced that from 1985/86 all students, regardless of stream, would be judged on the same criteria for admission into university. Students would have to attain a minimum grade of C6 in English as a first language at the “O” level, and C6 in Malay/Tamil/Mandarin as a second language at the “OA” level (ST 1 June 1981). Non-English medium students would also need to pass their General Paper. This announcement sparked a flood of heated and emotional debate in the Chinese press about the unfair disadvantage the policy gave the Chinese-medium students. Their angst was further fuelled by comments made by Permanent Secretary (Education) Goh Kim Leong
concerning 61 bright English-stream students who had failed the Chinese Second Language exam and thus jeopardised their chances to enter Pre-university. “Although the number is small”, he said, “these bright students are our nation’s valuable assets” (ST 17 Sept 1981), and pledged that the ministry would investigate the matter. One reader of the Nanyang Siang Pau said bitterly, “Are there no bright ones among the Chinese school students who are poor in English? Can we take it that none of them are our nation’s valuable assets and so can be thrown away any how?” (reprinted in ST 17 Sept 1981). The Straits Times editor, however, showed support for the policy: “The fact must be faced that while the government hopes to create a bilingual society, English will remain largely the language for one’s economic and educational progress” (17 Sept 1981).

On 23 September 1981, the PM’s principal private secretary, Mr. Lam Chuan Leong wrote an open letter to The Straits Times and the two major Chinese newspapers to respond to the debate, and to justify the government’s policy decision. The letter included charts and statistics showing that “Chinese-streamed students have fared much worse at university in recent years than those from English stream” and that “the key difference in performance underlines the importance of a good command of the English language”. Lam concluded the letter by saying, “Those who wish to go to university must face the fact that English is the medium of instruction” of the institutions of higher learning and that “the development of our economy has made English the working language”. Incidentally, this change in admission requirements resulted in a gender imbalance in university enrolment, with more females being admitted than males (ST 30 Oct 1983). Adjustments were made in 1983 with a relaxing of the second language requirement, allowing those who failed the second language at the ‘A’ level to still be admitted, although graduation would be contingent on a pass in a language proficiency test (ST 1 Nov 1983).

At the primary level, English-medium education continued to attract more and more students. In May 1981, the MOE offered Chinese-stream monolingual students the chance to convert to the English-stream Monolingual programme; 43.4% and 51% from Primary 4 and 5 respectively chose to be transferred (School Circular/81/061), leaving only 33% of all monolinguals in the Chinese-stream. And by 1983, more than 99 percent
of Primary students were registered in English-medium schools. Permanent Secretary (Education) Goh Kim Leong commented at a press conference that “Only 260 children had enrolled for Chinese-medium primary one classes next year (1984). This is out of a total of more than 38,000 children who will start school in January. This is the smallest number of children to enrol in Chinese schools. No parent has put his child in a Malay-medium school since 1976. And there has been no primary one pupil for Tamil schools since 1982” (ST 22, 24 Dec 1983). Non-English medium pupils made up only 6 percent of primary pupils and 23 percent of secondary pupils. It is significant that Goh Kim Leong rationalised his argument on the basis of choices made by parents. Because parents chose to send their children to English medium schools, the government was confronted with having to make a policy decision. However, he did not consider, for example, why parents were making these choices – that perhaps, as was noted in the previous chapter, the NES made the Asian-language schools redundant, or that the functional polarisation of languages did not give parents much choice when considering the pragmatic needs of their child’s future, or even the widespread bias in employment recruitment practices that favoured the English-educated (senior civil servant, personal communication, 1995).

Given the choices that parents were making, Goh Kim Leong argued that the obvious decision was to implement a national school system with English as the medium of instruction in all schools and mother tongue taught as a subject.\(^3\) As an indication that the introduction of the all-English stream was in no way to be seen as a weakening of the bilingual policy, the nine SAP schools and four selected primary schools (referred to as “junior” or “seed” schools of the SAP secondary schools, ST 24 Dec 1983) would be exempt from this ruling. In these schools, English and Mandarin would continue to be offered at the first language level. “The bilingual policy is still strongly supported and will be strongly implemented by the government”, Goh emphasised at his press conference (ST 22 Dec 1983). Significantly, there was no mention of schools offering Malay or Tamil at

\(^3\) A common system of education with English as the medium of instruction for all was first proposed by the Malay Teachers’ Union in 1970. They also proposed that, to preserve cultural-linguistic identity, the teaching of Chinese, Tamil and Malay and their respective literatures be made compulsory. However, the government rejected their proposal for fear that it may upset supporters of Malay and Tamil education. Tham Seong Chee, “The Perception and Practice of Education,” Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore, eds. K. Sandhu and P. Wheatley (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989): 477-502.
the first language level, although provision for this was made for top Malay and Tamil students in 1985 (ST 25 Nov 1985). And so, in 1984 the progressive conversion to English began; by 1987, all schools were converted to English medium. Around the same time (1985), after an MOE study confirmed that the policy of double weightage given to languages in the PSLE was leading to incorrect streaming, Education Minister Dr. Tony Tan announced that the policy would be dropped (although the syllabus time-table stayed the same). This decision actually hints some awareness of the problematic logic in bilingualism-intelligence link promoted by Lee Kuan Yew – an issue that will resurface in the next chapter. As put in The Straits Times, “In scrapping double weighting for language in the PSLE, the government is admitting the unfairness of streaming pupils according to language ability (14 July 1985).

The announcement of the National Education System, the earlier merger of Nanyang and the University of Singapore, the change in NUS admission requirements, and the change in PSLE, all created considerable anxiety among the Chinese-educated about the status and standard of Mandarin. Once again, debate and criticism flooded the Chinese and English press. The concerns raised by the community also were discussed in the March 1984 budget debate in parliament. The Straits Times summarised the controversy by identifying three main issues (13 Jan 1984): first, the consequences that the policy would have for traditional Chinese culture and values; second, the potential drop in the standard of Chinese in the schools and in society due to these policies; and third, the uncertain future for Chinese language teachers. The government responded in numerous articles and speeches, attempting to allay these fears. Leaders assured the community that they remained committed to the bilingual policy and to the Speak Mandarin Campaign. Various proposals to prevent a decline in the standard of Mandarin in the schools were put forward, including scholarships for good bilingual students, the recruitment of good Mandarin teachers from abroad, and the pledge that no second language teacher would be retrenched (ST 23 Jan 1984). Ultimately, as I will talk about in the next chapter, these concessions and assurances were not enough for the Chinese community, and greater action and commitment were demanded. However, for our purposes here, it is already significant that these voices spoke with the vigour that they did, and that there was a
response to these voices at the policy level. There was clearly an increasing "safe space" within which to discuss things Chinese and for the Chinese community to make demands on the government.

Given the changes in education policy and given the concerns expressed by the Chinese community, Lee Kuan Yew's 1984 SMC speech is hugely significant. "One abiding reason why we have to persist in bilingualism", he said, "is that English will not be emotionally acceptable as our mother tongue." He went on to argue that

To have no emotionally acceptable language as our mother tongue is to be emotionally crippled. We shall doubt ourselves. We shall be less self-confident. 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 5,000 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 over-emphasised. Parents want their children to be successful. They also want their children to retain traditional 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 [sic].

In this statement, then, Lee Kuan Yew made it very clear that just because English was to become the main medium of instruction in the majority of schools, it would not necessarily carry the status of a mother tongue. He uses the campaign to re-draw the lines of the functional polarisation of language ideologies within bilingualism. English cannot be a mother tongue. Only Mandarin, within the "race = language = culture" equation, can fill that role. It is a strong psychic force, linked with a 5,000 year-old civilisation. It is the language of identity; it is the language of cultural ballast.

However, just one year later, we begin to see these lines in the functional polarisation of language significantly challenged. The challenge came from Mandarin, and from the increasing potential it carried as an economic language. In the next section, I will look at some of the changes in the "riverscape" that were happening to allow this challenge to take place. I will also look at the challenge itself, and the questions this raises
for the legitimacy of the government's language policies and language ideology in the imagining of the nation.

6.5 The Great Barrier Challenge

During the mid- to late 1980s, there were a number of important events both nationally and internationally that had a profound effect on issues pertaining to Singapore's authenticity in the world and at home. In the first place, at home, the year 1985 was in many ways a watershed year for the Singapore economy. Singapore had just passed its 25th anniversary of self-government the year before. It was now in the league of middle-income developing countries. However, it was also the first time since 1964 that the economy experience a 1.8% decline in its GDP. One of the ways in which the government responded to this shake-up was to launch a full-scale promotion programme through the Singapore Trade and Development Board (STDB). To avoid the risks of putting all of the economy's eggs in one basket, the STDB embarked on an aggressive campaign to regionalise the economy by helping Singapore companies set up operations overseas. Although Singapore had not yet established diplomatic ties with China, in 1985 the STDB opened an office in Beijing. The timing is significant. Between 1983 and 1985, China's economic reform entered a second period of advancement with the release of two major policy statements on urban economic reform and a proposed seventh Five-Year Plan (Harding, 1987). That the STDB went into China in 1985 thus speaks of the confidence the Singapore government placed in these reforms.

Internationally, the late 1980s saw the end of the cold war. Just as the Japanese Occupation during the Second World War in Singapore dismantled the myth of British superiority in the region and made real the possibility of self-rule, so too the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s ushered in new possibilities of social meaning, governance and

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4 Aware of the sensitivities their predominantly Chinese-population caused, Singapore promised its ASEAN partners that it would be the last ASEAN nation to establish diplomatic ties with China. It was not until 1990 that it was able to do so.

5 Singapore already had a trade representative located in its Consulate office in Beijing since 1981. However, in 1983 STDB was formed, and in 1985, it went full scale into China.
organisation. As argued by Emmerson, a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin, “The Cold War straitjacketed Asia in a choice between Western ideas: democratic capitalism versus authoritarian socialism” (1994). The end of the war thus gave ideological space for new possibilities of social meaning, governance and organisation. Encouraged by their countries’ sustained economic growth, Asian leaders increasingly challenged the notion of liberal democracy as being democracy’s only legitimate form. Lee Kuan Yew has been particularly vocal in this debate, earning him the title of the “new Asian warrior who hits back at the West” (ST 28 Jan 1996).

It was in this context that Ong Teng Cheong (Second Deputy PM and secretary-general, NTUC) launched the 1985 SMC in which a new argument for Mandarin was given. In his speech, Ong began like those before him, noting the areas which were still dialect strongholds: hawker centres and the Zhongyuan (Hungry Ghosts) Festivals. He urged the relevant organisations to work harder to promote the campaign in these areas. He also reiterated the basic tenet of the bilingual policy: “English is important as far as acquiring modern science and technology is concerned, but learning one’s mother tongue is no less important.” We would expect him to go on to talk about the cultural and unifying values of Mandarin. However, note what he says instead:

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 and adopted the open-door policy.

China, with a population of more than one billion, is a large market. With the open-door policy, there will be an increase in China’s external trade and economic activities. We shall no doubt face competition in our trade and economic activities with China, but we have an edge over others in our bilingual ability. Some of the recent trade activities indicate the economic value of Mandarin. Recently, an American computer company has arranged for China’s computer personnel to receive training in Singapore

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6 A key component of the Hungry Ghosts Festival is the auction where ‘good luck’ items are sold. The auctions are traditionally conducted in a dialect, and involve many auspicious and time-honoured phrases and idioms that are difficult to capture in translation.
because our computer experts can speak both Mandarin and English. They are able to explain to the Chinese in Mandarin.

Some multinational corporations and big enterprises in Europe and America have also begun their hunt in Singapore for talents who can speak both Mandarin and English to represent them in China because such talents are able to do business with the Chinese in Mandarin directly. Singapore entrepreneurs are also going to China to invest in factories, build hotels, set up banks, tender for contracts and provide professional/consultative services. These economic activities require a large number of people who can speak Mandarin, particularly those who can speak both Mandarin and English. With further development in China, the economic value of Mandarin will increase.

The editor of the Lianhe Zao Bao reacted approvingly: "China's economic reform and open-door policy will surely contribute to the importance of Mandarin... We should, therefore, make full use of our favourable position in this respect" (reprinted in ST 8 Oct 1985). Of course, China had already been experimenting with economic structural reform at the end of 1978, and since 1981, Singapore has had trade representation in Beijing (see footnote 5). Yeong Yoon Ying, Press Secretary to the Senior Minister and MITA Director (Publications) suggested to me (personal communication, Dec 1994) that Lee Kuan Yew most likely anticipated the value of the China market when he launched the SMC in 1979. Thus, the economic opportunities made available through Mandarin were an important factor already in the initial launching the campaign. However, Ow Chin Hock, currently Minister of State (Foreign Affairs) and always very active in issues pertaining to Mandarin and Chinese culture, disagreed with this view (personal communication, Sept 1997). He told me that, while some of the old guard leaders did see the potential economic value of Mandarin and did try to raise this with Lee Kuan Yew, Lee was not really convinced until well into the late 1980s. Regardless, the economic value of Mandarin had not been an overt part of discourse in the SMC. Nor did it have a place in the functional polarisation of language ideologies within bilingualism. That is, not until Ong Teng Cheong breached these lines in his 1985 SMC speech.

There are two important things to note in Ong's speech. First of all, what is most significant is that Mandarin crossed ranks within the functional divide of language
ideology. What Ong has done is, he challenged the one side of the equation, without altering the other. Visually, it looks something like this (Figure 6.2):

**Figure 6.2 The Functional Polarisation of Language: The Great Barrier Challenge**

![Diagram](image)

Not everything in this model will be discussed here; it will appear again in my next chapter. However, I want to raise the questions here already to highlight the ideological implications of Ong’s challenge to the functional polarisation of language. According to Ong, Mandarin no longer carries value just for its cultural appeal, but for its “economic value” as well. The next logical step would be to ask, can English then also cross the barrier? Can it be a “mother tongue?” And how about the other two “mother tongue” languages? Can they also cross the barrier and carry “economic value?” Until now, the functional polarisation of language treated the non-Chinese “mother tongues” with somewhat equal status. That is, they all equally carry cultural value, and are all equally capable of protecting Singaporeans from deculturalisation and Westernisation. Now that Mandarin has crossed ranks and taken on added-value, does this change the dynamics between Mandarin and Malay/Tamil? And if Mandarin now extends beyond the meanings of “mother tongue”, will it be possible for non-Chinese Singaporeans to be allowed to learn Mandarin for its economic advantage? These are profoundly important questions as they challenge the fundamental tenets of the bilingual policy. No longer are the lines just blurred, but they are challenged.
Because of the increasing pragmatic usefulness of Mandarin, there was also a corresponding increase in concern expressed about the standards of Mandarin. In the March 1987 parliamentary debates on education, the focus was on the standard of Mandarin. MP Ow Chin Hock challenged Parliamentary Secretary (Education) Tang Guan Seng’s claim that the standard of Mandarin was rising based on the increasing number of students passing their exams. “Anyone who has common sense knows that the passing rate does not necessarily reflect the standard of Chinese language”, he argued. He went on to say that many Chinese Singaporeans had expressed their doubts about the MOE’s sincerity and commitment to the bilingual policy, and expressed concern about the decline of standards in Mandarin. In response to these challenges and doubts, the MOE released a statement on 3 May 1987 saying that, if there was enough interest, they would consider restarting the Mandarin-medium schools. However, they also published statistics on the steadily declining school enrolment in the Chinese stream schools to show that there would likely be very few takers. According to *The Straits Times*, “The Government’s response is dramatic in that it signals an apparent readiness to reverse a major policy on language and education” (3 May 1987) – although an editorial on 6 May 1987 interpreted the government’s response as a way to silence “the critics once and for all, for if parental support for Chinese medium schools is not forthcoming, and indications are that it will not be, then the Government will have proven its case beyond doubt.”

There also was growing discussion about increasing the status of Mandarin. MP Ow Chin Hock identified two challenges facing the promotion of Mandarin: one, how to “cultivate the interest” of Chinese students in learning the language; and two, “how to raise the social status of Mandarin and affirm its cultural and economic use” (*ST* 21 Apr 1987). In 1989, Lee Kuan Yew announced in his *SMC* speech that the campaign’s focus was turning towards the upper echelons of society, towards those “in the professions, in business, in industry and in the higher ranks of the Civil Service”, who, for the most part, were English-educated and mostly English-speaking at home. Once this group of people are heard speaking Mandarin, he said, “The social status of Mandarin will rise.”

This statement carries us to the final stretch of the river, and to the sequel to the “Asianising of Singapore”. Energised by the “Asianising of Singapore”, the Chinese-
educated were becoming increasingly vocal in their dissatisfaction with what they saw as the government’s lackadaisical commitment to Mandarin. Of course, their bitterness against the government ran even deeper. They bore a deep-seeded resentment over their systematic political and economic marginalisation, over being the “silent majority” trapped in the eddy of Singapore’s success (senior civil servant, personal communication, 1995), and over the continuing dominance of English. Commentaries in the Chinese-language press contested that “in a democracy”, it is only right that “the wishes of the majority, that is the Chinese, prevail” (cited in ST June 13 1991) and to disassociate the promotion of Mandarin with Chinese chauvinism (Ow Chin Hock, ST 21 Apr 1987).

And once again language was at the centre of the “Asianising of Singapore”. Various statistics consistently showed an increased trend towards the use of English and less support for learning the mother tongue. As a result, there was increasing concern within the government over the possible loss of traditional values (ST 28 July 1991). Once again concerns were raised about increased individualism and the decay of traditional culture; once again there was a sense of a national crisis; and once again the “Asianising of Singapore” became a means by which to answer this crisis.

6.6 Summarising Thoughts

In this chapter, we looked at the first two sections of the “river” in the Asianising of Singapore as it is captured in the SMC. Using Blommaert’s (1997) words, I have called the campaign an 18-year “historical moment of discursive activity”. To see the campaign in these terms highlights the ways in which the campaign has been the centre of language ideological debates and how these debates interact with the kind of “ideal” society that the Singapore government envisions for the nation. The campaign has had a powerful presence in organising a sense of meaning about Singapore and about Singapore in relation to the world.

In the first ten years of the campaign, language ideologies were constructed around the regression equation of “more Mandarin” and “less dialects”. The continued use of dialects was seen as an obstacle in the effective implementation of the bilingual policy.
This failure of bilingualism was affecting the effectiveness of education, which was seen to further affect the government’s efforts for human resource development (Singapore’s only resource), which would in turn ultimately adversely affect Singapore’s economic development. Economic growth, recall, is the essence of nationhood. Thus, pragmatism suggested that dialects must be sacrificed for the national good. Furthermore, the campaign was tied into the logic of multiracialism. Multiracialism suggests an image of Singapore’s population as one divided by three homogenous communities: Malay, Indian, and Chinese, with all others thrown into the “Other” category. Dialects disrupted that homogenisation, and even (so the argument goes) threatened to fragment the Chinese community. Children from dialect-speaking homes were also disadvantaged in school. Again, following the logic of meritocracy, dialects needed to be sacrificed. Mandarin would put all Chinese students on the same footing. Finally, the arguments and discourses of Mandarin are tied into the discourse of vulnerability. For, without success in all of these other areas, Chinese Singaporeans would be deculturalised. Such a deculturalised nation is, in Lee Kuan Yew’s words, “not worth the building, let alone defending”. For all these reasons, Mandarin was the answer to the national crisis.

The regression equation “more Mandarin” and “less dialects” was powerfully evident in the speech given by Lee Kuan Yew at the opening ceremony of the 1979 Speak Mandarin Campaign. The schema of the speech built on this equation, presenting parents with a “choice” and bringing them to the ultimate inevitability of this choice. By examining the various grammatical and discursive features of Lee Kuan Yew’s text, it was possible to see the construction of language ideologies, and how these ideologies were implicated in and implicate the imagining of the nation. His use of metaphors provided tangible evidence for his regression equation of “more Mandarin” and “less dialects”. We saw in his conditional statements the framing of his argument, the building of logic towards the inevitable conclusion. Through his use of redundancy and his lexical choices, we could see him stacking his argument in favour of Mandarin. The tone was very dense and very strong, leaving little room for alternative views or voices. And ultimately, through his use of pronouns, the onus was put on the parents to make their “choice”. It was possible to see the positioning once again of this language crisis within the national
framework, and the reasoning used to solve this crisis. The overall tone made evident in his lexical choices, his use of conditionals, and the regression equation presented a crisis, and his solution as the one to adequately solve it. Through the analysis of voice in the text and the use of pronouns, it was also possible to see how these ideologies are very much connected to societal power relations. His was the dominant voice throughout the text, setting the agenda, establishing the crisis framework, establishing the conditions for a solution to this crisis, and assigning responsibility for acting on this proposed solution.

While the SMC was the focus of much of the public discourse on language, the increasing dominance of English continued unabated. What this highlights is the very complex ways in which Singapore has attempted to imagine the nation. With its particular circumstances (lack of natural resources, etc.; see Chapter 4), Singapore cannot be isolationist. It must be, so the leaders argue, cosmopolitan, modern, and positioned in the world. Because of the position of English globally (Pennycook, 1992, 1994a), English takes on particular status and value in the particular countries in which it operates. Singaporeans eager to climb the social ladder thus continue to embrace English, in the hope of acquiring the economic, political and social status that it carries. Thus, the SMC can be seen as a way to balance the contrasting global and national needs of Singapore’s authenticity, to give it a sense of identity and distinction, and to gain legitimacy from the very large Chinese-educated grassroots. And so we see how in the SMC campaign, language is intricately implicated in and implicates the imagining of the nation.

However, we also saw in this chapter how the structure of language ideologies in the functional polarisation of language was challenged by Ong Teng Cheong’s 1985 campaign launching speech. In his speech, Ong noted the increasing importance of China’s economic awakening to Singapore’s economic policy, and suggested that Mandarin needs to be valued for its economic potential in addition to its traditional cultural value. And as a result, serious questions emerge about the meanings of the other official languages and their role in the imagining of the nation. In the next chapter, we will look at how this challenge has been taken up by the government, particularly in light of the increased intensity of the “Asianising of Singapore”.
Appendix A

"Mandarin or Dialect?"
Mr Lee Kuan Yew (The Prime Minister)
7 September 1979

The Straits Times
8 September 1979

Chinese Singaporeans face a dilemma. The Chinese we speak is divided up among more than 12 dialects. Children at home speak dialect; in school they learn English and Mandarin. After 20 years of bilingual schooling, we know that very few children can cope with two languages plus one dialect, certainly not much more than the 12 percent that make it to junior colleges. The majority have ended up speaking English and dialect.

Language Problem

It is most difficult for the average, and impossible for the slow, to keep in mind, for immediate recall and use, enough words in English, Mandarin, and dialects. Even those who, after 12 years of Chinese schooling, have to go to universities abroad lose their fluency in Mandarin. It is because they use English for their work and dialect for their family and friends. Because Singapore is 25 percent non-Chinese, English will be the common language between different ethnic Singaporeans. And if we continue to use dialects, then English will tend to become the common language between Chinese of different dialect groups.

Learning Burden

A knowledge of dialect helps the learning of Mandarin. But the continued use of dialect, after Mandarin has already been learnt, makes a person lose his fluency in Mandarin. It is daily use which gives fluency, the facility to think in and speak a language. All Chinese parents face this choice for their children – English-Mandarin, or English-dialect. If they allow, or worse want, their children to speak dialects, then their children will find their work in school very burdensome. Therefore, actively encourage your children to speak Mandarin in place of dialect. If you can speak dialect, it is not difficult to learn to understand Mandarin, and, if you make some effort, then learn to speak it. It is much easier to understand a language than to speak it.
Administrative Action

Once it is clear to the Government that parents want their children to learn and to use Mandarin, not dialects, the Government will take administrative action to support their decision. All government officers, including those in hospitals and clinics, and especially those in manning counters, will be instructed to speak Mandarin except to the old, those over 60. All Chinese taxi-drivers, bus conductors, and hawkers, can and will be required to pass an oral Mandarin test, or to attend Mandarin classes to make them adequate and competent to understand and speak Mandarin to their customers.

Language Environment

I had surveys carried out a few months ago of the languages spoken on the buses and in the hawkers' centres. They disclose how widespread and dominant dialects are. Nevertheless, within five years, once parents have decided that their children's learning load must be lessened by dropping dialect and concentrating on English-Mandarin, we can dramatically alter the language environment. Students will hear and speak Mandarin in the streets, on the buses, in the shops, in the hawkers' centres. If, however, the majority of parents secretly believe they can have English-Mandarin plus dialect for their children, then administrative action will not be wholly successful, because administrative action cannot reach the home where dialects, already entrenched, will prevail.

Constant Use

It is frequent repetition, through constant use, that makes for easy immediate recall and fluency. It is the chicken and the egg. If our ancestors had come from northern China, most parents will be Mandarin speaking. Then the few who do not will soon pick it up, just like everybody picks up Cantonese when they go to Hong Kong. All the same, we can create this Mandarin-speaking environment, if the majority of parents decide to lighten their children's learning load.

Obvious Choice

Let us face the problem and make our decision to use Mandarin, not dialect. Two generations of Chinese-educated students have gone through 12 years of Chinese school education since the war. They still do not speak Mandarin fluently because they have reverted to dialect in their daily lives. We can go on for another two generations teaching Mandarin and we shall make as little progress if we revert to dialect outside school. And because it is Mandarin, not dialect, we teach in schools, the dialect spoken will be a limited, pidgin-type patois. This is the stark choice – English-Mandarin, or English-dialect. Logically, the decision is obvious. Emotionally, the choice is painful.

Now I have the pleasure in declaring the Campaign open.

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7 Statistics were reproduced in table form as an appendix in the original text, and also appeared in the ST.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ASIANISING OF SINGAPORE: THE SEQUEL

In the previous chapter, I examined the first two sections of the “river” depicting language ideological debates within the Speak Mandarin Campaign. In the first section, language ideologies were constructed around the regression equation of “more Mandarin” and “less dialects”. The embedded rationale was that the continued use of dialects would hinder the establishment of the Mandarin as the “mother tongue”. Without a mother tongue, the Chinese community would fragment with the effects of deculturalisation and Westernisation that came with the dominance of English. Homogeneity was thus validated over heterogeneity. Lee Kuan Yew evoked some very specific assumptions about language in constructing this rationale, including the “race = language = culture” equation, and a space-management concept of language learning. In the second section of the river, the intensity of Mandarin increased with its crossing over into the pragmatic domain of economics. This gave the ideological space for members of the Chinese-educated community to frame their demands along the lines of ‘linguistic rights’ – to demand greater commitment from the government for their language and culture. However, the breaching of the functional divide of language ideology raises some important questions concerning the position of the other languages. Can English then also cross the barrier and become a mother tongue? Can the other ethnic languages also cross over to the economic domain? How does it change the relationship between Mandarin and the other ethnic languages? One of the objectives of this chapter is to see how these questions are answered, if at all, in the third section of the river. This third section also coincides with the second phase of the “Asianising of Singapore”, or the “Asian values debate”. Together, these two stories weave a complex account of the imagining of the nation.
In the first part of this chapter, I will look at the "Asianising of Singapore" as it has taken shape in the Asian values debate. The climax of the story is the formation of the 1991 White Paper on Shared Values, which crystallised many of the language ideologies within this debate. I will then focus on the discourses of language that emerged within this debate and which formed the third section of the SMC "river". Located within the discourses of the Asian values debate, language ideologies have mostly been formed by the "Mandarin versus English" dichotomy. Particular attention will be given to how this dichotomy attempts to answer the questions raised by the crossing of Mandarin into the economic domain of the functional polarisation of language. This discussion will continue into the third section where I talk about the changes in education policy since 1990. A number of policies were put in place that appeared to give greater status to Mandarin. Yet, upon closer analysis, they reveal some significant incongruities between rhetoric and reality. This leads to the fourth section where I will consider in greater detail the role and ideologies of English. Included in this discussion will be a critique of the claim that English is a language of "wider communication". We will also note how the language ideological debates concerning English have been structured around the familiar regression equation such that Standard Singapore English and Colloquial Singapore English are pitted against each other. Finally, we will consider how the SMC actually disguises the continuing dominance of English. Finally, in the last section, I will consider the various voices of resistance participating in the language ideological debates within the "Asianising of Singapore". In these discussions, what becomes once again powerfully clear is the ways in which language ideological debates are implicated in and implicate the imagining of the nation.

7.1 The Asian Values Debate

As I mentioned in the last chapter, the "Asianising of Singapore" needs to be seen discursively. It needs to be seen as a "frame of reference" within which Singaporeans and the nation's leaders seek to "define, organise and regulate a particular sense" of themselves in relation to the West and in relation to the region. Towards the end of the
1980s (see Chapter 6), the PAP leaders renewed their efforts in searching for an appropriate model by which to imagine the nation. Their questions were captured in a *Straits Times* commentary: “English and mother tongue. Scientific and commercial know-how versus traditional values and social organisation. These are perennial issues facing Singapore, a young country of immigrant stock at the cross-roads of East and West, and still in search of an ideal model for social organisation” (31 Aug 1988). As during the late 1970s, the PAP leaders turned to the discourses in the “Asianising of Singapore” to frame their questions and answers. Echoing Lee Kuan Yew’s earlier concerns, President Wee Kim Wee questioned the future of Singapore in his 1989 parliamentary address:

> the speed and extent of the changes in Singapore society is worrying. We cannot tell what dangers lie ahead, as we rapidly grow more Westernised.

> What sort of society will we become in another generation? What sort of people do we want our children to become? Do we really want to abandon our own cultures and national identity? Can we build a nation of Singaporeans, in Southeast Asia, on the basis of values and concepts native to other peoples, living in other environments? How we answer these questions will determine our future. (*PDS* 9 Jan 1989, Vol.52, Col.13-14)

The view presented is that Singapore has reached a crossroads in the imagining of the nation: should it look East or should it look West. Put another way by then DPM Goh Chok Tong, “We have to determine the sort of society we want to be in the 21st Century – more communitarian or more individualistic?”

Two factors have guided the answer to these questions. The first has been the perceived demise of the West. BG George Yeo (Minister for Information and the Arts) described recent trends in the West this way: “Since the 1960s, many Western societies have gone downhill. Budget deficits have become uncontrollable. The rule of law has been taken to extremes so that to protect one innocent man, the system is prepared to let 99 guilty men go free. As a result crime is rampant” (*ST* 6 Sept 1992). These trends, he argued, have essentially invalidated the Western model as appropriate for Singapore. Quoting again from George Yeo: “All this has strengthened our conviction that we must find our own solution to our problems and cannot accept the Western model as ultimate or ideal... What is clear is that we do not want to be a Western society.” The view held by
the PAP leaders is that Western liberal democracy could well invite cultural conflict, ruin political stability, and ultimately impede the economic growth that defines Singapore’s nationhood. And so they stacked the trends of liberal democracy against the merits of Asian values (even though some leaders, like DPM Rajaratnam (1977), have expressed doubt whether distinctive “Asian values” exist at all). In his 1995/1996 course syllabus devoted to the “Asian values debate”, Professor Emmerson of the University of Wisconsin describes this discursive structure as follows: The West has deified rights to the neglect of responsibilities; protected the sovereignty of individuals while letting families and communities fall apart; maximised personal freedom to the detriment of personal safety; and checked authority to the point of paralysis instead of focusing it on economic growth.

In rejecting the Western model, Singapore’s leaders simultaneously began to find ways to, in George Yeo’s words, “re-create” the East after its own image. There was an increasing awareness that the model of the East was working, economically anyway, and perhaps even politically and socially. This awareness was substantiated by research coming from the US, such as a study conducted by Lodge and Vogel (1987) on “ideology and national competitiveness”. According to their analysis, Singapore’s economic success can be attributed to the fact that they share the same cultural base as other high-performance countries in East Asia. The PAP leaders took this theme and wrapped it in a crisis framework. If Western individualistic practices and attitudes were allowed to overshadow traditional Asian communitarianism, Singapore’s high levels of economic achievements would be increasingly difficult to sustain. Speaking at the 1991 Chinese Press Club Annual Dinner, Goh Chok Tong argued: “the nub of the problem is not whether the Chinese community would lose its cultural identity and core values over time”; but rather, “if it does, whether Singapore without these core values of thrift, hard work and group cohesion, can thrive and prosper.” He saw it as a national “disaster” if Chinese Singaporeans lost their core values. The logic of pragmatic rationality once again defined this crisis. The “Cultural values of a country do affect its economic performance”, he said, “and for Singapore, more than any other country, if our economy is shaky, Singapore cannot survive” (ST 27 July 1991). An article in the ST put it this way (31 Oct 1988): “Beneath the emphasis on the retention of Asian values, there certainly lies the fear that
one Monday morning, a Westernised Singapore would wake up, after a weekend of revelry, to the horror that the world economic power centre has shifted to the East, to which the country once belonged.

The challenge facing Singapore's leaders was to find a way to ensure that Singaporeans would continue to embrace those values crucial to Singapore's continued economic prosperity and national viability. To this end, Goh Chok Tong raised the suggestion in a speech to the PAP Youth (28 Oct 1988) of a “national ideology”. This documented national ideology would be taught in the “schools, workplaces, homes, as our way of life. Then we will have a set of principles to bind our people together and guide them forward” (Speeches, 12.5, 1988). It would be, he said a few years later, a “moral anchor [to] buttress Singapore's Asian value system against over-Westernisation and deculturalisation” (ST 6 Jan 1991). It would protect Singapore's nationhood.

On 2 January 1991, Goh's vision of a national ideology was formalised in a *White Paper on Shared Values*. The following were identified as the core principles to guide the imagining of the nation: nation before community, and society before self; family as the basic unit of society; regard and community support for the individual (i.e., those who have fallen behind in the meritocratic economy); resolving major issues through consensus, not conflict; and racial and religious harmony. As noted by Chua Beng Huat, the *White Paper* appears to “sit uncomfortably as a discursive artefact in search of an institutional site in the body politic” (1995:33). In the first place, it carries no legal or constitutional status. Secondly, it explicitly denounces individualism. Yet, individualism is the very essence of meritocracy. As such, the *White Paper* cannot have any material grounding, nor function as a “descriptive and/or prescriptive statement of the extant conditions”. It can only be a “floating moralising statement” (Chua Beng Huat, 1995:33).

Nonetheless, the *White Paper* has had a powerful presence in the imagining of the nation, and in rationalising government policy. In particular, it has been used as evidence of the government's commitment to multiracialism, and as a model for how national identity and ethnic identity can coexist. The authors claimed that elements of the "traditional" values of the Chinese, Indian and Muslim cultures were selected and integrated to form these "shared" and "Asian" values (*White Paper*, 1991:1,3). In this
sense, the “Asianising” of Singaporeans refers to the “intentional discursive distillation and reformulating” of vast traditions and histories into a singular cultural formula (Chua Beng Huat, 1994:16). It subsumes ethnic difference under an illusion of a kind of homogenous, pan-ethnic national identity. This is not a fusion, but it is an abstraction of identity to the level of values and ideology. And at the same time, it also provides the ideological space for the different communities to continue to develop their own cultural identities within the discourses of multiracialism.

It is worth noting that the institution of a set of core national values came at a time when it became apparent that the Religious Knowledge (RK) programme (Chapter 5) was not producing the expected results. By 1989, only 17.8 percent of all eligible Chinese students were enrolled in the Confucian Ethics course, compared with 44.4 who enrolled in Buddhist studies and 21.4 in Christianity. Chua Beng Huat (1995) noted the irony that the failure of Confucianism was found in the success of the RK programme. The programme was so successful that a government-commissioned study on religion implicated RK courses in intensifying religious fervour among students (Kuo et. al., 1988). Arguing that this fervour could potentially lead to inter-religious conflict, the government discontinued the programme (and with it Confucian Ethics) in 1990. This does not mean that Confucianism was completely discarded, though. Rather, its essence was recovered in the concept of communitarianism. And it is communitarianism that forms the basis of the “shared values” in the White Paper.

As I mentioned earlier, the significance of the White Paper has been largely in how it has been used by the PAP leaders in the imagining of the nation. Once again, language ideologies have had a powerful presence in this imagining, both implicating and being implicated in this “Asian values debate”. Singapore’s renowned calligrapher Pan Shou captured the essence and tone of this discourse in a couplet that he penned for Lee Kuan Yew (1990): “Zhang baichuan er tong zhi; Hui kuanglan yu ji dao.” One writer to The Straits Times interpreted this couplet to mean: “Transforming into oasis so as to replace the desert; channel all streams (to flow eastward and seaward) so as to turn back the incoming tide.” He explains further: “Not only is Mr. Pan Shou lamenting the falling standard of Chinese, he is also telling us that perhaps this decline is due to our having
gone too far West; now let us turn around and head for the East: put more emphasis on learning our own language and culture” (ST 3 Jan 1990). It is to this emphasis I now turn.

7.2 Goh Chok Tong: “Mandarin is More than a Language”

When I left the SMC in the previous chapter, Lee Kuan Yew had called for an effort to increase the status of Mandarin by targeting those in the higher echelons of society. Most of these individuals were English-educated and felt no great affiliation with Mandarin nor any need to learn the language. And so the challenge was, he said, to make this group of people realise the necessity of “forging a stronger bond with the Chinese language” (ST 5 Oct 1989). However, there was also another challenge facing Mandarin. While numerous surveys and statistics showed a steady increase in the use of Mandarin over dialects, the use of English in the homes was also increasing. Already in 1985, a Times Survey on the SMC revealed that the younger generation was using more English than Mandarin (ST 6 Oct 1985). This was confirmed by the 1990 Census advance report (July 1991), which showed that almost half of young graduate Chinese households used English. MOE’s 1990 statistics (Table 7.1) on the “first most frequently spoken language at home” for Primary One students even showed a decline in the use of Mandarin while the upward trend for English continued. Pakir’s (1992) interpretation of these statistics was that the shift to Mandarin from dialects at home has reached its maximum level against a trend for greater use of English. The gains are now being made in favour of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Mandarin</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Others</th>
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<td>64.4</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>42.7</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td>26.9</td>
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<td>13.9</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: (MOE) ST 4 Oct 1989; 18 Nov 1990
English rather than Mandarin. This reading needs to be tempered somewhat with a qualification about MOE data collection. In addition to the first most frequently spoken language at home, the MOE also gathers data on the second and third most frequently spoken languages. For example, in 1990, the “second” most frequently spoken language was 33.8 percent English, 26.0 Mandarin, and 28.4 percent dialects (ST 18 Nov 1990). With the high frequency of code-switching and code-mixing that occurs in the average household (Tay, 1989; Platt, 1980; Pakir, 1989; see also my earlier discussion in Chapter One of census taking, section 1.6), parents may find it difficult to determine which language is first, second or third most frequently used. As well, parents eager to get their child admitted into the highly competitive best schools may cite English as the “first” home language to enhance their child’s chances, and so there may be some over-reporting.

Nonetheless, all of the statistics do point to the fact that the use of English in the home was on the increase. To BG George Yeo, this was a “disturbing trend” (ST 6 Sept 1992). Similarly disapproving, DPM Ong Teng Cheong warned in his 1992 SMC speech that, “If this trend continues, Mandarin may one day lose its influence in this society. This means that Chinese children will use English when they grow up. Their understanding of the mother tongue will either be limited or totally absent. Now it may be time to switch the emphasis of the SMC.” The threat came not with the use of English per se, but rather, its increasing use in the home, as a mother tongue. Once again, Lee Kuan Yew forewarned that Singapore might become a “pseudo-Western society. Not a real Western society, but a fake one” (ST 21 Aug 1988). This view has been supported by local academics such as Pakir (1993:82) who argues that the dominance of English has made Singapore in general, and the Chinese community especially, an “extremely soft-shelled community” (from Saville-Trokie, 1982), susceptible to outside (Western) influence.

To reach those in the higher echelons of society and to curb the increasing use of English in the home, the PAP leaders turned once again to the discourses found in the “Asianising of Singapore”. In particular, the stock “East versus West” dichotomy of the Asian values debate found its expression in the “Mandarin versus English” structure that we saw already in Chapter Five. Three key arguments for Mandarin have been given. The first is already familiar: the cultural argument, whereby the perceived negative cultural
effects of economic advancement are located within the English language and its adjunct Westernisation, while the ballast to these effects are located in the mother tongue. The second is the pragmatic argument, whereby the value of Mandarin is seen in the economic potential of China. The third is the identity or mother tongue argument, which reaffirms the functional polarisation of language ideologies. As will become evident in this discussion, the dichotic structuring of language ideologies within the “Asianising of Singapore” is significant. Not only does it allow Mandarin to cross into the economic domain of the polarised language ideologies, but also at the same time, it keeps English from crossing to the side of mother tongue.

As a way to guide this discussion, I will once again anchor my analysis on a specific text. My focus this time is on PM Goh Chok Tong’s 1991 SMC speech. His speech is significant because of where it stands historically. First of all, it marks the beginning of his leadership as Prime Minister (Lee Kuan Yew passed the leadership on to Goh on 28 Nov 1990, and himself became Senior Minister), and his “consultative” style of governance. Second, it marks a time when the PAP government was forced to reconsidered its strategy, after hitting an all-time low of voter-support (61%) in the 1991 elections. As I will discuss in section 7.5.2, language issues had a significant part to play in these election results and subsequent political adjustments. And third, Goh’s speech came in the wake of the furore over the message of the 1990 SMC, when Chinese Singaporeans were encouraged to speak Mandarin at work (see section 7.5.1). This changed the tone of the campaign from “hard-sell” to a softer, more fun approach. And so, in some ways, 1991 can be seen as a watershed in language ideologies and in the “Asianising of Singapore”.

Unlike the other government texts examined thus far (and very unusually), Goh’s 1991 speech does not appear verbatim in The Straits Times. However, a comparison of the press release (Appendix A) and the newspaper text (Appendix B) shows that the changes made by the press mostly had to do with presenting the text as reported speech. The changes appear to be primarily for the purposes of genre, rather than anything substantive. Thus, in order to maintain continuity with my previous analyses and the principles of analysis used, I have chosen to follow the original text found in the press
release. However, there are some significant differences in the two texts. The most noteworthy difference is that concerning the schema of the text: the newspaper account tended to position the speech within an ethnic framework, while Goh positioned his speech within a national framework. The implications of these differences for our understanding of language ideological debates in the imagining of the nation will thus also be considered in my analysis of Goh’s speech (section 7.5.1).

In my analysis of Goh’s text, I will once again begin by considering the schema of the text, looking at how it organises the discursive construction of language ideologies within the imagining of the nation. For example, his argumentation structure both problematises dialects and the increasing use of English in the home, while at the same time establishes the merits of Mandarin as the only appropriate “mother tongue” for the Chinese community. Through the use of metaphor, he develops a contrastive structure between Mandarin and English, linking the discourse directly to that of the Asianising of Singapore. There is also considerable ambiguity in the text, both with respect to the meanings of particular terms and to his references to nation and community. This use of ambiguity is a powerful means by which Goh uses language to construct particular meanings and readings of his text. His use of pronouns and the control of voice (section 7.5) make this ambiguity even more potent. I will also consider the genre of the SMC and its speeches, and see what the paradoxes emerging from this genre tell us about the construction of language ideologies and their connection to societal power structures.

Like in Lee Kuan Yew’s 1979 speech, the schema of Goh Chok Tong’s text follows an argumentation structure, one which proposes a problem and then provides a solution to that problem. Goh first establishes the premise of “the problem” by quoting Rupert Emerson’s definition of a nation: “A nation is a single people traditionally fixed on a well-defined territory, speaking the same language and preferably a language all its own, possessing a distinct culture, and shaped to a common mould by many generations of shared historical experience” (1-4).1 Without questioning its applicability to multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nations such as Singapore, Goh takes this definition as common-sense

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1 All numbers in parentheses refer to the line number of Goh Chok Tong’s text (see Appendix A).
knowledge, and uses it to measure the degree of nationhood achieved thus far. By this definition, Singapore is not yet a nation. It does not have a *common language* and it does not have a *common history*. Emerson's definition thus establishes what Singapore is not, and directs its national agenda.

Goh first addresses the challenge of linguistic diversity to Singapore's achievement of nationhood. He problematises Singapore's linguistic diversity at all levels of society: from the smallest unit, the family (including his own), where many are experiencing inter-generational communication problems caused by residual dialects and the bilingual policy (8-20); to the community (24-26), where dialects hinder intra-ethnic communication; and to government (30-33), where no political leader "can reach out on his own to every Singaporean." Faced with such linguistic diversity at all levels of society, he asks, "How can we ever build a nation?" (26-27). Although I will discuss this in greater detail in section 7.5, it is important to note here already the conflation of nation and community in defining the problem. The problem is national identity and nation building, resulting from linguistic diversity at the *community* level.

Goh then introduces the inevitable solution. If the main obstacle to achieving full nationhood is linguistic diversity caused by dialects, then "it is in our national interest" for the Chinese community to achieve linguistic uniformity through "less dialects" and "more Mandarin" — for Mandarin to become the "mother tongue" (35-38).

A second element to the problem is that, if Mandarin does not become the common "mother tongue", then English would become the intra-ethnic link language for the Chinese community. In fact, he says, "Already English is becoming the dominant language among Chinese households. Its use had increased from 10 per cent in 1980 to 21 percent in 1990" (44-45). The problem of the increasing presence of English in Chinese households relates to Emerson's second element of nationhood lacking in

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2 Many families today experience problems with inter-generational communication similar to that which we see among new immigrants in Canada. Grandparents and grandchildren, and even parents and children, often do not share a common language in which they can communicate on more than a rudimentary level. "We are like chickens and ducks talking", said one 73-year-old Teochew-speaking grandmother, whose two grandchildren speak only English and Mandarin. "We carry on in different languages without understanding one another, but hoping somehow that we will" (*ST* 7 June 1993).
Singapore: the lack of shared historical experiences and culture. The logic in Goh's argument follows what we have already seen. English is necessary. But English only, without mother tongue, is undesirable. At the individual level, a person would lose "the collective wisdom of the Chinese civilisation" (60) and would lose his/her bearings (68-69); such a person would be deculturalised. At the national level, English-knowing monolingualism would undermine the shared cultural and historical experiences that Emerson said were necessary for nationhood. As Goh puts it, "The question is whether with the greater use of English, we may lose some aspects of our identity. These are the traditional values of our forefathers" (50-51). These are key to the nation's shared historical experiences. There is a conflation here again of nation and community, for clearly, "our forefathers" refers here only to the Chinese community. The discourse of the "Asianising of Singapore" encourages "exoglossic" identities; each community is encouraged to find their identity in historical experiences outside of Singapore. How this would contribute to a "shared historical experience" necessary for nationhood is not addressed.

Goh then spends the rest of his speech establishing the merits of Mandarin over English. In the first place, he presents the cultural argument. Drawing upon the equation that "a race = a language = a culture", he argues: "Values and language cannot be easily separated. They are intrinsically linked to each other" (53-54). Further on he uses the metaphor of a key to a treasure chest: Mandarin is "more than just a language... it also opens up many chests of treasures – Chinese literature, music, operas, paintings, calligraphy, ceramics, and so on" (61-63). In Goh's argument, there is a subtle conflation of "culture" with "values". This conflation is present in other government speeches as well. Note for example the slippage in MP Dr. Aline Wong's comment that "Chinese traditional values should be conveyed when promoting the use of Mandarin because language and culture are inseparable" (ST 7 Oct 1985). The same slippage occurs in Lee Kuan Yew's speech at a National Day Rally (14 Aug 1988): "Learning an additional language and a second culture is a good thing. But bilingualism does not mean bi-culturalism. We may speak ten languages, but we can only have one set of basic values."
And these are the values that we inherit from our birth” (Lee Kuan Yew, 1991:95). Chinese language, culture, values, and race are indivisible.

This slippage between culture and values, and the notion that values are intrinsic to language, evoked a very passionate debate that divided the Chinese community (ST Sept-Oct 1992). For the most part, the Chinese-educated agreed with DPM Ong Teng Cheong’s view that Mandarin has a “definite advantage” over English as a medium in transmitting Chinese values (1990 SMC speech). Good (Asian) values, they argued, are best conveyed through the language of that culture, through one’s ethnically defined mother tongue. “To say that good values can be passed on in any language is to speak without regard to one’s cultural heritage”, wrote one Straits Times reader (17 Sept 1992). In contrast, the English-educated Chinese contended that values could be transmitted in any language. Nominated MP Walter Woon argued against his colleagues, maintaining that “the values of thrift, hard work, honour, filial piety and respect for law can be inculcated in whatever language one chooses” (ST 13 Sept 1992).

Ultimately, however, this conflation of culture and values made it possible for the leaders to argue that English could not be a mother tongue. The conflation placed “Asian values” within the “a race = a language = a culture” equation, the quintessential criterion of a “mother tongue”. Because “a race” cannot be translated, the argument follows that neither can any part of the equation; its component parts cannot be separated. It was thus possible to argue that Asian values cannot be adequately translated through English (56-57). “Translations just won’t do – use Mandarin” read one Straits Times headline (ST 3 Sept 1992). A SMC caption reads, “Translations take care of the meaning of the characters but not the spirit of the poem or story.” Thus, because it cannot contain Asian values, English cannot be a mother tongue.

Goh Chok Tong then offers the pragmatic argument (72-79), bringing Mandarin out of the context of culture to that of business and commerce. In his account of the SCCCI Congress, he presents Mandarin and English as equals: “One would expect them to prefer using English, which is the language of trade and business. But I was told that was not the case” (74-75). Mandarin was used instead. DPM Ong Teng Cheong explicitly called for Mandarin and English to be seen as equals in his 1990 SMC speech: “With
economic development and social changes in Asia Pacific area, Asians no longer need to feel inferior to the Westerners. And Mandarin is not an inferior language compared to English.” Goh Chok Tong once used the analogy of a “transformer”, whereby Singaporeans would be “serving both the English-speaking countries in the West and the Asian businessmen, entrepreneurs and policy-makers in the East” (ST 28 Aug 1991). As neutral transmitters, both English and Mandarin have equal status in relation to each other. It is worth noting that, unlike English, the neutrality of Mandarin does not carry the threat of deculturalisation. And so any exploration of the perceived negative consequences of modernisation continues to be contained within the denunciation of Westernisation.

The business component of Mandarin has been a central theme of the SMC since DPM Ong Teng Cheong first mentioned the economic value of Mandarin in his 1985 SMC speech. The economic advantage of Mandarin has come to be perhaps the single most important motivation to learn the language. In his 1992 speech, DPM Ong Teng Cheong noted that “Apparently the question of learning Mandarin lies in whether Mandarin can bring about the same economic benefits as English. Many people feel that if learning Mandarin can bring about economic benefits, more Chinese will learn Mandarin seriously.” Business Mandarin courses have proliferated and continue to have long waiting lists. In 1993, the SCCCI and Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations even organised a seminar on the economic value of Mandarin (ST 19 Sept 1993). Indeed, as DPM BG Lee Hsien Loong declare in his 1994 SMC speech, the “commercial value of Mandarin is now obvious to all.”

However, this pragmatic argument rarely appears alone, and indeed, cannot. For Mandarin to become the established mother tongue of the Chinese community, it must go beyond the neutrality and pragmatism of English. In Goh’s account of the SCCCI congress, he uses the device of contrast to take Mandarin there. The moment someone switched from English to Mandarin, “the atmosphere changed” (76-77). There was intimacy, brotherhood, a common understanding. The assumption built into his account is that, prior to the use of Mandarin, these features were lacking. Thus, not only does Mandarin hold a place in the commercial sector, but also it is superior to English. By virtue of the “race = language = culture” equation, it could unite this group of nationally
diverse, but ethnically homogenous, Chinese, while English could not. It carries the powers of identity. It follows then, that, while the value of English can only be in its neutral role as the language for commerce and for inter-ethnic communication, Mandarin is value-added.

Embedded in this discussion is thus also a third argument, that of identity and mother tongue. "Mandarin has more to offer than business" reads a Straits Times headline (13 Sept 1994). "Don’t treat Mandarin as alien language", reads another (8 Sept 1994). A frequent reminder in SMC speeches is that the campaign’s agenda is more than just economic. Goh Chok Tong reminded his SMC audience in 1993 that “exploiting the economic value of Mandarin is not the motive behind the SMC”; rather, it is to unite the Chinese community, to provide them with cultural ballast, and to give them an identity.

Once again, a conflict model is used to pit Mandarin and English against each other as a way to elevate the status of Mandarin. For example, according to Goh Chok Tong, an English-knowing monolingual person is incomplete and deficient; an English-Mandarin bilingual person is whole. At a PM’s Book Prize ceremony, he spoke from personal experience. “I know what I missed”, he said. “I can feel the inadequacy of being monolingual.” And because of his low proficiency in Mandarin, a part of him “is never quite complete” (ST 28 Aug 1991). Along the same vein, he has argued that: An English-knowing monolingual person is insecure; an English-Mandarin bilingual person is confident. In an interview with Friday Weekly (for Mandarin learners), Goh said: “It’s not just a question of embarrassment. It’s a question of being forced to ask yourself – how is it that you are Chinese and you don’t know your mother tongue? And then you feel a sense of inferiority. Yes, I felt inferior” (BT 11 Oct 1991). BG Lee Hsien Loong (1994 SMC) similarly held the view that “knowledge of the mother tongue is an important part of a person’s sense of identity and self confidence. Someone who knows that he belongs to a rich and ancient culture will not easily be seduced by plausible but unsound ideas derived from a superficial understanding of another culture. But someone who feels insecure about his own status... may lose his bearings and be carried away.”

Metaphors are also commonly used to enhance this oppositional structure of language ideologies and to further validate Mandarin over English as the mother tongue.
For example, MP Ow Chin Hock used the metaphor of a helm. He argued that students need to learn their mother tongue in order to imbibe its adjunct cultural values. These "cultural and traditional values are like the helm which stabilises the boat. It enables our society and economy to progress steadily and yet not be influenced by the decadent tides or wind lest we lose our direction" (ST 26 Oct 1988). Goh Chok Tong used the metaphor of a compass to portray the role of language-based Asian values. "For Asians not to have [the] values” learned through their mother tongue “is like a small boat without a compass. We would not know where we are going" (ST 7 Oct 1985). MP Dixie Tan compared the compulsory learning of mother tongue to immunisation: “Compelling students to learn their mother tongue is like making it compulsory for every infant to be immunised... The government will be failing in its duty if it does not make immunisation compulsory” (ST 13 Mar 1985). Finally, a metaphor we have already seen is that of cultural ballast: “if we abandon our bilingual policy, we must be prepared to pay the grievous price of becoming a people who have lost their cultural self-identity. Once we lose this emotional and cultural ballast, we will cease to be a separate and distinct community, with pride in ourselves. Instead, we shall become pseudo-Westernised, alienated from our Asian background” (Lee Kuan Yew, ST 27 Dec 1989). In each of these metaphors, the meaning conveyed is that the Chinese community sans mother tongue is lost, forlorn, indistinct, diseased, and aimless in direction, and that Mandarin is the only legitimate mother tongue.

Goh began his speech by establishing the problem of Singapore’s nationhood. The problem is that Singapore is not yet a nation: it does not have a common language and it does not have shared historical experiences. In his speech, he demonstrated how the use of Mandarin could fill both needs. The cultural, pragmatic and identity arguments for Mandarin, strengthened by positioning Mandarin in contrast to English, all establish the validity of Mandarin in the nationalist agenda. Once Chinese Singaporeans accept these arguments, they will become a community, “a single people, speaking the same language, that is Mandarin, possessing a distinct culture and a shared past, and sharing a common destiny for the future” (97-99). Such a community “will then be tightly knit”; only then will they be able to contribute to the task of nation building; then “Singapore will grow to become a nation” (101-104).
What is particularly significant about language ideologies in this third section of the “river” is how they answer any demand to grant English the status of mother tongue. The logical consequence of the pragmatic argument for Mandarin is that English be similarly allowed to cross the boundaries within the functional polarisation of language, to the domain of mother tongue. Numerous headlines in *The Straits Times* have raised this challenge: “Why Mandarin is not my mother tongue” (*ST* 23 Feb 1992), “English a mother tongue too?” and “English: A Singaporean mother tongue?” (*ST* 14 June 1994). One person wrote to *The Straits Times*, “It must be realised that there is a whole generation of Singaporeans that do not regard themselves as Chinese Singaporeans but simply as Singaporean. Having been born and bred here, we look upon Singapore and not China as our motherland. Putting all pretences aside, having descended from a line of dialect-speaking peasantry, Mandarin is as much my mother tongue as hieroglyphics is to modern-day Egyptians” (*ST* 7 Nov 1987). However, by placing language ideologies in oppositional relation to each other, Mandarin is presented as being value-added, as being superior to English, and as rescuing the Chinese community from the English cultural abyss. English cannot be a mother tongue as it continues to reflect a cultural wasteland. Conversely, while Mandarin may be as “alien” as English in the sense that both are “foreign” languages, the “race = language = culture” equation makes Mandarin the mother tongue in ways that English cannot. Ultimately, then, while the lines dividing language ideologies within the structure of functional polarisation are challenged by Mandarin’s encroachment into the commercial sector, the divide appears to be immediately rescued by an expansion of the meanings of Mandarin in ways that simultaneously restrain the meanings of English. As such, the functional polarisation of language is reinstated.

As we have seen, much of the discourse around language ideologies in the “Asianising of Singapore” has been concerned with the status of Mandarin. By enhancing the status of Mandarin through its contrast with English, it appears that it has even superseded the dominant status held by English. At first glance, changes in education policy seem to bear this out. There has been considerable activity and discussion in promoting the status and standard of Mandarin in the schools over the years. However, a closer look at these policies uncovers some revealing paradoxes. It seems that the focus
on Mandarin and on the "Asianising of Singapore" in many ways disguises the increasing dominance of English. In the next two sections, I will look at the changes in educational policy, and the meanings and role of English in society. Particular attention will be given to some of the paradoxes they reveal, and to what they tell us about language in the imagining of the nation.

7.3 Education: Paradox and Policy

With all schools now operating in English-medium, the Chinese-educated were increasingly concerned about the status and standard of Mandarin. The perception was that the Mandarin taught in the schools was very basic, and nowhere near the level necessary to be the cultural ballast required of it. After their "O" level exams, students were only "functionally literate", meaning they were only able to read newspapers and write simple letters (ST 28 Sept 1986). In response to these complaints, the government implemented a number of policies to expand the Mandarin-proficiency base of the Chinese community. Most of these policies involved an extension of the SAP concept. However, as this discussion will show, by expanding the programmes offered in the SAP schools, the status quo and dominant status of English were ironically maintained.

To carry this discussion forward, it is useful to consider for a moment the official rationale for the SAP schools. As mentioned in Chapter Five, SAP schools were first introduced with the implementation of the New Education System (Secondary) in 1981. They were meant to be seen as evidence of the government's categorical commitment to the maintenance of Chinese language and culture. As described by PM Goh Chok Tong, the SAP schools were set up because we were concerned over the declining standard and use of Mandarin. We fear the disappearance of the Chinese cultural heritage and values if Singaporeans use only English. These schools are an attempt to preserve some very powerful assets of the Chinese community... In time to come, we hope that many of those at the top will be equally comfortable in English and Chinese, that is, be effectively bilingual. The SAP school students are amongst the brightest in the country. If the people at the top are proficient in Chinese
and possess the strong virtues of the Chinese society, they will give Singapore its Asian ballast. (cited in Vasil, 1995:76)

This mandate was not without prestige. SAP schools were the top Mandarin-medium schools; they are the only schools that offer the “Special stream” (EL1, CL1), and they accept only the top ten percent of students. They attract better teachers and receive grants to develop superior programmes. Their students are given bonus points for admission to Junior College and in pre-university scholarship selection.

In order to increase the status of Mandarin and to broaden the base of proficient speakers, the MOE decided in 1990 to extend the SAP programme beyond the secondary school level. At the primary level, six more “seed” schools (see Chapter 6, section 6.4) offering both English and Mandarin at the first language level were added to feed into the SAP schools. And at the junior college level, two schools were selected to offer a Language Elective Programme (LEP) involving Mandarin as a first language to give SAP students the option to continue their Mandarin studies (ST 20 Jan 1989). According to Education Minister Dr. Tony Tan, “In due course”, students from the SAP, Seed, and LEP programmes would “help to transmit the language by occupying key positions in our society” (ST 17 Mar 1990).

In March 1991, the MOE proposed further changes to the education system in their report on Improving Primary School Education. To redress the declining status and standard of Mandarin in the schools, the MOE proposed that streaming be delayed until the end of Primary 4 (instead of Primary 3). This new system would involve three different language streams: EM1 (English and mother tongue at first language level), EM2 (mother tongue at the second language level), and EMO (oral mother tongue). However, the Chinese community strongly rejected these proposals. Their main objection was that the restructured streaming would force those stronger in Mandarin to take it at a lower level and English, their weaker language, at the first language level (ST 3 Nov 1991). Around this same time, DPM Ong Teng Cheong had set up a Chinese Language Review Committee (CLRC; June 1991) to conduct a detailed review of all aspects of Mandarin education. At the request of the MOE, they interrupted their activities to look into the concerns raised by the Chinese community about the proposed changes. Without altering
the general structure of streaming outlined by the MOE, the CLRC made one important variation (Figure 7.1). They recommended that the mother tongue be once again the medium of instruction for those students who were unable to cope with English-medium education. Instead of the EMO stream, they recommended EM3/ME3. In this stream, students strong in English but weak in mother tongue and Math would learn their mother tongue as a "third" language. Those strong in their mother tongue, but weak in English and Math would receive instruction in their mother tongue and learn English as a "third" language.

**Figure 7.1 The New Primary Four Streaming System**  
(Orientation Stage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pass all 3 Subjects</th>
<th>Pass 2 Subjects</th>
<th>Pass 1 Subject or fail all Three Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85% or more in all 3 subjects</td>
<td>Fail English</td>
<td>Strong in mother tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM1; MT1</td>
<td>EM2; EL1</td>
<td>MT1; EL3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL1; MT1</td>
<td>MT2; EL1 with remedial lessons in English</td>
<td>MT1; EL3 (reading, oral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EL1; MT2 with remedial lessons in MT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: The Straits Times 3 November 1991*

These proposals received the support of the Chinese community, and were subsequently adopted by the MOE (ST 3 Nov 1991).

In 1994, some changes were also implemented in streaming at the secondary level (Figure 7.2). The Secondary Normal stream was divided into two streams: Normal (Academic), offering English and mother tongue as a second language; and Normal (Technical), offering English and basic mother tongue. All students sit the GCE "N" examination at the end of the fourth year. Those in the Normal (Technical) who do well go on for one more year and sit the GCE "O" level exam. Those who do not qualify for the fifth year go on to technical-vocational education.
It is significant that, while these adjustments reflect a genuine attempt to meet the learning needs of different students, the fundamental link between language proficiency, meritocracy and language-based streaming remained unchallenged.
In the meantime, the CLRC continued with their evaluation of Mandarin education. In their final report (ST 9-16 May 1992), the committee acknowledged that “individual social mobility and economic gain have been significantly influenced by one’s proficiency in English.” However, they felt that Mandarin would continue to hold an important place in Singaporean society. Mandarin is the “conduit through which Chinese Singaporeans learn about their roots, culture, and traditional customs”, and contributes significantly to business, commerce and diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. To better reflect this status, they argued that the terms “Higher Chinese” and “Chinese Language” should be used instead of “first” and “second” language respectively (Chinese refers to Mandarin here). Minister of State (Culture) Fong Sip Chee had described the rationale for this recommendation more fully a few years earlier:

The mother tongue is not less important than English and must not be downgraded by insensitive labelling that accords its “second language” status. In the Singapore context, where English is the medium of instruction in 95 percent of the schools and yet is not the mother tongue for the majority, labels like “first” and “second” language are misnomers. In other countries, the term “second language” refers to a foreign language. If an English or Japanese pupil fails his second language, he loses nothing. He remains either English or Japanese as the case may be. Not so in Singapore. If we fail in our second language, it will mean a loss in terms of understanding our own culture. (ST 19 Apr 1983; see also ST 19 Apr 1984; 8 Dec 1986; 20 Jan 1989)

The CLRC also proposed that more junior colleges offer the LEP, and that SAP schools offer Chinese Language and Literature at the GCE “O” level. This, they said, would guarantee an adequate pool of people who are fluent in Chinese language, culture and values. Other proposals covered the areas of language exposure time, curriculum design, and professional development for Mandarin teachers. The MOE has adopted most of these recommendations.

Finally, at the secondary level itself, a number of policies were introduced to further expand the concept of SAP schools. The first was the introduction of “independent schools” in 1987, modelled after the top schools in the UK and USA (Towards Excellence in Schools, 1987). Independent schools are run by a board of
governors. They manage their own budgets and all issues relating to staff, admission policies, fee structures, curriculum design, and so forth. However, they must still follow the general guidelines set by the MOE regarding the bilingual policy, civics, and national exams. And, while they do have more control in selecting their students, they generally must accept the students sent to them by MOE.

The eight schools having independent status today are unapologetically elitist. In defence of their elitist nature, then Education Minister Tony Tan argued, “In Singapore today, we already have an elite — it is elitism through meritocracy. People are different and Singaporeans recognise this. Elitism by itself is not necessarily bad... It is unrealistic to hope that everybody is equal” (1990:15). Because of their independent status, these schools are able to hire the best teachers and to supplement their local staff with foreign teachers to enhance the quality of their programme. They offer nothing lower than the Express Course; the two independent SAP schools also offer the Special Course. Even the non-SAP independent schools offer Higher Mandarin (both of the Raffles schools also offer Higher Malay and Tamil) in addition to the Express Course, and all have a strong tradition in English. Enrolment is limited to the top 3-5 percent. And their high fees and large government grants give the schools the budgetary means for expensive programme development and school infrastructure, and for the best technology.

The latest development (1994) has been a scheme of “Autonomous Schools” introduced by Education Minister Lee Yock Suan. As described by The Straits Times, “The introduction of six autonomous schools this year will dispel misconceptions that good educational programmes are to be found only in independent schools” (ST 3 Jan 1994). Autonomous schools are either government (fully government-funded) or government-aided (heavily subsidised by the government and managed by committees; mostly missionary schools) which are awarded this status on the basis of their high performance. Unlike the independent schools, however, they do not have a board of governors, but remain under the jurisdiction of the government. Of the 18 schools having autonomous status today, seven are SAP which offer either only the Special course or Special and Express; four offer only the Express course; and the rest offer Express and Normal (academic). Because they have more autonomy in developing and executing their
own programmes, they all are able to offer Higher Mandarin. While these schools have not reached the same status as the independent schools, they are still seen to be more prestigious than the regular government schools.

The effect of the Independent and Autonomous programmes is two-fold, and ultimately contradictory. In the first place, there has undoubtedly been an expansion of programmes designed to increase the base of proficient Mandarin speakers (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3 The Expansion of the SAP Programme


(1987) Independent

(1990) Autonomous

All of the Independent and Autonomous schools offer Higher Mandarin in addition to their Express courses. The SAP schools, of course, continue to offer the Special stream. In 1995 the government officially extended the number of students allowed to take two languages at the Higher level to 20 percent (ST 23 Oct 1993). However, while these programmes have increased the base of proficient Mandarin speakers, they have simultaneously had a contradictory effect. Because the SAP schools are now absorbed into these larger programmes, as Figure 7.3 shows, their special status has been diffused. They now have to compete directly with the other Independent and Autonomous schools. This competition has intensified with the recent implementation of a rigorous annual
ranking exercise by the MOE. The result has been the reproduction of the status quo. That is, the top schools continue to be those with a strong English tradition.

One place where this maintenance of the status quo is particularly evident is in the secondary school affiliation of President Scholars. Table 7.2 shows the schools affiliated with President Scholars since 1981 when the first batch of SAP students would have been eligible for the scholarship.

### Table 7.2 Secondary School Affiliation of President Scholars (P.S.) (1981-1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>No. of P.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican High (Autonomous; SAP)</td>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Chinese Secondary (Independent; GEP)*</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic High (Autonomous; SAP)</td>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese High (Independent; SAP)</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chung Cheng High (Autonomous; SAP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunman High (Autonomous; SAP; GEP)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maris Stella High (Autonomous; SAP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist Girl's (Independent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nan Chiau High (Government-Aided)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanyang Girl's High (Independent; SAP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raffles Girls' Secondary (Independent; GEP)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raffles Institution (boys) (Independent; GEP)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Valley (Autonomous; SAP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore Chinese Girl's (Independent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrew's Secondary (Gov-Aided)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Gabriel's Secondary (Gov-Aided)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph's Convent (Government-Aided)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph's Institute (Independent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Nicholas Girls' (Autonomous; SAP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanjong Katong Girl's (Autonomous)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria Secondary (Autonomous)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
- Does not offer Higher Chinese


*The Gifted Education Programme (GEP) is offered in just four schools for the intellectually gifted. It provides special enrichment programmes in addition to the regular syllabus.
While this scholarship is only one measure, it is the most prestigious award in Singapore since it was first offered in 1966. And because Lee Kuan Yew has argued so strongly for the bilingualism-intelligence link, one would assume that the SAP schools would have an edge over the others as they alone offer the “Special Course”, the top bilingual programme. The table does seem to support the bilingualism-intelligence link. Between 1981 and 1994, only nine students did not attend schools that offered Higher Mandarin compared to the 69 that did. Most likely, these nine took their “higher language” course at another school.

From this table, it appears, then, that effective language-based streaming contributes to identifying the best students. And so one could conclude then that the expansion of the SAP programme has met its objectives. What is most surprising, however, is the low representation of SAP schools in the President Scholar roster. Between 1981 and 1994, only 14.1 percent of the president scholars went to SAP schools. In contrast, 70.5 percent went to one of the eight independent schools; only one student went to an independent SAP school. The Raffles schools alone represent 34.6 percent of the scholars. What seems to be going on is that there was and is a genuine desire to increase the status of Mandarin through the SAP schools and through the expansion of the Higher Mandarin programmes. However, there are other powerful forces at work that constrain this desire.

In the first place, the historical perceptions of these schools cannot be ignored. A sense of this history can be found in a MOE brochure entitled “What it means to be in a SAP school.” Ironically, the two aims of the SAP schools identified in the brochure both stressed the learning of English: that the schools attain as high a standard of English as in the English medium schools”, and to “raise the English Language proficiency of the non-English medium pupils in these schools to enable them eventually to study in junior colleges and tertiary institutions and to improve their prospects in employment.” There was a very clear sense that the way for these schools to achieve higher status was through raising their standard of English. These aims are thus telling of the position of SAP schools in relation to the English-medium schools. This history continues to influence the choices of parents and students regarding secondary education. Schools like Raffles and
Anglo-Chinese, which accept only the top three percent of students, have always been perceived as the most prestigious. It is significant that almost half of the current cabinet, including Lee Kuan Yew, and about one-third of parliament, received their secondary education at Raffles.

It also appears that Lee Kuan Yew's argument for the intelligence-bilingualism link is not completely tenable. These schools offering the top bilingual programmes always were among the top schools in Singapore. To place the Higher Mandarin programmes in the best schools was a logical conclusion to language-based streaming and to the bilingualism-intelligence link promoted by Lee Kuan Yew. However, it also increases the chances that the link will "hold true". At the same time, the strength of this link is substantially weakened when seen within the larger historical and educational contexts. Furthermore, consideration must also be given to the fact that tertiary education continues to be available only in English medium, and that the second language requirements have actually gone down. Applicants today must have a minimum of a D7 (a bare pass) at the GCE "A" level in their second language, and a C6 at the GCE "O" level in English. And so, while the bilingualism-intelligence link defines the streaming process, the importance of bilingualism continues to decrease as one moves through the education system.

And so it seems that the changes in education policy within the second phase of the "Asianising of Singapore" have in effect reproduced and legitimised the status quo. As I will show in the next section, the focus on Mandarin and on the Asianising discourse has also hidden the continuing dominance of English as the real linguistic power broker. In particular, it will be shown that there remains to be a very strong correlation between higher education, higher socio-economic status, and English.

7.4 English and the "Asianising of Singapore"

In spite of the focus on Mandarin within the "Asianising of Singapore", the definition and practices of English-knowing bilingualism clearly positioned English as the dominant language in Singapore. This dominance of English appears to follow Fishman's (1968b) notion of nation/nationism (Tan, 1995a). Nationism, Fishman argues, involves a
diglossic situation where indigenous languages coexist with a "language of wider communication" (LWC), with the latter functioning as the working language in society. The LWC is recognised primarily on the basis of its functional utility in the domains of science and technology. Much of the political and academic discussion in Singapore about English has followed the assumptions of LWC, a status reinforced by the concurrent relegation of the mother tongue languages to the domain of culture. English has been referred to as the "unifying working language" (Kuo, 1980b; see also 1976, 1977, 1979), and as linked with the "emergent national culture" (Benjamin, 1976). Tay (1993a) and Kuo (1980b) see English as the language of a "supra-ethnic national identity". Murray (1971) calls the English-educated potential "social brokers" and English a "link language". As we have already seen in Chapter Five, Lee Kuan Yew places the policy of extending English "to all" within the logic of meritocracy, as a way to level the playing field in the common pursuit of socio-economic advancement.

Tan (1995a), however, challenges the applicability of Fishman's LWC to English in Singapore. She argues that his notion of nationism is fundamentally flawed in that it projects English in apolitical terms as utilitarian and neutral. Nationism "assumes uncritically an ideology of modernisation which fails to connect the spread of the language with an understanding of the dialectics inherent in its development" (1995a:18). The notion of LWC also problematically assumes a unitary meaning of language, when in fact, language carries a multiplicity of competing meanings in its various domains of usage and as implicated in the processes of power relations. The choice of a particular language to function as the LWC is never a purely administrative decision, and its meanings and use are always related to systemic issues of power.

What particularly argues against this notion of unitary meanings in the English language is how English is embedded in the logic of meritocracy. Located within meritocracy, English not only has unifying possibilities, but also divisive ones (Gupta, 1994; Kandiah, 1994; Pakir, 1991, 1994a; Platt and Weber, 1980). This was evident in the findings of the 1990 Census. According to the Census, 65 percent of the population is literate in English. This means that 35 percent of the population is not able to read English. In terms of actual language use, the figures are substantially lower: 20.3
percent of the population reported English as a predominant household language, compared to 26.0 percent for Mandarin and 36.7 percent for other Chinese languages. Therefore, a high percentage of literacy does not necessarily mean that English is widely used by all. The statistics also show that proficiency in English is directly associated with social mobility and socio-economic status. 7.6 percent of households with incomes less than $1,000 per month use English as their dominant household language, compared to 33.5 percent of those earning $4,000 monthly.

Because educational streaming occurs very early (Primary 4), and because English is so crucial to this process, students who come from homes where English is used extensively have a strong advantage over others. In her study of students’ use of extracurricular language lessons, Kwan-Terry (1991) noted that 60.5 percent of Primary students in the “gifted” stream come from such English-advantaged backgrounds. Only 2.3 percent came from homes where Chinese dialects were used. In the monolingual stream, the reverse was true: children from English-speaking homes were not represented at all, while 60.6 percent came from dialect-speaking homes. She also found that more than half of Primary students hired tutors for extracurricular language lessons. English lessons were the most common, and were largely taken by those from middle-income homes, while those from the higher-income bracket tended to take mother tongue lessons. For obvious financial reasons, those from low-income homes were largely unable to provide for extra tuition. Kwan-Terry concludes,

Children from English-speaking homes where the father has a university education commanding a high income stand a much higher chance of getting into the top academic group where they are assured of a good future, as they are advantaged both on account of their language background and the financial resources available to them to help them cope with the language demands of the education system. Children from disadvantaged homes, on the other hand... are devoid of the necessary financial resources to avail themselves of help when help for the learning of languages is needed. (1991:88)
And so the social stratification system is perpetuated.  

Added to socio-economic status, there also appears to be a link between the English language and political power. A look through the curriculum vitae of the 1996 Cabinet Ministers revealed that all, except one, are English-educated. As well, all received their higher education in English-speaking countries. The one exception is BG Lee Hsien Loong, who attended Chinese-medium Catholic High. However, as a son of Lee Kuan Yew, he grew up in a predominantly English-speaking environment. Like the others, he too completed his tertiary education overseas, at Cambridge and Harvard. Within parliament as a whole, only 17 MPs (21%) of the 81-seat House received Mandarin secondary education. Of these, only 8 went on to Mandarin-medium Nanyang for their tertiary education; the rest attended English universities.  

So far I have been talking about English as if it were a single-meaning entity in Singapore. However, a distinction needs to be made (which is strikingly lacking in government discourse about language) between Standard Singapore English (SSE) and Singapore Colloquial English (SCE). This distinction is important for what it reveals about the meanings of the English language and about its role as a gatekeeper of socio-economic and political power. Pakir’s (1991) model of “Expanding Triangle of English Expression” (Figure 7.4) brings us forward in this discussion. In particular, it shows how the range of English expression negates any notion of a single “English” language that can stand as the LWC in Singapore.

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1 A. Mitchell came to similar conclusions in her study of tuition in Canada. “Class Distinctions. Children who are better off financially do better in school.” Second of four parts in The Globe and Mail (28 April 1997).
According to Pakir, those users of English with higher education are located at the top ends of both the formality and proficiency clines. They are capable of the whole range of English expression, and are able to move along the whole length of the formality cline. Most, however, are located at the base of the triangle. They have lower levels of proficiency, typically have lower levels of education, and tend to come from a lower socio-economic background. They are more restricted in their movement along the formality cline, and can usually speak only the colloquial forms of Singapore English.

Pakir's model is somewhat limited in that it remains unclear how one might place an individual speaker on this triangle (what is the difference between basic and rudimentary?). It is also doubtful that all speakers of SSE are indeed able to move all the way down the proficiency cline to speak SCE at the lowest level. However, her model is useful for what it tells us about the multiplicity of meanings embedded in the English language. These meanings hinge on a complex interplay between proficiency, power, and socio-economic status. The model also brings us further in understanding the paradoxes discussed earlier with regard to the education system. As English became increasingly "available to all", the criterion of language as the basis of meritocracy has become more finely tuned. Through this fine-tuning, the status quo is maintained.
Before moving on, it is worth considering for a moment the government’s response to this diversity of Singapore English, and how their response reinforces the relationship between language and the distribution of power. To a large extent, the government’s response has been couched in the familiar regression equation whereby Standard Singapore English and Singapore Colloquial English are pitted against each other. We thus see a pattern evolving: more Mandarin, less dialects; more Mandarin, less English; and now, more SSE and less SCE. This pattern relates very much to the government’s “space-management” concept of language learning. In this view, there is only limited space in the brain for language. As such, if one were to use SCE, there would be less space for SSE, and SCE would even corrupt the “purity” of SSE. As with the broad categorisation of race into three main groups (Chinese, Malay, Indian) whereby diversity is homogenised, so too linguistic diversity is not tolerated.

As already mentioned, the leaders see “Singlish”, as SCE is more commonly called, in the same way they view dialects: as inappropriate for the imagining of the nation. Already in 1977, one of the ministers noted that, “Whichever way English evolves, we have to ensure that the English spoken by our pupils is internationally intelligible” (ST 18 Aug 1977). The concern expressed here of course reflects the pragmatic discourse of English, where English is valued as an economic resource. “Upgrading” the standard of English is given considerable attention, largely through the involvement of the British Council and the Regional (English) Language Centre (RELC). The MOE recruits non-Singaporean native English speakers to teach English in the schools, local teachers are trained in language proficiency and teaching, and English-proficiency courses are frequently offered in companies and the civil service.

More recently, however, there has been a growing view among some Singaporeans that Singlish should be seen as the language for Singaporean identity. The controversy gained currency in 1993 when several popular English entertainment television programs, such as The Ra Ra Show and Mum’s not Cooking, had some of their characters liberally

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4 There are many discoursal, grammatical, lexical, phonological, and idomatic features of “Singlish”, and the definitions are continually evolving. A good starting place for a description of some of these features would be English in New Cultural Contexts, by J.A. Foley, et al. (Singapore: Oxford University Press and SIM), 1998. For a more light-hearted introduction to these features, see Appendix C.
speaking Singlish. On the one side of the debate were those who saw Singlish as "mongrel-lingualism" (ST 24 Jan 1985), "a perversion of the English language", and as a "grotesque form of English" (ST 11 May 1993). They worried that the use of Singlish on television would hinder their children's learning of "proper English" and that it might tarnish Singapore's reputation internationally.

On the other side were those who saw Singlish as a home-grown *rojak* language, "an idiosyncratic vernacular combining elements of the official languages of English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil as well as Chinese dialects such as Hokkien and Cantonese" (ST 14 May 1993). They made a diglossic distinction between "high" SSE and "low" Singlish. A Straits Times reader used Platt's (1980) "speech continuum" to describe this diglossic pattern (although local linguists see the lectal continuum and diglossia views as contrastive interpretations of English in Singapore; see Alsagoff and Ho, 1998:130-133): "The basilect is distinctively and delightfully Singaporean. We don't have to apologise for it and we should be free to use it - unblushingly - when the occasion arises... Let the basilect stay, but let's also have a wide enough repertoire to 'switch' to higher 'lect' if need be" (26 Apr 1983). A reporter for the Business Times wrote about the trendiness of Singlish among English-educated young professionals. The deliberate switch to Singlish was described as "a familiarity marker, an act of identity" (25 June 1992). Tan Chong Kee (a participant on an Internet panel Multiculturalism in Singapore, 1996) sees an "overarching hybridised and non-ethnocentric national identity" forming through Singlish. "Singlish cuts across ethnic boundaries and draws its speakers into national identification, whereas English might be a common language but it is also a language of exclusion." Yet, while this notion of a hybridised national identity may cut across ethnic boundaries, one cannot ignore the class dimensions of Singlish. In Pakir's model, only a small percentage of the population can effectively switch between the two varieties of Singapore English. The majority, those at the base of the triangle, speak Singlish not as a voluntary act of

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5 *Rojak* is a Singaporean dish consisting of a mixture of food (fruit, vegetables, seafood) and dipped in a thick sauce. The term is also commonly used metaphorically in Singapore to refer to any "mixture of diversing." For example, Singapore can be called a *rojak* society, i.e., a mixture of different ethnic groups. See A. Brown, *Making Sense of Singapore English* (Singapore: Federal Publishers), 1992.
identity but because of limited language proficiency (although I would not equate Singlish with broken English). The ability to code-switch thus is a powerful and divisive marker of socio-economic status. It cannot be claimed that Singlish is non-exclusionary or reflects a hybridised national identity.

The government’s response to the Singlish debate has been to deny Singlish legitimacy in the imagining of the nation. This came with Singapore Broadcasting Corporation’s (SBC) announcement in 1993 that Singlish would no longer be allowed on television (ST 1 July 1993). As the government controls SBC, this decision is seen as government policy. In a press release, SBC produced “clear guidelines” on the definition and use of English in its programs. They defined Standard English as “grammatically correct and pronounced in the correct way” (i.e., British RP); local English as “grammatically correct but spoken in a recognisably Singaporean accent”; and Singlish as “ungrammatical English spoken by those with a poor command of English” (ST 10 July 1993). This last definition of course ignores the fact that Singlish is not just a language spoken by those with a “poor command of English”, but also by some as an act of identity. Furthermore, local grammarians (e.g., Alsagoff and Ho, 1998) argue that Singlish follows specific grammatical rules. By dismissing Singlish as “ungrammatical” and as used by “those with a poor command of English”, Singlish and those who are limited to its speech are denied any legitimate status in the imagining of the nation.

From this discussion, it appears that, in spite of the increased focus on Mandarin in the “Asianising of Singapore”, the meritocratic basis of English continues to position proficiency in English as the main gatekeeper of socio-economic status and political power. As English became increasingly “available to all”, the language requirements to pass through the gate became more stringent. The distinction between SSE and Singlish demonstrates this fine-tuning: how those with limited proficiency in SSE are denied status and power in the nation, and ultimately, how the status quo is maintained.

So far in this chapter, I have looked at language ideological debates within the third section of the “river” and in the second phase of the “Asianising of Singapore”. By positioning Mandarin and English within a tension framework, it has been possible for Mandarin to take on value-added meanings. At the same time, the functional polarisation
of language is reinforced, silencing any demands for English to be a mother tongue. Through my analyses of education policy and of the meanings of English, it has also become clear that it is English (SSE) and not Mandarin that continues to be the real power broker in society. And so, in many ways, the “Asianising of Singapore” ironically serves to hide this dominance.

However, the story is not complete without an account of how voices of resistance have also participated in the emergence of these dominant discourses.

7.5 Voices of Resistance

I mentioned in the previous chapter that the use of a national campaign for the promotion of Mandarin created two paradoxes. One has to do with the conflation of nation and community in the use of a national campaign for issues at the community level. The second has to do with the conflation of the public and private domains in the use of a public genre (national campaign) for language issues in the private domain of the mother tongue. These two paradoxes have translated into powerful areas of resistance by the different communities. The former has been voiced mainly by the non-Chinese communities; and the latter by the members of the Chinese community – by the dialect-speakers during the earlier years of the campaign, and, as we have already seen, by the English-educated during the later years. In this section, I will talk about these voices and how the government leaders have responded, and about how this debate is to be understood within the imagining of the nation.

7.5.1 Mandarin for Nation? For Community?

The multiracialist discourse in the “Asianising of Singapore” paints a picture of Singapore as being a multiethnic nation with three homogenous ethnic communities unproblematically coexisting in equilibrious relation to each other. Singapore has rejected the “melting pot” model in favour of retaining the cultural heritage of the different ethnic communities. The multiracialist discourse also contends that such cultural and ethnic identity
coexists harmoniously with political loyalty at the national level. Goh Chok Tong captured this harmony in the phrase: "Unity in diversity", which he says is "what we must aim and work for" (ST 14 Aug 1988). I am reminded of his rationale for multi-lingual (rather than English) signs: "Singapore is an Asian multiracial country... The selective use of multilingual signs will reflect in a symbolic, visible way, the multiracial, Asian [and national] character of Singapore" (ST 27 July 1991).

However, there are a number of problems with this model. In the first place, the equal status accorded to the different communities is difficult to maintain. The Chinese are by far the dominant group. As a result, in spite of the government’s genuine efforts to manage ethnicity fairly (Vasil, 1995; Chua Beng Huat, 1995), in many ways the “Asianising of Singapore” appears to translate into the “Chinesification” of Singapore. From the language policies examined in the last few chapters, there seems to be a pattern emerging: a language problem is identified within the Chinese community, usually by the Prime Minister or some other Minister; a committee is subsequently appointed to review the problem and to put forward recommendations; these recommendations are then implemented across the whole nation. In many respects, the non-Chinese communities have benefited from this strategy. It has given them opportunity to develop their own language and cultures and to receive mother tongue education. In 1985, the MOE announced that it would offer Higher Malay to the top ten percent of PSLE students, with similar benefits as those offered to Higher Mandarin students (ST 25 Nov 1985). Since 1989, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Gujerati and Bengali have been recognised as secondary school examination subjects in addition to Tamil. This was extended to primary schools in 1993 (ST 3 Aug 1993). When Chinese community leaders asked for Mandarin signs in public places, the government responded by legislating multi-lingual signs in selected areas. Nonetheless, it remains a Chinese-driven agenda, and thus these are fortuitous benefits. The needs of the minorities continue to be met on the periphery.

A further problem in the discourse and policy of “Asianising Singapore” is that there is considerable ambiguity between community and national identity. It is not always clear which is being referenced in political discourse. This ambiguity is heightened by the conflicting forces of celebrating ethnic distinctiveness while at the same time collapsing ethnic identity to allow a
national identity to emerge. A look at the use of pronouns in Goh Chok Tong’s 1991 SMC speech demonstrates this ambiguity. Once again, I have placed these pronouns on Rees’ (1983) scale of pronominal distancing:

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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I/My/Me</td>
<td>(4x/5x/2x)</td>
<td>We/Us/Our</td>
<td>(16x/2x/7x)</td>
<td>You/Your</td>
<td>(2x/0x)</td>
<td>He/His</td>
</tr>
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</table>

In line with his “consultative” style of governance (in contrast to Lee Kuan Yew’s authoritarian style), Goh typically makes extensive use of inclusive pronouns in his speeches. The first two categories alone account for 36 (63%) pronominal instances. In contrast, there are relatively few instances of exclusionary pronouns. For example, “they” is used only 8 times, and not once in reference to an out-group. There is thus a clear attempt by Goh to develop a sense of affinity and community. Not only does he draw his audience in, but the use of these pronouns also gives him a strong presence in the text. This sense of community brings everyone into the problem. Together, Singaporeans must work towards fulfilling the criteria for nationhood. It is “our problem” (82), “our aim” (95) and in “our national interest” (34).

It is instructive to note when Goh does not use inclusive pronouns. After drawing his audience into the problem, when it comes to working towards a solution, he retreats. In the last paragraph, he lapses into the traditional community-based rhetoric (Chua Beng Huat, 1995) whereby each community is responsible for its own welfare. In order to remove himself, it seems he needs to extract the human element that had been so present in his text. For the first time, the Chinese community is de-humanised as an “it”. The nationhood of Singapore requires not the efforts of “we” or “us”, but rather, of an inanimate Chinese community.

However, while Goh’s use of inclusive pronouns creates a sense of community and bonding, a closer analysis reveals considerable ambiguity. The use of “we” in lines 4 and 5 clearly refers to Singaporeans, and in lines 62 and 63 to the Chinese community. But, the other references are not so clear:
His constant switching between references to nation and community compounds the ambiguity. For example, when Goh details the extent of the problem, he oscillates between Chinese community/family and nation (government). In lines 27-28 (and again in the last paragraph), he merges nationhood with community homogeneity. In lines 71-73, he talks about how Singapore’s history is short, and so “we” must identify with China’s 5000 year-old civilisation. As well, while the immediate audience was the Chinese community, because the speech was printed in *The Straits Times*, the main “non-ethnic” (national) newspaper, the audience was also “nationalised”.

The ambiguity in Goh’s text can be understood at at least two levels (see Gruber, 1993 for more on ambiguity in political talk). Firstly, the specific reference of the pronouns can be seen as irrelevant to the general aura and effect of the speech. It does not demand intense scrutiny. If anything, and secondly, the ambiguity enhances the overall effect of community. The ambiguity attempts to diffuse any sense of boundary, and to maintain a discourse of multiracialism within the “Asianising of Singapore”.

A comparison between the text of Goh’s speech with the coverage of this speech in *The Straits Times*, provides further insight into his use of ambiguity and conflation of nation and community. The most striking difference between the two texts is the schema of the text, and how the text is framed. In Table 7.3, I have compared the schematic construction of the two texts. The numbers in parentheses in the first column refer to the corresponding paragraph numbers in Goh Chok Tong’s text (Appendix A).
Table 7.3 The Schematic Construction of Goh Chok Tong's 1991 *Speak Mandarin Campaign* Speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Straits Times (Appendix B)</th>
<th>Goh Chok Tong's Text (Appendix A)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Paragraph</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 (15)</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>2 (16)</td>
<td>Community – nation</td>
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<tr>
<td>3, 4 (2,3)</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<td>5 (4)</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 (5)</td>
<td>Nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 (6)</td>
<td>Nation – community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (6,7,8)</td>
<td>English dominance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (10)</td>
<td>Community/culture</td>
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<td>10 (12)</td>
<td>SCCCI</td>
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<td>11 (13)</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>12 (14)</td>
<td>Nation (non-Chinese)</td>
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<td>13 (-)</td>
<td>Community</td>
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As we have already noted concerning the schema of Goh Chok Tong’s text (section 7.2), Goh framed his speech with “the nation”. Embedded within this national framework were his references to the Chinese community, with considerable conflation and ambiguity between the two audiences. However, the text found in the *ST* does the exact reverse. In the newspaper account, the schema of Goh’s text is changed so that it is the community that frames the text. The newspaper begins with the last two paragraphs of Goh’s text, and then ends with a reference to the “English-education Chinese Singaporeans” as the main target of the 1991 campaign. The internal schema of the newspaper’s text keeps fairly close to the original.

This reorganisation of Goh’s text by the press is significant in two ways. In the first place, the fact that *The Straits Times* felt it was necessary to make a more pointed distinction between nation and community highlights the ambiguity in Goh’s text. Secondly, it highlights the explosive tension that this ambiguity and conflation potentially cause. The press was clearly being careful to make the boundaries very explicit. All references to the nation were made only in terms of how the Chinese community had a
national responsibility to settle their language issues, and how they were to remain sensitive to their non-Chinese counterparts. This is further evident when we compare Goh’s comment in paragraph four (lines 24-38). “In Singapore”, he says, “communication across families is even more complicated for the older generation.” Then he goes on to talk about communication among the elderly dialect speaking members of the Chinese community. In contrast, the ST says (paragraph 5, lines 21-22): “For the older generation here, he said, communication was even more difficult as it was not unusual to find two Chinese together who were unable to talk to each other.” While “here” is somewhat ambiguous and could mean either nation or community, it is less obvious than Goh’s direct reference to Singapore and his immediate discussion about the Chinese community. Thus, the reorganisation of the schema of the text, and these changes in reference both highlights the ambiguity in Goh’s text and the caution exercised by the ST in targeting Goh’s message to the Chinese community while informing the nation.

This conflation of community and nation within the genre of a national campaign has been highly problematic. It is precisely because it is not always clear to whom the campaign speeches are directed, and who is being drawn into the “we”, that the non-Chinese communities have reacted against the campaign. They fear an increase in Chinese chauvinism, and worry that there may be a consequent reduction in the status of their languages and cultures, and that the government might weaken its commitment to multiracialism (ST 16 May 1978). The recent focus on Mandarin-versus-English made these questions even more pertinent. English is not confined to just the Chinese community (unlike dialects), and so the lines between community and nation became increasingly vague. The fault-line broke open during the 1990 SMC. The theme that year was about speaking Mandarin at work, which is clearly not a community-specific domain. The Straits Times was flooded with letters from both the Chinese and non-Chinese communities condemning the campaign as chauvinistic and exclusionary. As former Senior Minister Rajaratnam noted, people were questioning the government’s commitment to multiracialism, and whether the leaders were “doing all this in favour of a Singaporean Singapore” (ST 29 Oct 1990). They were questioning the ambiguous boundary between nation and (Chinese) ethnic community.
Because of such resistance, the leaders must repeatedly qualify the SMC’s objectives. First, there is the frequent guarantee that the campaign is not about replacing English with Mandarin as the official working language. After the furor of the 1990 campaign, Goh Chok Tong assured Singaporeans that the government’s “policy towards the Chinese language has not changed. English will remain the working language in Singapore” (ST 27 Oct 1990). Second, the leaders assert that the promotion of Mandarin is not to diminish the status of the other official ethnic languages. During the 1981 campaign, SMC chairman Ho Kah Leong (and Parliamentary Secretary, Education) said, “I want to emphasise here that the government” is not promoting Mandarin “to the exclusion of the other languages. Mandarin WILL NOT replace the other official languages” (ST 4 Oct 1981). Third, the discourse of multiracialism is frequently brought in to reassure the non-Chinese communities that the campaign is not for them, and not to make Singaporean society more Chinese at the expense of the other communities. The PAP leaders call attention to the government’s support for the development of the minority cultures. BG Lee Hsien Loong spent considerable time on this theme in his speech at the launch of the 1988 SMC:

*Majlis Pusat* (Central Council of Malay Cultural Organisations) and other Malay cultural organisations organised a Malay Language and Culture Month this year, and Indian cultural organisations organise similar Tamil language activities from time to time. The Government encourages them to do so. Our desire to preserve traditional values is not confined to the Chinese community alone. It is good for the nation that Singaporeans of all races have a clear sense of where they have come from, and why they are here. Each community should take pride in its heritage, retain it and develop upon it.

In his 1991 SMC speech, Goh Chok Tong similarly reminded the non-Chinese communities of the government’s efforts to promote their languages and cultures. “We want all the ethnic communities to preserve their language, culture and values”, he said. “We aim to be a harmonious, multiracial society” (98-99). Equilibrium is thus restored through the discourse of the “Asianising of Singapore” and through the reinstatement of the “race = language = culture” equation.
In addition to the ambiguity surrounding community and nation, the crossing of Mandarin into the economic domain of language ideology also upset the balance of language ideologies within the functional polarisation of language (see Figure 6.2). The value-added status of Mandarin had two effects. First of all, because Mandarin stepped outside its ethnic enclave, the argument could be made that it was no longer tied to the “race = language = culture” equation. Various members of the non-Chinese communities began to argue for open access to Mandarin and hence open access to the economic opportunities it gave. As Malay grassroots leader Mr. Abdul Halim Kader has argued, “The Chinese hold the reigns of business in this country.” Learning Mandarin would be one way to break their monopoly. Justice A.P. Rajah encouraged top Tamil students to learn Mandarin as a third language. “If you look at the future”, he told them, “job opportunities will not be confined to the two languages [Tamil and English]. The study of Mandarin will be equally important because of the industrialisation of China and if [sic] you look at the Chinese population in Southeast Asia” (ST 27 Oct 1985). MP Kanwaljit Soin also suggested to parliament that non-Chinese pupils be allowed to take Mandarin as a second language (ST 13 Oct 1993). However, the government’s response has been to keep the “third language” option limited to the top 10 percent of PSLE pupils. Because the number of non-Chinese students at this level is small, it is “legitimately” not feasible to offer Mandarin as a third language (ST 7 Oct 1994). Only non-Tamil South Asians and pupils of mixed parentage are allowed to take Mandarin as a second language; all others must learn their mother tongue according to the “race = language = culture” equation.

Secondly, the value-added status of Mandarin challenged the parity between the mother tongues (see Figure 6.2). This parity was quickly restored, however, in two ways: by neutralising Mandarin, and by extending pragmatic rationality to Tamil and Malay. Concerning the former, by arguing for Mandarin in the terms of pragmatic rationality, Mandarin is “de-ethnicised” or neutralised. That is, pragmatism creates a space for discussions about the need for Mandarin and creates a legitimate focus on Mandarin. The focus on Mandarin cannot be called chauvinistic, because it has extra-ethnic and extra-cultural validity. Concerning the latter, MP Low Thia Khiang said in parliament that “Malay and Tamil would also have economic value as most of Singapore’s neighbours
spoke Malay, and Singaporeans were encouraged to do business in India" (ST 13 Oct 1993). BG George Yeo mentioned at the opening of the Malay Language Month that the government’s aim was to make Malay one of the important languages of trade in the region (ST 11 June 1990). This discourse works very closely with Singapore’s economic policies of regionalisation. The regionalisation programme is to promote investment projects within the region, including Indonesia and India, as a way to diversify the Singapore economy. Seen in this light, the impetus behind Singapore’s language policies and language ideologies is once again defined by economics. It must be noted, however, that the economic value of Tamil and Malay is perhaps not as strong or obvious as that of Mandarin. Business in India is mostly conducted in English. And much of the economic clout in the Malay region (especially Indonesia) is held by the Chinese communities. However, the link has been a way for the government to encourage the various communities to participate in the nation’s economic strategies. And by all three mother tongues sharing in this discourse, they are once again placed in equilibrious relation with each other. Thus the functional polarisation of language ideologies essentially remains intact.

**7.5.2 Public Genre For Private Domain?**

Most national campaigns in Singapore are concerned with issues relating to public behaviour. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the SMC also appears to be about behaviour in the public domain. Lee Kuan Yew stated very clearly in 1979 that he would not interfere with the home: “I want to be quite clear, we cannot control what is done at home; that we have to leave to the good sense of the parents and the grandparents.” Instead, he said, the government will focus on “dramatically” altering the pattern of language use outside the home, in government offices, public transportation, markets and restaurants, shopping centres and so on. *Straits Times* Editor Peter Lim interpreted Lee Kuan Yew’s comments as a policy of non-interference (ST 24 Nov 1979): “While Mr. Lee still seeks to get Singaporeans to stick to two languages and not complicate life for themselves by hanging on to dialects, he concedes that home is where government should
not interfere... he leaves it to the parents to decide. Did I hear a sigh of relief last night?"
The demarcation between private and public was thus made very explicit.

However, it also is clear that the main objective of the campaign has been to make Mandarin a "mother tongue", the language of the private domain. Quoting again from Lee Kuan Yew, "The ultimate test" of the SMC's success "is whether Mandarin is spoken at home between parents and their children. That is the meaning of mother tongue" (ST 26 Oct 1981). Shortly after the campaign began, Goh Chok Tong announced that the 1980 census would for the first time include a survey on what languages Singaporeans speak at home. The same question would be asked in the 1990 census "to monitor the success" of the SMC (ST 19 Nov 1979). The SMC itself was launched in direct response to the failure of the bilingual policy, which the Goh Committee blamed on dialect use in the homes. The focus on the home is also evident in the fact that nine of the SMC speeches from 1979-1994 included statistics on the language most frequently spoken at home; seven of the first ten speeches urged parents choose Mandarin over dialects in the home.

The use of a national campaign (public) to alter the use of language in the home (private) is explosively contradictory. As with the blurred distinction between nation and community, this contradiction has formed a fault-line along which voices of resistance have emerged. In particular, these voices have resisted the government's definition and ascription of a mother tongue. I have already discussed the voices of the English-educated who regard English as their mother tongue. Another voice is that of the dialect speakers, who consider their dialect as their true mother tongue. Although the focus on dialects was stronger during the first ten years of the campaign, I have chosen to discuss it here because of a recent revival of dialects and clan activities, and subsequent changes in language policy. I will first discuss resistance to the government's attempts to eliminate dialects from the homes. This resistance was most strongly heard with the implementation of two policies: Hanyu Pinyin for students' names, and the elimination of dialects in the mass media. I will then talk about the recent revival of dialects, and examine how this revival has been possible and what it means for language ideologies in the imagining of the nation.
7.5.2.1 Dialects: Acts of Personal Identity

It is a difficult thing

I
When we were evicted from Malaysia,  
I cried with you.  
When you called for a "Rugged Society",  
I helped to train the trainee teachers in  
Youth Leadership Camps.  
When you launched the "Keep Singapore  
Clean Campaign".  
I stopped being a litter bug.

II
When you wanted volunteers to service the  
People's Defence Force,  
I joined.  
When you wanted the "Garden City",  
I planted.  
When you launched the "Keep Singapore  
Clean Campaign".  
I stopped being a litter bug.

III
When you determined what language I  
should speak  
I complied.  
When you wanted me to smile, 6  
My smile could have won the hearts  
of the prettiest girls.  
When you advocated "Stop at Two", 7  
I stopped at one.

IV
When you wanted the "Garden City",  
I planted.  
When you determined what language I  
should speak  
I complied.  
Now, you want me to change my name after  
four generations in Singapore...  
it's tough, it's real tough!

-A proud, very, very proud Tan  
("Forum Page", ST 24 July 1982)

When the SMC was first launched, there was considerable negative reaction from  
the Chinese community. While most supported the objectives of the SMC as they applied  
to the public domain, there was strong resentment against any move by the government to  
interfere in the private domain of the "mother tongue". Most of those without formal  
education and many of the Chinese-educated continued to speak their dialects at home,  
and most considered their dialects, not Mandarin, as their mother tongue. Parents were  
reluctant to replace dialects with Mandarin in the home because they feared "their children  
might lose their grasp of the mother tongue in the process" (ST 17 Aug 1976). Dialects  
continued to be a very important factor in demarcating the unique cultural characteristics  
of the various groups within the Chinese community. One reader wrote to The Straits  
Times, "The assumption is that dialects have little or no culture in them. What most have

6 This is in reference to the " Courtesy Campaign."
7 This is in reference to the Government's campaign to control population growth. The slogan was "stop  
at two."
neglected to deal with is the fact that for the dialect-speaking Chinese, dialect represents culture, while Mandarin does not" (12 Oct 1979). It was dialect speaking parents and grandparents that played an active role in the transmission of culture and values. Dialects, not Mandarin, were seen as necessary for intimacy, for culture and roots, for family and clan identity, and as the true mother tongue. Indeed, since 1989, the Ministry of Communications and Development has tried to recover some of this oral culture that is dying with the steady disappearance of dialects. They mounted a national search for the traditional dialect nursery rhymes to be “documented as part of the national heritage” (ST 11 Jan 1990).

This general resistance to the SMC’s aim to eliminate the use of dialects concentrated around two specific policy decisions. The first, which I mentioned already in Chapter Six, had to do with the MOE’s announcement in 1980 that all students would have to register in their Hanyu Pinyin names. The official rationale for this policy was to promote a common identity among the various Chinese dialect groups. As reported in The Straits Times: “Mr. Chan Kai Yau said the ministry’s decision is in line with the Speak Mandarin Campaign and will also have the effect of standardising Chinese names so that it will be impossible to tell which dialect group a pupil belongs to by simply looking at his name” (ST 20 Nov 9180). Hanyu Pinyin is a romanised system of transcribing Chinese characters based on Mandarin pronunciation. Most Chinese in Singapore go by the dialect pronunciation and transliteration of their Chinese names. The same Chinese character will have different dialect pronunciations, such that, for example, the same name will be Tan in Hokkien, Chan in Cantonese, Sin in Hainanese, and Chen for Mandarin. The MOE’s policy thus required students to assume a name different from the one given them by their parents, and different from their father’s. Parents were also urged to give their children Mandarin names at birth. Lee Kuan Yew made compliance with this recommendation a measure of one’s identification with the Chinese community in his 1984 SMC speech:

When parents registered their children’s names, between August 1982 to July 1984, one-fifth registered only their dialect names, a total rejection. Over one-third registered their dialect names, with full Pinyin in brackets, a concession to their identification with other Chinese of different dialects, a tentative and reluctant acceptance. Nearly one-quarter registered their
sumames in dialect and their personal names in Pinyin, a partial acceptance, i.e. they will not give up their total identification with their fathers’ and grandfathers’ dialect surnames but are prepared to concede an identification with Chinese of other dialects through using Pinyin for their personal names. One-fifth did so in full Pinyin, a full acceptance.8

By implication, the choice to keep one’s name in dialect was an indication that one preferred division and fragmentation to a united Chinese community.

However, names are intensely personal and reflect personal, family, and group identities. A Straits Times survey conducted shortly after the policy was announced (21 Nov 1980) revealed a polarised reaction between the Chinese- and English-educated. Reactions from the English-educated “ranged from mild support to an angry denouncement of it as ‘an infringement of the individual’s right.’” Some wrote to the press that the government had “gone overboard”, and that the policy was “unconstitutional” (ST 7,9 June 1982). The Chinese-educated considered the move “as logically in step” with SMC, while “dialect speakers, who believe firmly that whatever the government decides is always for their good, said they have no complaints if that is what the government wants” (ST 21 Nov 1980). Teachers complained that the policy caused confusion and that it was a futile exercise (ST 17 Jan 1981; 7 June 1982). For example, one unfortunate student missed out on receiving her milk at lunch time until, when the teacher contacted the parents, it was found out that Teo Geok Boey did not recognise her Hanyu Pinyin name, Zhang Yumei, on the milk carton (ST 23 Feb 1986).

But perhaps the strongest voice of resistance was the “silent” one that spoke against registering children’s birth names in dialect. After a full decade, it was clear that most Chinese Singaporeans continued to resist giving their children pinyin names. According to The Straits Times editor, people simply “have not bought” the government’s argument for pinyinising names (23 Dec 1991). In 1987, Lee Kuan Yew noted that only 12 percent of all Chinese babies born in January to June 1987 were registered with full pinyinised names, compared to 22 percent in 1983. The number of children who had

8 To illustrate, a ‘dialect only’ name could be Wang Chee Lak, the same name with mixed translation would be Wang Zhi Li, and in full Hanyu Pinyin would be Wen Zhili.
dialect surnames with Hanyu Pinyin personal names increased. The editor interpreted this pattern as steeped in issues of identity: "After all, most parents would want their surnames and their offspring's to be instantly recognisable as one and the same, as an outward mark of their blood bond... There is also the desire to preserve symbolic links with their dialect groups and the provinces and villages of their forefathers in China" (23 Dec 1991).

The second policy decision concerned the area of entertainment. In 1979, the government announced that all dialect television programming, movies and radio were to be either phased out or dubbed in Mandarin. Again this prompted a strong reaction from the Chinese community. Even though a large number of the educated Chinese population understood Mandarin, it was the dialect programmes that held greater cultural and comic appeal. *The Straits Times* editor noted that, while most supported the SMC, public reaction to the policy announcement came "thick and fast – and is overwhelmingly against the exercise" (1 Nov 1979). The press received more than 100 letters, many with multiple signatures. The editor claimed that no other issue in recent years had "provoked anywhere near the same kind of reaction and so swiftly", with reactions ranging from "dismay and sadness to anger and outrage" (2 Nov 1979). When the last remaining dialect programme, "The Brothers", was dubbed in 1981, two out of every three (67%) Chinese felt that dialect programming should not be dropped completely (*ST* 28 Sept 1981). Some argued that the policy would wrongly deprive the older dialect-speaks; others said dubbing would result in a loss of "flavour" and meaning; and others that much of the entertainment value would be lost. Ironically, the popularity of "The Brothers" was ignored by Eddie Kuo in his analysis of trends in SBC viewership (*ST* 12 Oct 1981). His survey showed that all but one of the ten most popular television programmes were Mandarin. Yet, he failed to note the significance that "The Brothers" was the one exception and that it *topped* the list. Rather than commenting on how this reflected the continuing popularity of dialect over Mandarin in the area of entertainment, he concentrated on the popularity of Mandarin over English.

In spite of such resistance, the government remained firm in its decision. Ow Chin Hock (then Parliamentary Secretary, Culture) said: "The government is determined to push ahead relentlessly its effort to dub more dialect films or television serials in Mandarin
despite public opposition... There is no way we will change the policy... We will definitely not compromise” (ST 4 Nov 1979). He went on to argue that, “All efforts to promote Mandarin would be nullified if so powerful a medium as the Cantonese serials were allowed to continue... The government regards such serials not as entertainment but as opportunities to help get people to learn and speak Mandarin.” Ultimately, he said, “It would be impossible to survey public reaction before implementing every government policy. The government has to place the interests of the nation above everything else... The government cannot afford to make decisions based on popular public opinion” (ST 19 Nov 1979).

This theme of individual “sacrifice” has been a mainstay of the government’s defence. Goh Chok Tong once invoked Sorel’s phrase, “You can’t make an omelette without breaking the egg”, to imply that individual sacrifice must be made for the sake of the nation (ST 19 Nov 1979). BG Lee Hsien Loong (then Trade and Industry and Second Defence Minister) talked about this sacrifice in his 1988 SMC speech:

At first, many, especially older folks, were unhappy that SBC was phasing out dialect programmes on television. Now, Singaporeans have accepted it... I recognise what a sacrifice the older generation of dialect speaking Chinese have made, for us to achieve this transformation. I thank them for making this sacrifice, and co-operating in this effort to change the spoken language of the whole community. Their grandchildren will be grateful for what they have done.

However, any notion of sacrifice is highly idiosyncratic, as it implies there was a choice when in fact, there was none.

**7.5.2.2 The Dialect Comeback**

As numerous statistics have shown, the use of dialects in the home is significantly reduced. However, it is also clear that the last vestiges of dialect are not yet consigned to the pages of local linguistic history! A stroll through the hawker centres and markets will reveal the sights and sounds of dialects. A turn of the dial on the radio will bring one to a dialect station. A casual viewing of local situation comedies and dramas will reveal the
interspersed use of dialects. When attending an election rally, as I was able to do during the 1997 General Election, one will hear the extensive use of dialects by the candidates. A visit to clan meetings will similarly reveal the predominant use of dialects.

The Government’s attitude towards dialects has clearly changed. In 1992, BG George Yeo told parliament what would have been unthinkable ten years earlier. While Mandarin would continue to be the unifying language for the Chinese community, he said, dialects are also important to the community “in carrying out their business, cultural or political activities... In short, the Government will neither support nor suppress Chinese dialects” (ST 18 Mar 1992). Later that same year, he said, “We cannot totally reject dialects because they are about our roots” (ST 19 Dec 1992). Just as community and national identity can coexist, clan identity through dialects is no longer seen as contradictory to community identity through Mandarin. The Straits Times editor pointed to the dialect-based clans, who “are among the staunchest proponents of Mandarin”, as evidence that “there is no inherent contradiction between dialect-based loyalties... and learning Mandarin as a unifying tongue for the Chinese” (23 Dec 1991). In 1991, the government announced that students could once again register in their dialect names (ST 14 Dec 1991). And just recently, Minister for Information and the Arts George Yeo announced that more dialect programmes would be allowed on cable television channels, although not on local free channels (ST 11, 16 May, 1997).

In part, it can be argued that the campaign has been successful in getting Mandarin into the homes, and so residual dialects no longer pose a threat to the bilingual policy. However, the timing of the reversal of the policy on students’ names reveals something else. In the 1991 elections, the PAP lost four seats to the opposition. Apparently, one of the main reasons for this loss was that those at the bottom of Pakir’s triangle (Fig. 7.4), those with the lowest levels of education, socio-economic status, and limited proficiency in English, fought back. Dr. John Chen, then Chairman of the PAP’s Publicity and Publications Committee, gave his post-election analysis as follows:

I believe the primary factor that caused the swing of votes was disenchantment with certain government policies, the consequences of which were felt... by individuals who have failed to make it, or who are struggling just to make ends meet. They belong to the lower socio-
economic category of Singaporeans, primarily due to lack of skills and inadequate grasp of the English language. (1991:4–5)

SM Lee Kuan Yew has also pointed out that the election outcome was a reminder that dialect and clan loyalties do not die easily (ST 14 Dec 1991), and that policy needs to be adjusted accordingly. And a Straits Times commentary on the election results noted that the reason the Workers Party candidate won the Hougang seat was because he used Teochew. It was in response to these results and analyses that the government’s attitude towards dialects has been considerably relaxed. PM Goh Chok Tong and the PAP MPs have since been using dialects in community visits and meet-the-people sessions and in their speeches to grassroots communities.

There are two ways to read this relaxation. On the one hand, it can be said that the voices of resistance were heard, and thus have their place within the imagining of the nation. On the other hand, it is significant that, while the complex relationship between language and social class has been acknowledged, this acknowledgement has not resulted in any change to the dominant status of English or of the English-educated that I talked about earlier (section 7.4). Neither have dialects been allowed space in defining one’s identity. Before 1991, when it was re-designed and re-issued, each person’s identity card included information about one’s race and one’s dialect. Since 1991, “dialect” no longer appears as a category on the card. In the prescriptive manner that has characterised the SMC all along, it is now assumed that if you are ethnically Chinese, or because your father is ethnically Chinese, your mother tongue is Mandarin. Furthermore, because dialects are not present in education or in Singapore’s economic structure, monolingual dialect speakers remain at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder – a consequence of the bilingual policy that Lee Kuan Yew already predicted in 1978 (ST 7 Apr 1978). As such, any empowerment that might have been accorded to the dialect-speakers through these recent policy changes remains weak and rather peripheral. In this sense, while the voices of resistance have been heard, and the leaders have toned down the strength of their opposition to the use of dialects, the discourse itself has not change. And as such, the dialogic possibilities of resistance in the imagining of the nation are ultimately obstructed.
7.6 Summary

In the last two chapters, I have followed the meandering river of the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* as it travelled through and interacted with the two phases of the “Asianising of Singapore”. The first phase was propelled by the findings of the *Goh Report*, which identified the continued use of dialects in the home as the key obstacle to the successful implementation of Mandarin as the “mother tongue” of the Chinese community. The implications of this failed attempt related directly to language ideologies, to the deculturalisation and Westernisation that came with the neutrality of English. Singapore was on the verge of a moral crisis, the leaders said. The answer to this crisis was the “Asianising of Singapore”, the implementation of moral education, the introduction of language-based streaming through the NES, and the launch of the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*. Dialects were barred from the imagining of the nation.

Towards the end of this first phase, the pace of the river quickened. Mandarin crossed into the domain of commerce and took on value-added status. It challenged the functional polarisation of language ideologies. This challenge caused considerable turbulence in the river, and raised important questions about the status of English and of the other two mother tongue languages. The answers to these challenges were found in the second phase of the “Asianising of Singapore”.

Like the first phase, the second phase of the “Asianising of Singapore” began with a language-based crisis. The 1990 census and some earlier reports revealed a “disturbing trend” of the increased use of English in the homes. Once again, the successful implementation of Mandarin as the mother tongue of the Chinese community was threatened. Once again, Singapore was seen as threatened by a moral crisis because of the dominant presence of English. Once again, changes were made to educational streaming. Attempts were made to expand the Mandarin-proficiency base of the community. Instead of just moral education in the schools, the government produced a *“White Paper on Shared Values”* to suggest a multiracial Singaporean identity that subsumes any notion of racial difference. Paradoxically, through the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*, all communities have been encouraged to identify with their roots and to celebrate their ethnic differences.
In answering the challenge that the value-added status of Mandarin brought, the mother
tongue status of Mandarin was reaffirmed, while at the same time, English was denied
such status. Tamil and Malay were also presented as value-added as a way to maintain
parity between the various languages. Discursively, then, the mother tongue languages
encompass both sides of the polarisation, while English is contained to pragmatic
rationality. However, as my analyses of education policy and the social position of
English show, all of this activity within the “Asianising of Singapore” hides the continuing
dominance of English, and of a powerful relationship between English and socio-economic
and political status.

This chapter also considered the voices of resistance in the imagining of the nation.
Not all voices could be examined in this project (for example, the Eurasian community and
those of mixed parentage also need to be considered), largely because of the difficulties in
obtaining access to these voices. However, by considering the voices of the major non-
Chinese communities and of the dialect-speaking members of the Chinese community and
the English-educated, it is already possible to see how such voices of resistance contribute
to the imagining of the nation. It appears that much of the dialogic possibilities of such
voices of resistance are quite limited. Even though dialects have been given more space in
the public sphere, and even though the meanings of Mandarin have been expanded to
include economic value, the essential tenets of the functional polarisation of language
ideologies remain intact. The voices of resistance thus ultimately function as an
opportunity for the official dominant discourses to be reiterated, reinforced and to remain
dominant.

7.7 Lingering Thoughts

One question that might be lingering in the mind of readers as we approach the end
of our journey is: has the SMC been successful? Some have tried to answer this question
(e.g., Kuo, 1984; Newman, 1988). The PAP leaders certainly have focused on this
question with numerous surveys on the use of Mandarin in the home, in hawker centres, in
government offices, and other domains. However, for this analysis, such a question would
be misplaced. For more important here is how the ongoing language ideological debates have interacted with the meaning of the nation, and how this interaction continues today. As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, nations cannot be built; they are incompletable projects. As such, the role of language within the nationalist agenda is also incompletable. This is not to say change cannot be noted; however, questions about “success” are not meaningful. Rather, as I have attempted to do in this thesis, we can ask questions about how language ideologies have changed, why these changes have occurred and at what moments, and what these changes tell us about the imagining of the nation.
Appendix A

"Mandarin is more than a language"
Mr Goh Chok Tong (The Prime Minister)
30 September 1991

A nation is “a single people traditionally fixed on a well-defined territory, speaking the same language and preferably a language all its own, possessing a distinct culture, and shaped to a common mould by many generations of shared historical experience” [Rupert Emerson in From Empire to Nation]. By this definition, Singapore is not yet a nation. We do not speak the same language, and we do not yet possess the many generations of shared historical experience.

Within the same family, it is still very common to find that grandparents, parents and children do not share the same primary language – the language they are most comfortable in. For the grandparents the language they use is very often dialect, for the parents Mandarin; and for the children English. Of course, the three generations do still converse with one another through a combination of dialect, Mandarin and English. But their common vocabulary is unlikely to go beyond 500 words. They will have difficulty discussing any subject in depth. Their conversation will be shallow, limited by each other’s command of the other generation’s primary language.

I speak Hokkien to my mother. My children speak to me and my wife in English, and Mandarin to their grandmother, my mother. They have dropped dialect. It will take another generation in my family for three generations to share the same one primary language.

Heterogeneous community

In Singapore, communication across families is even more complicated for the older generation. It is not unusual to find two Chinese together who are unable to talk to one another. One may speak Hokkien only while the other Cantonese. How can we ever build a nation if the Chinese community is unable even to speak the same language, be it dialect, Mandarin or English?

You will discover how heterogeneous Singapore is when you go campaigning in an election. No political leader in Singapore can reach out on his own to every
Singaporean. No matter how good a linguist he is, he cannot be expected to master the four official languages plus over 20 Chinese and Indian dialects.

It is in our national interest to move into a situation where all Singaporeans can speak to one another in a common language, i.e. English, and to members of his own community in his mother tongue. For the Chinese, the common mother tongue should be Mandarin rather than dialect. Unlike Hong Kong, where Cantonese predominates, it will not be politically acceptable if we replace the teaching of Mandarin with any of the major dialects. I do not think we can agree on which dialect to be taught. If we do not succeed in forging Mandarin as the common mother tongue, the link language for future generations of Chinese Singaporeans will be English only.

Already English is becoming the dominant language among Chinese households. Its use had increased from 10 per cent in 1980 to 21 per cent in 1990.

Language and values

The question is whether with the greater use of English, we may lose some aspects of our identity. These are the traditional values of our forefathers.

Values and language cannot be easily separated. They are intrinsically linked to each other. Values get into our minds and hearts through folklore. For the Chinese these stories and beliefs are preserved in their literature or passed on by word of mouth. Although Chinese literature, idioms and proverbs can be translated into English, their full meaning may be lost in the process.

A Chinese Singaporean who does not know Chinese – either Mandarin or dialect – runs the risk of losing the collective wisdom of the Chinese civilisation. This year’s campaign slogan is apt. Mandarin is more than a language. Mandarin not only allows the Chinese to communicate with one another but also opens up many chests of treasures – Chinese literature, music, operas, paintings, calligraphy, ceramics and so on. When we can appreciate them, we will feel proud to be part of that rich history which is Chinese.

A sense of history

Having a sense of history is important. It gives us our bearing and makes us understand what we are today. As a country, Singapore’s history is short. But if we know Mandarin, we can identify with a 5000 year old civilisation.

Last month, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry organised a congress of Chinese businessmen from all over the world. These were successful men and women. One would expect them to prefer using English, which is the language of trade and business. But I was told that that was not the case. Although the official language of the congress was English, the moment someone spoke in Mandarin, the atmosphere changed.
It became more intimate. The use of Mandarin brought out immediately a common understanding among the Chinese businessmen of different nationalities. They felt a common bond. They felt they belonged together.

**Making Mandarin popular**

Our problem is how to make Mandarin popular with our students. Many parents have voiced the concern that their children may not be able to cope with the learning of Mandarin in schools. I believe we should make learning the language lively and enjoyable. We should put fun and humour to soften the serious task of teaching Chinese.

Last year’s ‘Speak Mandarin Campaign’ made some Singaporeans uncomfortable. I fully understand their concerns. Let me assure non-Chinese Singaporeans that the government is not promoting the Chinese language or culture at the expense of the others. In fact, the Ministry of Information and the Arts is working together with the Malay Language Committee to promote standard Malay. The Ministry has also asked the Indian community if it needs help to promote the use of Tamil. We want all the ethnic communities to preserve their language, culture and values. We aim to be a harmonious multiracial nation.

For the Chinese community, our aim should be a single people, speaking the same primary language, that is Mandarin, possessing a distinct culture and a shared past, and sharing a common destiny for the future.

Such a Chinese community will then be tightly-knit. Provided it is also tolerant and appreciative of the other communities’ heritage, able to communicate with them in English, and work with them for a common future, Singapore will grow to become a nation.
Appendix B

“Mandarin is more than a language”
Mr Goh Chok Tong (The Prime Minister)
30 September 1991

The Straits Times
1 October 1991

1 The Chinese community should aim to be a single people with Mandarin as its common
2 language and sharing a distinct culture, a shared past and a common destiny for the future,
3 Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said last night.
4
5 Speaking at the launch of this year’s Promote the Use of Mandarin campaign, he said that
6 such a Chinese community will then be a tightly-knit one. But, he added, if Singapore was
7 to grow into a nation, the community must be tolerant and appreciative of the other
8 communities’ heritage, able to communicate with them in English, and work with them for
9 a common future.
10
11 Mr Goh noted in his speech in Mandarin that it was still very common to find, within the
12 same family, grandparents, parents and children who did not share the same primary
13 language that they were most comfortable in. Although the three generations still
14 conversed with one another through a combination of dialect, Mandarin and English, he
15 said that their common vocabulary was unlikely to go beyond 500 words.
16
17 “They will have difficulty discussing any subject in depth. Their conversation will be
18 shallow, limited by each other’s command of the other generation’s primary language”, he
19 told the 1,000 guests at the Singapore conference Hall.
20
21 For the older generation here, he said, communication was even more difficult as it was
22 not unusual to find two Chinese together who were unable to talk to each other.
23
24 He said that no political leader here could reach out on his own to every Singaporean in an
25 election campaign as he could not be expected to master the four official languages and
26 over 20 Chinese and Indian dialects.
It was, therefore, in the national interest for all Singaporeans to speak to one another in a common language, English, and to members of their own community in their mother tongue. For the Chinese, he said that the common mother tongue should be Mandarin, rather than dialect. Unlike Hong Kong, where Cantonese was the dominant language, he pointed out that it would not be politically acceptable if Singapore replaced the teaching of Mandarin with any of the major dialects. "I do not think we can agree on which dialect is to be taught", he said.

"If we do not succeed in forging Mandarin as the common mother tongue, the link language for future generations of Chinese Singaporeans will be English only." English, he noted, was becoming the dominant language among Chinese households, as its use had increased from 10 percent in 1980 to 21 percent in 1990. As he saw it, the question was whether, with the greater use of English, Singaporeans might lose some aspects of their identity.

That was why he said that he found this year's campaign slogan, Mandarin for Chinese Singaporeans – More Than a Language, very apt. Mandarin, he noted, not only allowed the Chinese to communicate easier with one another, but also opened up "many chests of treasures", such as Chinese literature, music, operas, paintings, calligraphy and ceramics. "When we can appreciate them, we will feel proud to be part of that rich history which is Chinese", he said.

He cited last month's meeting of Chinese businessmen at the World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention here as an example of how, when someone spoke in Mandarin, the atmosphere changed – even though the official convention language was English. "They felt a common bond. They felt they belonged together", he said.

Mr Goh said the problem was to make Mandarin popular with students, adding that many parents were concerned about whether their children could cope with the language in school. He suggested adding fun and humour to soften the serious task of teaching Mandarin.

On last year's Speak Mandarin Campaign, which made some Singaporeans uncomfortable, he assured non-Chinese Singaporeans that the Government was not promoting the Chinese language or culture at the expense of the others. The Ministry of Information and the Arts, he disclosed, was working together with the Malay Language Committee to promote standard Malay and had asked the Indian community if it needed help to promote the use of Tamil. "We want all the ethnic communities to preserve their language, culture and values. We aim to be a harmonious, multi-racial nation", he said.

This year's campaign is targeted at English-educated Chinese Singaporeans and features a Chinese computer exhibition, which Mr Goh toured at the end of the ceremony.
Appendix C

The Story of Litter Led Liding Hoot

Wans apon a time hor, got one girl, called Litter Led Liding Hoot leh! She very like chabo okay, she wan to go to Ah Mah’s house. Morning already she go out one, she got take home one basket to put flower. You know, hor, she very lazy leh! She not wan to walk long-long; she wan to play ‘red alert’ lah. So she go take shot cut lor.

Wah! She dono got one big bad woof follow her one hor! She happy-happy walk-walk until she come to Ah Mah house.

“Ah Mah! Ah Mah! I come, open the door leh?” she talk.
Then Ah Mah also talk back, “Come in lah. I never close one.”

Litter Led Liding Hoot open the house and go inside door...oh, solly solly ...open the door and go inside the house. She got see her Ah Mah on top of the bed. She say

“Wahlau, Ah-mah, you soooo shiok ah, sleep always wan!
She go ask Ah Mah; “Ah Mah, ah, how come your eye vely big one har?”
“So I kan si you maahhh!!!” Ah May say back.
“Ah Mah, how come your year vely long one leh?”
“So vely easy to hear you one laah!”
“Ah May, how come...”
“Aiyaa!!! So many question one ah you...never die before ah?”
“Solylah Ah Mah, I dono mah. So I ask loh.”
“What soly-soly! Why you sooooo blur one you. I not Ah Mah, I big bad woof one you know. An I very hungry you know. Now I want to eat you.

Wah! Litter Led Liding Hoot vely skad one, she sceam vely loud but late already. The big bad woof already eat hear. She now inside stomach.

Suddenly, got one people, cut wood one, go inside the house. He wan to save Litter Led Liding Hoot. He go and cut the big bad woof stomach and take out avithing, but he too late. Litter Led Liding Hoot become shit already.

---Finish Already---

-unknown author, with some amendments
-I am grateful to Ling Sim and Mark Ho for their helpful suggestions
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

BALANCING AUTHENTICITY

Samuel Johnson once called languages "the pedigree of nations," emphasising the centrality of language to the essence of nationhood. This thesis has been about this relationship between language and the nation, and about finding ways to talk about its formation and significance in the imagining of the nation. More specifically, it has been about this relationship as it operates in the imagining of one nation: Singapore. What I want to do in this chapter is to draw the various threads of this thesis together by discussing three major contributions that Singapore's story offers us. First of all, Singapore's story is important for what it tells us about Singapore: the particular nation and ideal society that the government has been trying to imagine, the particular language policies and the ways that language has been described and understood, and some of the profound paradoxes that seem to characterise this relationship. The story of Singapore shows the complex ways in which the various powerful discourses in the imagining of the nation interact, together imagining the nation in and through language. Secondly, Singapore's story is important for what it tells us about the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation in general, and the implications this has for further research. It powerfully demonstrates how language ideologies and the ideology of what the "ideal" society should be concur in very important ways in the imagining of the nation. And thirdly, Singapore's story is important for what it tells us about discourse analysis as a methodology by which to examine the discursive relationship between language ideologies and the imagined nation. The Singapore story is particularly instructive because
the government's language ideological debates are so accessible in the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* and in the mass daily press. In the rest of this chapter, then, I will consider each of these contributions in detail.

### 8.1 Singapore's Story: Balancing Authenticity

The protagonist of this thesis, language with all its multiple meanings, has played and continues to play a dramatic role in the imagining of Singapore. In fact, so intertwined and intense is the relationship between language and the nation that it is possible to see the processes of imagining the nation evolve by examining the ways in which language has been talked about, described and used by government leaders. The story of the relationship between language and imagining the nation thus becomes a story of what Singapore's leaders envision to be the "ideal" society, and of how they attempt to achieve that ideal image in and through language policy and language ideologies.

In this section, I will summarise the various influences on Singapore's need for authenticity and how government leaders have couched these influences in the terms of national crisis. I will then go on to discuss the role that language ideologies have had in the management of these crises, and some of the challenges and paradoxes that have characterised this management.

#### 8.1.1 Singapore's Authenticity Crisis

Singapore's story is particularly interesting because, prior to independence in 1965, the PAP leaders very strongly asserted that an independent Singapore was an impossibility; it wouldn't work. When they found themselves confronted with this "impossibility made reality", they had to convince Singaporeans, the region, and the world of the legitimacy and authenticity of Singapore's existence as a state. To be seen as a legitimate player within the region, it needed to present itself as willing to blend in and not assert its Chineseness. To be seen as a legitimate player globally, it needed to present itself as stable, rational, modern and efficient, a willing and equal participant in the
international market, and relevant to the world. Singapore has thus sought to present itself to the world as “more Western than the West”, and hence a desirable location for foreign investment, trade, and business.

To be seen as a legitimate player nationally, however, the government needed to remain consistent with its pre-independence commitments. In particular, this meant a continued commitment to policies of multiracialism and multiculturalism, whereby the different ethnic communities are seen as equal players within the nation’s various spheres. This commitment to multiracialism also meant a blurring of racial lines such that race could not be considered a rallying force in political life. Particularly in the early years, such a multicultural policy was a key feature that distinguished Singapore from Malaysia, where political parties and national politics were largely organised along racial lines, and where pro-Malay policies highlighted issues concerning the representation and protection of racial interests (Chua Beng Huat, 1995). This notion of “multiracialism” has also been used to distinguish Singapore from “the West” through the caption “instant Asia” (the slogan that the Tourism Board has coined to emphasise Singapore’s unique form of multiracialism and “Asian”, as opposed to “Western”, face). Furthermore, Singapore’s primarily English-educated leaders have had to demonstrate to the people that they are not “wogs” (western oriented gentlemen), but truly Asian individuals connected with the grassroots, and that their role in governing the nation is legitimate. In Chapter Four, for instance, I mentioned how Lee Kuan Yew changed his name from Harry Lee, and began to learn Mandarin as part of this struggle for authenticity and legitimacy at home.

Clearly, the need to balance these various needs for legitimacy and authenticity presents Singapore’s leaders with enormously difficult challenges. Singapore’s story thus becomes one of the “balance of authenticities”, most often framed by government leaders as crisis management. The title of Chapter Five, “Qi hu nan xia” (“when your ride a tiger, it is hard to dismount”), captured the essence and tone of this management. In the same chapter, I argued that the discourse of “vulnerability” is the de facto sixth unofficial “shared” value in Singapore (in reference to Singapore’s five national “shared values”) in that such vulnerability provides the basic legitimacy for virtually all policy in Singapore. It is because Singapore is in unique and vulnerable circumstances – circumstances that were
thrust upon it by history – that the leaders must devise unique solutions to overcome such vulnerability. As a result, each policy and aspect of the imagining of the nation tends to be defined in terms of a crisis. The title of one of Lee Kuan Yew’s speeches on language aptly captures this crisis: “Bilingualism for survival” (10 June 1974). As mentioned in Chapter Five, leaders use the spectre of crisis to present their policies and imagining as the only possible and legitimate solutions. Ultimately, the image that the government seeks to put forward is one whereby Singapore is imagined as rational, thinking, planned, orderly, predictable, and in control. Some of the key discourses that have emerged in this effort for legitimacy – vulnerability, multiracialism, pragmatism, and meritocracy – were discussed in Chapter Five.

What is particularly interesting in this study is how language ideologies have been central to this balancing of authenticities. Indeed, as we travel through Singapore’s history to locate where the shifts in language ideologies occur, it becomes apparent that they are always connected with challenges to balancing the various needs and faces of authenticity.

8.1.2 Language Ideologies and the Management of Authenticity

There are two obvious reasons why language ideology is such a central element in balancing the various needs of authenticity: (i) Singapore’s “colonial hangover” and (ii) the government’s emphasis on human resource development. Firstly, as I discussed in Chapter Four, the colonial hangover was characterised by multiple socio-economic, racial, and political divisions, in all of which language played a key role. As outlined in section 4.1.1, English was the key to socio-economic success. The various ethnic communities, however, were contained in their ethnic enclaves due to the colonial government’s laissez-faire education policy. The Chinese community was further divided politically, with the English-educated on one side and the Chinese-educated on the other. Because of this legacy, language continued to be central to the imagining of the nation after independence as well.
Secondly, language is so important to the imagining of the nation because of the government’s emphasis on human resource development. On more than one occasion, the government has called Singapore’s people the nation’s “most precious assets” (*The Next Lap*, 1991). Of course, care must be taken here, because this in itself is part of the discourse that the government leaders have put forward. However, it is true that Singapore’s language complexities have required some very difficult decisions. As outlined in Chapter Five, the findings of the *Goh Report* concerning language learning suggested that, without a strong education programme, Singapore’s human resource development, and ultimately economic strategies, would suffer.

Certainly, the “colonial hangover” and Singapore’s economic and human resource development strategies do explain some of the reasons why language has been such an important variable in the imagining of Singapore. However, we also need to think back to my earlier discussions (see Chapter 1) about the legacy left by the eighteenth century’s French Revolution and German Romanticism, and the “worldliness” of language. In this chapter, I argued that the most potent legacy left by the period is the use of language ideologies as a means by which to imagine the nation. The notion of the worldliness of language takes our understanding of this relationship between language ideologies and the imagining of the nation further. It is because language exists in the world that language is also affected by its material presence. Furthermore, because language exists in the world, language has both a constituted and constitutive role in the world. It is not just passively present in the world, not just implicated by its material circumstances, but it is also an active agent in the world. It is this “worldliness of language” that largely explains why language is so often a powerful player in the imagining of the nation. This was certainly not lost on Singapore’s leaders. Neither is it lost on other leaders and nations around the world. And so, by considering the “worldliness” of language, we are able to see the position of language within its social, political, economic and historical circumstances. We are able to see language implicated in and implicating the imagining of the nation. The Singapore story is thus profoundly significant in understanding the political-economic grounding of language ideologies and the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation as a discursive process.
To carry this discussion further, it would be useful to recap some of the highlights of the challenges to Singapore’s various faces of authenticity, and consider how language ideologies are implicated in this process. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the very structure of the bilingual policy (English-knowing bilingualism) and the language ideologies used to talk about this policy are central to Singapore’s crossroads’ position. Because of colonialism, Singapore was faced with the presence of the English language and with a complex pattern of multilingualism. Language was intricately tied to the social structure, to local politics (particularly in dividing the English-educated and Chinese-educated members of the Chinese community), and to the economy. While many post-colonial nations discarded the colonial language upon gaining independence, Singapore chose the more “pragmatic” and non-emotional path. Having established the necessity of sustained economic growth as the basis for nationhood, and having decided that this growth was best attained by capitalising on Singapore’s activity as a trading nation and financial hub, the leaders saw the continued presence of English as essential. English is necessary, they argued, for the pragmatic needs of economic globalisation, human resource development, and to give Singaporeans access to science and technology. English is the language that brought Singapore down the road towards modernisation, to become more “Western than the West”.

English has also had a role to play in the government’s search for legitimacy at home. As a “neutral” language, English is necessary as the meeting place for Singaporeans of all ethnic groups. English allows each ethnic community to have its own “separate playing field”, as Lee Kuan Yew recently put it (ST 9 Jan 1997). That is, it provides an additional playing field for the nation to meet on terms other than race. In that sense, English is also tied into the discourse of multiracialism, whereby racial difference is blurred. Furthermore, the need for English is argued on the basis that it is necessary for meritocracy. English, government leaders claim, puts everyone on equal footing, giving everyone equal access to the economic and social benefits that English provides. In this way, no one ethnic group is able to claim undue disadvantage in terms of gaining access to positions of power and privilege. It must be noted, of course, that while the notion of “neutrality” has been essential to the government’s discursive construction of
the English language, English is in fact very much bound up with issues of socio-economic and political power (see Chapter 7), and thus is anything but neutral. Nonetheless, by presenting English as “available to all”, the “race card” is somewhat neutralised.

By embracing the English language and giving it a prominent role in the imagining of the nation, the image the leaders seek to present is that Singapore is not guided by irrational or unpredictable emotions. Rather, the nation is confident enough in its own identity that it is not threatened by the global and colonial status of English. Singapore is able to rationally separate the colonial associations of the language, usurp its meanings and make the language its own, on its own terms. The ability of the nation to “ride the [English] tiger” for the purposes of the national agenda while at the same time maintaining its own “Asian” identity, speaks of Singapore’s ability to be a player in the international community. Furthermore, Singapore’s acceptance of the English language demonstrates to the world that Singapore is “open for business”.

On the other side of English-knowing bilingualism are the three mother tongue languages. It is enormously significant that not once in Singapore’s history was there any entertainment of the idea for Singapore to become an English mono-lingual nation. To do so would be, in Lee Kuan Yew’s words, emotionally unacceptable. Singapore has always insisted that it is an Asian country, and not Western or even pseudo-Western. Thus, by assigning the three Asian languages to the domain of “mother tongue” for the three corresponding ethnic communities, these three languages are placed at the centre of Singapore’s identity as an Asian nation. At the same time, any encroachment by English into the domain of national identity is curtailed: because the need for a “mother tongue” has been filled by the Asian languages, there is no ideological space for the English language to function in that capacity. English, though a dominant language in Singapore, is thus limited to the pragmatic needs of the nation. The discourses of language are such that English cannot be seen as a mother tongue language.

Furthermore, the adoption of the three Asian languages as official languages also speaks to the issue of legitimacy and authenticity at home. It allows the English-educated leaders to demonstrate that their governance is not an extension of colonial power, but that they seek to identify themselves and Singapore with Asia.
The three official Asian languages play another role as well – providing a way for the government to establish its "fairness" to the people and to consolidate power. By giving all three languages "equal" representation as official languages in the nation, with each language having a place in media, education and government, the leaders are able to visibly demonstrate its impartiality. This was especially important in the early years to meet the demands and expectations of the Chinese-educated, who were concerned about the close alliance between the English-educated leaders and Singapore's former colonial rulers. It was also important to meet the demands of the Malay community, which felt particularly threatened by its diminished status after Singapore's separation from Malaysia. To a lesser extent, it was also necessary to meet the demands of the Indian community, the smallest of the three ethnic groups. By giving all ethnic communities linguistic representation in the nation, multilingualism also allowed all citizens participation in the nation, even if they could not speak English.

This multilingual policy is important not only for race relations within the nation and to gain authenticity and legitimacy at the grassroots level; it is also important regionally. Because of Singapore's predominantly Chinese population, an argument could be made for Mandarin to be the sole official language of the nation. However, given Singapore's location in a predominantly Malay and Islamic region, Singapore needs to demonstrate that it is not an extension of China, that it is 100 percent Southeast Asian. Multilingualism, together with the policy of multiracialism, provides that assurance. Thus we can see how the "functional polarisation of language" in English-knowing bilingualism is centrally implicated in and implicates the balancing of these various faces of authenticity nationally, regionally and internationally.

8.1.3 Language Ideologies and Challenges to Authenticity

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the need to balance these various faces of authenticity has presented Singapore's leaders with enormously difficult challenges. The first major challenge came in the late 1970s, when the leaders began to see negative effects to Singapore's development and modernisation, and its increasing exposure to the world.
Government leaders began to express concern about the increase of individualism, consumerism and liberalism among the people. “Westernisation” became the catchword to capture these negative effects. “Undesirable” characteristics in society such as drugs, pop culture, divorce, and so on, could thus be blamed on external sources, rather than on anything “Singaporean”. As a way to counter these negative effects, the government began an aggressive campaign to “Asianise Singapore”, captured in the discourse of the “Asian values debate”. The main purpose of this campaign has been to “restore” to the various communities their Asianness, and hence to provide them with cultural ballast and the ability to resist the influences of Westernisation.

In Chapters Six and Seven, I discussed how the production and reproduction of these language ideologies in the “Asianising of Singapore” find their nexus in the annual *Speak Mandarin Campaign*. This campaign has been a continuous “moment” of discursive activity in balancing the various needs of authenticity. The 1994 campaign logo captured this particularly well: a picture of a hamburger and a *pao* (Chinese steamed bun) joined together. However, while the picture shows these dual identities coexisting unproblematically, the discourse concerning these identities more often is about crises and crisis management. In fact, the campaign was first launched in response to the perceived educational and moral crisis in the late 1970s that emerged from the *Goh Report*. And, although all three communities are the focus of this Asianising effort, special attention has been given to the Chinese, as their linguistic and religious diversity were seen to make them particularly vulnerable to the effects of Westernisation. Because of the continued use of dialects in the home, they were also particularly affected by the challenges that bilingual education brought. And a similar moral crisis in the late 1980s propelled the campaign forward.

While directed primarily at just one of the ethnic communities, the Chinese, the genre of the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* as a national campaign places it on the level of national importance and central to the imagining of the nation. As such, it is a particularly visible location in which to examine the processes involved in the relationship between language ideology and the imagining of the nation. It is a tangible discursive activity within which language ideologies can be debated, produced and reproduced – a frame of
reference by which Singaporeans have come to understand themselves and themselves in relation to the world.

To briefly recapture some of this discursive activity, during the first ten years of the campaign, the effort was to limit, if not eradicate, the use of dialects in the home. Language ideological debates in the imagining of the nation were structured around the regression equation of “more Mandarin, less dialects”. The official reasons for this included the need for a *lingua franca* within the Chinese community, the need for unity within the community, and because dialects were seen to hinder the effective implementation of the bilingual policy in the schools. However, as we saw in Chapter Six, the campaign has also been a powerful means by which to homogenise the community, to *make* Mandarin (rather than diverse dialects) the mother tongue of the Chinese and the language of ethnic identity. It has thus been a prime location to exercise the “race = language = culture” equation that has been the bedrock of the multiracial policy in Singapore. Thus, the campaign has been a powerful means by which to enact and give precedence to Singapore’s multiracial discourse.

In more recent years, the campaign has been directed at the English-educated members of the Chinese community. This focus came once again as a response to a perceived moral crisis due to Westernisation and social and moral decadence. English is once again seen as a threat to the imagining of the nation. This line of argumentation again has been particularly important in establishing authenticity at home. In the “Asian values debate” that I discussed in Chapter Seven, the West has been portrayed as a society in decay, out of control, and decadent. Conversely, things “Asian” have been portrayed as the ideal image of the kind of society that Singapore’s leaders wish to develop. Because English, while still necessary, is the gateway to this decadence, its domains and use must be “controlled”. Once again, the discourses of vulnerability, of crisis, and of “qi hu nan xia” serve to legitimise the government’s imagining of the nation both abroad and at home. And once again, language ideologies are structured around a regression equation, this time in the terms of “more Mandarin, less English”.

As I discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, especially since the early 1990s, Singapore has expanded its economic relevance with its policy of regionalisation. It was
during this time that the meanings of Mandarin were also expanded to include economic value. Because the economic and pragmatic arguments had always belonged to the rationalisation for English, this expansion challenged the functional polarisation of language and created a sense of crisis and paradox in the nation's language ideological debates. It challenged the definition of "mother tongue" and it challenged the perceived parity of the Asian languages. However, these challenges have been met by the same discourses that had been operating all along in the imagining of the nation. By offering to expand the role and meanings of the other "mother tongue" languages to also include economic value (the logic of pragmatism), the parity of the Asian languages, and hence the logic of multiracialism, is restored. Moreover, "neutralising" Mandarin through the discourse of economic pragmatism circumvents any charge of ethnic chauvinism. The government's "fairness" is thus reaffirmed. The increased attention given to Mandarin, in turn, has been argued on the grounds that it is "rational". Quoting Lee Kuan Yew: "Let's face it, by the time Malaysia is learning Chinese or encouraging its people to learn Chinese, we who have done it for the last 30 years, we'd be foolish at this stage to say, 'Let's stop learning Chinese and prove that we are 100 per cent South-east Asians.' That doesn't make sense" (ST 9 Jan 1997). By invoking Malaysia, which had all along touted a pro-Malay policy, the government's claim to rational foresight is legitimised.

Thus, as "qi hu nan xia" suggests, the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation in Singapore is fraught with paradox and contradiction as leaders try to balance the various needs for global and national authenticity and legitimacy. For, while English is neutral, it is also seen as the bearer of decadence. While it is the great equaliser, it has also been increasingly the source of socio-economic inequality. As we saw in Chapter Seven, proficiency in Standard English continues to be the gateway to positions of political power and to higher levels of socio-economic status. While multiracialism is meant to demonstrate fairness and impartiality, it has allowed the Chinese voice, if only because of sheer numbers, to become particularly strong. While multilingualism operates at the national level, at the individual level the policy translates into one of bilingualism, which actually hedges people in their ethnic compartments and hinders ethnic mingling in any other realm than the ethnic neutrality afforded through
English. Tied into such discussions of English is the need to recognise the complex meanings of English in Singapore, particularly with respect to SSE and SCE. Once again, language ideology was structured in a regression equation, this time by pitting SSE and SCE against each other: "more SSE, less SCE".

The voices of resistance that I explored in Chapter Seven suggest some of the complexities that arise because of these paradoxes. To a large extent, these voices are responding to the contradictions that arise from the use of (a) a public campaign for the use of language in the private domain of the home; and (b) a national campaign aimed at just one community. The English-educated Chinese, many of whom have only minimum proficiency in Mandarin, wish to take the meanings of English further and make it their mother tongue. The Chinese-educated and dialect-speaking members of the Chinese community, who for the most part still continue to use dialects in their homes and community, have resisted the extraction of dialects from their lives, and seek to have their dialects recognised as their mother tongue. The non-Chinese communities, in turn, continue to feel threatened by the perceived increasing dominance of Mandarin, and the use of multiracialism to deny them access to the economic benefits of Mandarin’s "globalisation".

Rather than seeing these contradictions as problematic, the government leaders have used them as leverage in balancing the different faces of authenticity. This was evident in the way they answered the voices of resistance – by reinforcing the polarised structure of language ideology. Rather than engaging the voices of resistance in the imagining of the nation, the leaders have, for the most part, only made peripheral policy adjustments. Ultimately, the dialogic possibilities are thus restrained. All of this suggests that at stake are issues of who controls the imagining of the nation, and how those who have privileged access to political and economic power use language and language ideology to maintain that privilege.

The story of Singapore is not yet ended. The imagining of the nation is an ongoing process as the leaders and the people try to understand themselves and themselves in relation to each other and an ever-changing world. How the story will unfold can only be told by the future. However, we can be fairly certain that language will continue to be the
protagonist in this story, as made clear by Lee Kuan Yew to members of his constituency. In his recent 1997 post-election “thank you tour”, he told members of his constituency that the government planned to spend much of the next five years carefully explaining, reiterating, and implementing its bilingual language policy. The reasons he gave are familiar: “The potentially de-stabilising effect of an over-emphasis on Chinese culture in Singapore society would increase as China grew in global influence” (ST 9 Jan 1997). Once again, we have the discourse of crisis management.

8.2 Language Ideologies and “Nationalisms”

The view put forward in Chapter One is that we need to think of language and language ideologies, of imagining the nation, and of the relationship between the two as discursive processes. Discourses, I argued, are frames of reference that we use to “define, organise, and regulate” a particular sense of ourselves and ourselves in relation to others. This notion of discourse allows us to focus on the process of creating and maintaining this relationship, located within real historical, socio-political, and economic moments.

This approach is fundamentally different from some of the earlier work on the relationship between language and nationalism, which mostly attempted to find universal features by which to describe this relationship. Such analyses ultimately have little to offer by way of explanation: about why the relationship is so common, about how it comes to take the form it does, and about how it works. In contrast, the focus in this thesis has been on the ideological underpinnings of language, and how these ideologies concur in very important ways with the government’s particular view of an “ideal” society in the context of particular nations. The ideological basis of this relationship between language and the imagining of the nation thus becomes a frame of reference by which governments wish the nation to be understood, both by its citizens and at large. In other words, the relationship becomes a central means by which governments seek to establish authenticity and legitimacy for themselves and for their nation.

The focus on the ideological underpinnings of language and on the discursive nature of the relationship between language and the nation does two things in particular.
In the first place, it gives the theoretical space for differences, rather than universals, to be investigated. Rather than looking for undue generalisations that ultimately require a way to explain away differences (Blommaert, 1996), we need to instead explore ways that will take into account these differences, and thus enrich our understanding of the dynamism of the relationship between language and the nation that we so often take as commonsense. To see the relationship discursively allows us to explain why and how particular ideologies have been taken up and why and how others have been discarded. It allows us to focus on the ways in which the ideologies of language and of the imagining of the nation interact, and to see their relationship in terms of dynamic processes operating in real historical, socio-political and economic moments.

This in turn provides opportunities for comparative analyses of (using Blommaert’s phrase) nationalisms, allowing us to see the different ways in which language ideologies have been taken up in different visions of the imagined nation. In short, it brings in a whole new dimension of analysis in our search to see how particular language ideologies come about and are maintained. The particular manifestations of this relationship in various times and places can be compared in order to contribute to our understanding of these manifestations collectively and individually.

Secondly, because of the possibility of comparative analysis and the attention given to the process of the relationship between language and the nation, this focus on the ideological underpinnings of language and on discourse allows greater possibilities for understanding how and why the relationship exists. It provides powerful insights into why language is understood the way it is in a particular nation, why the government has imagined the nation in a particular way or ways, and how this imagining is organised and delivered to the people. As Blommaert (1996:236) suggests in his study of language and nationalism in Flanders and Tanzania, “the study of how language becomes an ingredient of nationalism, and the way in which it articulates and sustains nationalist claims, may be an important contribution to the revival of nationalism studies.” This thesis, with its focus on the discursive relationship between language and the imagining of the nation in Singapore, is such a study.
Although this thesis has not focused on language planning per se, “language planning” is certainly part of the story. In this thesis, we have seen decisions being made about national and official languages, about language standardisation, about literacy, about language in education, about scripts and about lexicons. Thus, I would suggest that this thesis also has something to contribute to the body of work on language planning. As I have discussed elsewhere (1998), the study of language planning needs also to consider ideology – a focus sorely lacking from many studies on the topic (Blommaert, 1996). The discussion in Chapter One about the political-economic approaches to analysis suggests ways forward in this respect. Thus, questions asked in studies of language planning should be expanded to not only include the functional aspects, but the ideological aspects as well. In this sense, language planning too is discursive activity. For example, we need to ask questions about how “language problems” are products of colonial linguistics, how and why languages are “made” and communities divided. We need to ask questions about how these policy decisions were made in relation to the kind of assumptions the leaders held at that time concerning what an “ideal” and “good” society was, and how language planning was seen to contribute to social and political progress. And we need to ask questions about what ideology is guiding the decisions concerning language standardisation, spelling, and other language-planning issues.

8.3 Discourse Analysis

Finally, this thesis has something to contribute to the field of discourse analysis. It suggests how discourse analysis can be used as a way to bring forward comparative studies of the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation. In Singapore, because the Speak Mandarin Campaign has largely been a textual event, and because it and other government speeches on language have been so visible in the mass daily newspaper, the obvious place to see the processes of the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation is the mass daily press. As I discussed in Chapter Three, the location of these speeches in the press is itself an important focus of analysis in understanding the particular imagining of the nation in Singapore. By placing what
government leaders have to say about language in the mass daily newspaper, the debates become nationalised and placed directly within the imagining of the nation. In an analysis of this relationship between language and the imagining of the nation elsewhere, the location of the government’s voice may be different. However, as I sought to demonstrate in this thesis, discourse analysis of what the government has to say about language is a useful way to see the formation of ideology, to see the organisation of meaning, and to see discursive relations in operation. The methodology of discourse analysis can thus be an important basis from which to begin comparative analyses of the role of language in the nationalist agenda.

The methodology in this thesis also suggests ways to take us beyond some of the weaknesses in Critical Discourse Analysis. Rather than trying to unmask some kind of truth hidden or misrepresented by ideology, I have used discourse analysis as a way to understand how discourses construct our lives and our understanding of our world. Because discourses are most often conceptualised through language, by looking at how language has been used in a text it is possible to see the processes involved in producing these discourses. Quoting once again from R. Simon (1992:110), texts can be seen as a “set of practices produced within a limited range of rules and ordering procedures for employing a differentiated set of images and signs”. Texts are thus evidence of discursively ordered and regulated productive practices. By examining texts and the articulation of words in texts, it is possible to see how meaning is produced through discourse.

As such, by looking at the use (either consciously or unconsciously) of various discursive features, questions can be asked about why and how these features were used, whose interests they serve, and about how they contribute to the organisation and interpretation of the discourse. The argumentation structure used, the use of redundancy to establish themes, the manipulation of voice through pronouns and quotations, and the use of conditional statements are just some of the discursive features that authors make decisions about. Each of these choices is integral to seeing the text as social process, to seeing how the text and the way it is organised linguistically operates to establish particular parameters of meaning. As we saw in both Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong’s speeches, the schema of the text clearly shows how the text is structured according to authorial intent. The use of
modals and tense allow the author to establish the authority of his voice and the legitimacy of his views. Conditional statements bring a logical progression into the text, whereby, through deductive reasoning, the audience would arrive at the logical conclusion of the rightness of the views presented. These and other discursive features are powerful ways by which the author directs the meaning of his text. Furthermore, because the focus is not to unmask some kind of truth hidden or misrepresented by ideology, nor on the simplistic construction of society whereby the “dominant” group have power and the “oppressed” do not, it is possible to take into account voices of resistance, and investigate how these voices also contribute to the production of knowledge.

When taking a multi-methodological and multi-disciplinary approach, the text as “social process” becomes even more evident. The approach taken here is that texts are not merely static historical objects which function as “containers” of ideologies, but rather are intricately implicated in ideological practice. This is especially evident in my socio-historical analysis of the mass daily press in Singapore (Chapter 3). In this analysis, I argued that the press in Singapore is centrally located within the imagining of the nation, and sees the nationalist agenda as its central mandate. It is only when we understand the role of the press in Singapore that we can understand the significance of government texts appearing in the newspapers in terms of how they are produced and read. With such a socio-historical view of texts, and through discourse analyses of these texts, it is thus possible to see the assumptions built into the text, and to see how the ideologies produced in the text concur in significant ways with the discourses in the imagining of the nation.

8.4 Concluding Thoughts

In closing, this thesis does not seek to define some grand “modular type” of the relationship between language and the nation that can be applied to different nations around the world. Rather, it suggests a focus, a way of thinking about the relationship between language and the imagining of the nation. As Blommaert (1996:253) says, the “inevitable result of this exercise is a much more fragmented and heterogeneous picture of what goes under the label of nationalism”. However, this picture does allow us to focus
on the dynamism that characterises the relationship between the worldliness of language and the imagining of the nation. It also allows us to consider the diversity of this relationship in its many manifestations, as peoples and nations around the world attempt to understand themselves and themselves in relation to our ever-changing world.


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