

**SPEECH BY MR GOH CHOK TONG,
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SECOND DEFENCE MINISTER
AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE SPEAK MANDARIN CAMPAIGN
AT THE VICTORIA THEATRE ON 5 OCTOBER 1981**

Make Mandarin a Language of Everyday Life

Chairman, representatives from various trades, ladies and gentlemen: There was a population census in Singapore last year. It was the first time we conducted a survey on the language habit of Singaporeans. What languages do Singaporeans actually use to communicate with their parents at home? Results of the survey indicated that of Chinese Singaporeans over five years old, 87 per cent used dialects to communicate with their parents while 7.5 per cent used Mandarin and 5.2 per cent used English.

Survey Results

The findings are not surprising at all because we know that there are still many parents who can speak dialects only. As a result, children use dialects to converse with their parents in most of the families.

However, in another survey, ie. a survey on the family language used among siblings, we also discovered that in Chinese families, 72 per cent of the people, whether English- or Chinese- educated, continue to use dialects to communicate with their siblings while only 13 per cent of them use Mandarin and 15 per cent, English.

The above surveys on family language prove that the use of dialects is still dominant in the Chinese community and families in Singapore. Therefore, the results of the survey may have confronted educated Chinese parents with a choice: whether they should continue to allow their children to speak dialects at home with no regard to their burden in language learning, or let their children concentrate on the learning of Mandarin and English at home by lightening their burden in language learning.

The Risk Involved

We know that English is the common language for Singaporeans of various races as it is our administrative and commercial language. If Mandarin is to maintain its traditional importance, it should be used more widely and often than dialects. It can never become the common language of the Chinese if Hokkien, Cantonese and Teochew and other dialects continue to be used at home and public places. As there are too many Chinese dialects in Singapore, English may become the common language of the Chinese in future if Mandarin is not widely used. By then, Mandarin would become just another language and lose its actual value as far as the Chinese are concerned.

Mandarin's Value

In order to preserve the fine traditional culture, values and morals of the Chinese community, to break the language barrier among various Chinese dialect groups and to enable Chinese Singaporeans to have a common language, it is necessary for us to promote the use of Mandarin in everyday life.

Mandarin will be used as widely and naturally as dialects are used now only when it becomes the common language of the Chinese. Therefore, we should now support the Speak Mandarin Campaign wholeheartedly with the hope that in a few years, given concerted effort, we will succeed in persuading people to change their language habit and creating a conducive environment for the use of Mandarin.

Wide Support

During the past two years, the Speak Mandarin Campaign has received good public response and support as a result of the promotional efforts of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI), Ministry of Culture, mass media, civic societies, teachers' organisations and various working committees. Details of the progress could be seen from the survey reports on the promotion of Speak Mandarin Campaign published recently in the Nanyang Siang Pau, Sin Chew Jit Poh and The Straits Times. As for the Speak Mandarin Campaign launched by the various government departments, a recent report issued by the Ministry of Culture said the campaign had received the wide support of the people. So, the problem now is: how should we sustain the campaign so as to achieve greater success within the shortest possible time in the next few years?

This year, the Speak Mandarin Campaign is to be targeted at such public places as restaurants, coffee shops and department stores. This is very good because these are places frequented by the masses. Moreover, all along people in these places have been using dialects more. If we are able to persuade the staff members and customers in these places to converse in Mandarin voluntarily, the use of Mandarin will soon become a norm.

Training Programmes

In the past, in conjunction with the Speak Mandarin Campaign, a committee has been set up in each government department to launch the campaign. For example, Mandarin conversation classes have been conducted for the Chinese staff who are not Chinese-educated, particularly those at the counter who often come into contact with members of the public. They are taught Mandarin phrases and conversation related to their work. The Ministry of Culture too has compiled teaching materials for these civil servants. This is very helpful to the Speak Mandarin Campaign. However, teaching materials pertaining to phrases and conversation used in commerce and industry are yet to be made available in the market. In view of this, I hope organisations such as CCCI will try their best to compile teaching materials pertaining to phrases and conversation used in commerce and industry to enable staff in the various trades and professions who do not

Speak Mandarin to learn the language. If they encounter problems in teaching staff or compilation, they may seek help from the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education or the Chinese Language and Research Centre of the National University of Singapore.

Campaign Month

Whether in the past or at present, CCCI and the various trade organisations have spared no efforts in helping to promote the Speak Mandarin Campaign by contributing, both in cash and in kind, towards various meaningful activities aimed at encouraging the Chinese to speak and use Mandarin. This is a praiseworthy example worthy of emulation by other organisations. I am also happy to learn that the Speak Mandarin Campaign working committee, in order to achieve the long-term objective of the campaign, has decided to make October every year the "Speak Mandarin Campaign Month" so that the message of popularising the use of Mandarin can be brought home to more people in all nooks and corners. Such a move is indeed of great significance.

Now, I would like to declare the Speak Mandarin Campaign Month open. I hope all of us will keep up our efforts to create a conducive environment for the use of Mandarin.