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**SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG, FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE SPEAK MANDARIN
CAMPAIGN AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL ON
THURSDAY, 2 OCTOBER 1986 AT 8.00 PM**

I have walked through the markets in Marine Parade many times. I have noticed on several occasions that a Chinese mother would speak to her child in Mandarin but to the hawkers in dialect.

This is a common scene in present-day Singapore. It raises two questions: Why does the mother speak to her child in Mandarin and not dialect? Why does she switch to dialect when speaking to the hawker?

I think the answer to the first question lies in the parents' desire to help their children speak both English and Mandarin well.

In the past, even when Chinese parents could speak Mandarin, they would still speak to their children in dialects. My mother spoke to me in Hokkien. There was no bilingual policy then. So I spoke Hokkien but no Mandarin. She now speaks to her grandchildren in Mandarin. So my children speak Mandarin but no Hokkien.

Parents know that our bilingual education system is here to stay. They know that from the day when their children go to kindergarten classes, they learn Mandarin in addition to English. They also know that their children will continue to do this all the way up to 'A' level classes. When they drop dialects in conversation with their

children they are recognising that the continued use of dialects will add to the learning burden of their children. So most Chinese parents nowadays speak Mandarin with their children even before they go to kindergarten classes.

This observation is supported by statistics compiled by the Ministry of Education. According to the Ministry, the most frequently spoken language at home by primary one Chinese pupils is now Mandarin. In 1980, only 26 per cent of the homes of these pupils spoke Mandarin. In 1985, 67 per cent of them did (Table I).

Do parents make the right decision when they switch to Mandarin instead of dialects at home?

Has this change helped in the examination results of Chinese as a second language?

Language is a skill which, like any other skill, will improve with practice. There are two aspects to the learning of a language - oral and written. The two reinforce and complement each other. The greater use of Mandarin at home apparently has helped to bring about better examination results of Chinese as a second language, especially at 'O' Level. In 1980, 84 per cent of the students who took the Chinese 'O' Level examination passed. In 1985, almost 92 per cent of such candidates passed. Even for the PSLE, where the passing rate of CL2 was already very high, there was still improvement, from 96 per cent in 1980 to 99 per cent in 1985 (Table II).

This dramatic change in the pattern of language usage at home by Chinese families and the improvement in the CL2 examination results show that our people are sensible and adaptable. They will respond to campaigns when they can see the benefits.

Now, let me try and answer the second question: Why doesn't the mother continue to speak Mandarin to the hawker instead of switching to a dialect?

Firstly, this could be a matter of habit. All these years, the mother has been speaking to hawkers in dialect. She identifies the hawker with the dialect. Speaking to a hawker in dialect has become her habit, so it is quite natural for her to switch to dialect from Mandarin.

Secondly, she might have thought that the hawker would not be able to speak or even understand Mandarin.

Are these two reasons valid? I agree that habit dies hard but it is not something which cannot be changed. If we can change our speaking habit at home, we can change it outside the home.

Next, it is not true to think that most hawkers cannot speak or understand Mandarin. Many of them can, as I have found out for myself in the many hawker centres I have been to. It is a question of both the customers and the hawkers making the effort.

According to the surveys conducted by the Ministry of the Environment on hawkers at nine markets/food centres, nearly 90 per cent of the hawkers and their customers spoke in dialects in 1979 and only one per cent in Mandarin. Six years after the Mandarin Campaign, the percentage of dialect-speaking hawkers dropped to 74 per cent. The use of Mandarin on the other hand, improved to 20 per cent (Table III).

A Straits Times survey undertaken in 1985 also showed that 82 per cent of the Chinese members of the public could speak Mandarin fairly well or fluently. The survey also showed that 80 per cent of those who could not speak Mandarin were able to understand TV programmes in Mandarin.

All these figures point to the fact that there are more Chinese Singaporeans who can speak or understand Mandarin than is generally thought. So, instead of assuming that the other party cannot speak Mandarin, it is more polite to assume that he can speak Mandarin and not just dialect. By taking the initiative in speaking Mandarin, we will be right, eight out of ten times. In this way, we can help to create a Mandarin-speaking environment outside the home.

Let me now turn to a subject related to the Mandarin Campaign which has caused a little concern in some quarters. It is felt by a small group of people that the success of the Mandarin Campaign may be affecting the level and learning of English in school. It is claimed that school children, especially the younger ones, are speaking more Mandarin in school than English. As a result, it is argued that the standard of English may be affected.

The best way to dispel this fear is to look at the examination results of English studied as the first language (EL1) after the Mandarin Campaign was launched. The Ministry of Education's statistics show that the percentage of passes in EL1 at PSLE level has improved from 83 per cent in 1980 to 90 per cent in 1985. Similarly, the percentage of passes for EL1 at GCE 'O' Level has also improved from 41 per cent in 1980 to 64 per cent in 1985 (Table II).

These figures suggest that the Mandarin Campaign has not affected the EL1 results. On the contrary, it seems to have improved the results in the language examinations for both the first and second language. Since the Mandarin Campaign was launched in 1979, the performance of our students in school in both the first and second language has improved (Table II).

The reasons for these improvements are quite simple. As more and more school children speak Mandarin at home and in school, it becomes a language of daily life rather than just an examination subject. Also, the lesser use of dialects cuts down the language burden of our children, leaving them more time to learn EL1.

I must also point out that all the time, as the results of the examinations show (Table II), our school children have been doing much better in CL2 than EL1. This may be one reason why some people think that speaking Mandarin can affect their children's learning of English. The truth, however, is that CL2 is closely linked with the mother-tongue of our school children - the dialects they used to speak at home. It is easier to switch from dialects to Mandarin. And speaking Mandarin at home helps CL2 in school.

As compared to Mandarin, the English language is spoken much less in the average Singapore home. As our children have less exposure to the language in the early years of their education, it is understandable that they do not do so well in EL1 compared with CL2.

On the whole, I would say that the Mandarin Campaign is producing visible results. The Campaign has brought about greater usage of Mandarin both at home and in the public. It is also associated with a marked improvement in the examination results for CL2 and EL1 of our school children. What we need to do now is to put in more effort to promote greater use of Mandarin especially in areas which are still predominantly dialect-speaking: the hawker centres, the markets and the Zhongyuan Jie auctions. Chinese Singaporeans have shown that they are prepared to change their language habit at home and to some extent outside the home as well. Let us sustain the effort.

Now, let me end by giving you another interesting observation. According to the 1985 survey on the use of Mandarin in public places conducted by SNPL's Research Department, it was noted that customers of departmental stores and restaurants who spoke in Mandarin tended to be more polite than those who spoke in dialects. Why is this so? Is the relationship more than just casual? Can the greater use of Mandarin also help the Courtesy Campaign? If so, when we promote the Speak Mandarin Campaign, we also receive an additional bonus in the form of courtesy. It is another reason for making Mandarin-speaking as much a habit as courtesy is a way of life.

I am confident that with sustained effort, we can succeed in persuading more Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin instead of dialects.

On this note, I have pleasure in declaring open the 1986 Speak Mandarin Campaign.

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TABLE I

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF PRIMARY ONE CHINESE PUPILS BY 1ST MOST
FREQUENTLY SPOKEN LANGUAGE AT HOME FOR YEARS 1980-1986

Year	Dialect	Mandarin	English	Others
1980	64	26	9	0.3
1981	53	36	11	0.4
1982	43	45	12	0.5
1983	32	54	13	0.3
1984	27	59	14	0.4
1985	16	67	17	0.3
1986	16	67	16	0.3

SOURCE : MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

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TABLE II

**PSLE AND 'O' LEVEL RESULTS FOR
1ST AND 2ND LANGUAGE FROM 1980 TO 1985**

A PSLE RESULTS

Language	% of Passes					
	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
CL2	96	97	98	98	99	99
EL1	83	93	92	87	86	90

B GCE 'O' LEVEL

Language	% of Passes					
	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
CL2	84	83	86	88	90	92
EL1	41	40	45	41	52	64

SOURCE : MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

TABLE III**PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT
MARKETS AND FOOD CENTRES**

Year	Dialects	Mandarin	English	Malay and others
	%	%	%	%
Apr 79	89	1	3	7
Jun 81	86	6	3	5
Jul 82	92	7	1	1
Jun 83	89	8	1	2
Jun 84	84	11	1	3
Jun 85	74	20	3	3

SOURCE : MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT SURVEYS ON HAWKERS AT
NINE MARKETS/FOOD CENTRES (1979 - 1985).

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