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A Standalone but not Lonely Language: Chinese Linguistic Environment and Education in Singapore Context

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Abstract

Bilingual education policy in Singapore permits the students learn both English as working language and mother tongues, such as Chinese, as L2 anchoring to culture heritage. Starting from historical and sociolinguistic reasons, this paper is intended to provide a panoramic view of Chinese education in Singapore, clarify and compare Chinese education syllabi on different levels from primary schools to pre-university schools, cover social movement support on promoting Chinese learning and use in this multilingual society. Meanwhile, Singapore's success in bilingual education cannot hide its own problems. The status of Chinese dialects, the competitive role of English, the rational and practicality for proficient bilingual users, the choice of teaching methodologies between L1 and L2, are all remaining open to further discussing and probing for language policy making and modification in the future.

Keywords: Chinese, linguistic environment, education, Bilingual education, Singapore

1. Introduction

Singapore, a multicultural and multilingual society since its inception as an independent country, is comprised of three major ethnic groups in the following relatively stable proportions: 75% Chinese, 13.7% Malay, 8.7% India and 2.6% others (Department of Statistics, 2008). It is one of the most developed and globally connected countries in the world, second only to the USA as the most competitive economy (World Competitiveness Yearbook, 2007). Four languages are defined as its official languages, namely, English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil. And in order to maintain rapport with neighboring states, Malay is ratified as the national language, with which the national anthem and army orders should be made. With regard to language education, Singapore is worldwide known because of its success in bilingual education, which demands Singaporean students study both English as the first language (L1) and their mother tongue (Chinese, Tamil or Malay) as the second language (L2). And specifically, English is promoted as the working and instructional language in most of school subjects. Mother tongue language is a standalone course and the classes, such as moral lessons, should be taught in mother tongue languages to maintain the heritage. Meanwhile, the pass of mother tongue languages for students was also required for admission to pre-university classes from 1979 onward (Yip & Sim, 1994). That means all the students are expected to be bilingual users at least after receiving the education in school. Actually, most Singaporeans are "bicultural bilinguals" in the sense that they "operate in two language communities without experiencing any conflict with the speakers of each community and they can recognize the value of different aspects of the respective culture of each language group" (Saravanan et al., 2007). And mother tongue language education is reinforced by "Mother Tongue Language policy", which is coined by the top authority to emphasize the importance of mother tongues in maintaining the cultural heritage and social identity from generation to generation. But English is still in the core place of education. This English-knowing bilingual policy has undoubtedly brought great advantage in preparing human resources with multilingual ability to communicate with the world and facilitated Singapore's economy development in the past several decades. Currently, with the development of China and Singaporeans' frequent contact with Chinese people in different fields, Chinese language, as one of the mother tongues, has shown its more and more important role especially in educational and economic contexts. However, lots of researches have focused on the teaching of English as L1 in Singapore during previous years. Mother Tongue Languages' education, including Chinese education, is a topic which still

needs more devotion and thinking. Therefore, in this paper, we try to give a view of Chinese education in Singapore, explore the issues of Chinese linguistic environment and education in the context of bilingual policy, explain its historical and sociolinguistic reasons, clarify and compare Chinese education syllabi on different levels from primary schools to pre-university schools, cover social movement support on promoting Chinese learning and use in Singapore society, and some related issues and problems.

2. Language Policy and Singapore's Bilingual Language Policy

2.1 Definition of Language Policy

Language policy is an issue of considerable ethical, political and legal importance in jurisdictions around the world (Alan, 2001). Since the onset of language policy research in the 1960s, there have been several definitions and terminologies about it, but no consensus has been reached till now as well as "no prospect for a unified theory of language policy and planning" (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). As Ricento (2006) claims that there is no overarching theory of language policy because of the complexity of issues which involve language in society and it is not just an exercise in philosophical inquiry and it is interested in addressing social problems which often involve language, to one degree or another, and in proposing realistic remedies. Although it is undeniable that the effort of clear-cut definition of language policy is in vain, we can still explore some basic characteristics language policy may have from the previous definitions.

Firstly, language policy is such a matter for the whole society, and it is not just an individual linguistic autonomy issue. From a national level, a language policy cares more about the identity of a whole society and the benefit of the country, especially in a multilingual society. It is believed that people with common shared language will have much more tendency to be united together and expect a more flourishing future for their society. On the contrary, individual linguistic autonomy is about people's freedom of choosing a specific sound, expression or variety of a language as their communicating language, which may be used just across a small group of people. And linguistic diversity is usually thought as the obstacle to nation-building. Meanwhile, Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) note a conception of hemogenism, which regards the differences in a society as dangerous and centrifugal and the best society is suggested to be one without intergroup differences. This is a fairly general belief, which has led many countries to attempt to reduce the number of language spoken (Antonio & Wee, 2006).

Secondly, from the pragmatic point of view, language policy should be useful for the human communication in social life. Human verbal communication is the basic human social activities for a normal person and people's potentiality of learning different languages can make the existence of multilingual users possible. Although the proficiencies in these languages may be various, there is no denying that if people can fluently communicate in the government official language, they will receive more convenient official services and public utilities and live a happier life. Furthermore, most of human social activities will be accomplished in an easier way through languages, such as asking for help, explaining the usage of goods, buying a gift, giving a direction, expressing the emotional feelings, making jokes with each other, so on and so forth. We cannot imagine a modern society with no language to communicate with and we cannot hope people in a society communicate just with nonverbal ways as nodding, eye-contacting, gestures etc. So language policy should guarantee that people in a certain society can have a fundamental language education which will make communication with each other possible.

Thirdly, language policy should be in constant shift because of the change of linguistic environment. Leppanen and Piirainen-Marsh (2009) posit that "language policy as an evolving, mundane phenomenon shaped and reshaped by discursive practices, which in turn are embedded in the multiple contextual and semiotic resources available in specific social activities and environments". So language policy is a dynamic, situated, emergent thing that is continually changing moment by moment and turn by turn (Alia, 2013).

2.2 Singapore's Bilingual Language Policy

As a discipline, the origin of language policy in Singapore is accordance with the occurrence of research on language policy in academic field. At that time, the collapse of European colonial system subsequently led to a new wave of nationalism, which required "the organized pursuit of solutions to language problems, typically at the national level" (Fishman, 1974). This early period's language policy was characterized by treating language planning and policy as a problem-solving activity for a country, which is shaped by decolonization, structuralism and pragmatism (Cooper, 1989; Ricento, 2000; Ricento, 2006). But, what a language policy can and should do at a national level? Corson (1990) explains:

> It (Language Policy) identifies the nation's language needs across the range of communities and cultural groups that it contains; it surveys and examines the resources available; it identifies the

> role of the language in general and individual languages in particular in the life of the nation; it establishes strategies for managing and developing language resources as it relates all of these to the best interest of the nation through the operation of some suitable planning agency. In other words, a national language policy is "a set of nationally agreed principles which enables decision makers to make choices about language issues in a rational, comprehensive and balanced way".

Take Singapore's case into consideration, what is the interest of the nation when it claims its independence? What are the roles of different languages in this multilingual and multicultural community? What management strategies did the nation apply to develop the language resources?

To answer these questions, historical and sociolinguistic perspectives will be applied to account for the reality and rational of language policy in Singapore at its early times. Because a language policy cannot be achieved by one day and it definitely has undergone its original formation and continuous modifications to be adjustable with the changed social, economic and linguistic environment in certain context and in broad sense, in the world. Therefore, it is a necessity to uncover the veil of history to look at the root of Singapore's bilingual policy in the year 1965 when it was founded as a new country in Southeast Asia.

- Historical Perspective

With Singapore as a new country, government was aware of the importance of language and took a cautious way to deal with it from the very beginning and tried to avoid the disaster from the dominance of race, language and religions over politics, which actually were the direct reasons for Singapore to declare its independence from Malaysia.

The starting years of Singapore saw a nation plagued with unemployment, economic stagnation and ethnic divisiveness. As a tiny port city, there was no natural resource provided for its economic development. Its economy is largely dependent on trade, mostly importing, processing and then exporting other countries' goods (Singapore Government, 1965). Meanwhile, the competition from Malaysia and Indonesia was severe, and the estimated unemployment rate in 1965 was 7.4% of the population, and a majority of them were young people. The government faced a serious problem of creating more job opportunities for its people. Furthermore, countries, such as America and Britain, developed their technology greatly at that time. The government had to cultivate its people and modeled them into a competent workforce attractive to foreign investors and made sure they have enough knowledge and skills to compete in the global marketplace. The prominent role of English at that time is recognized by the Singapore government. Thus, English was chosen unquestionably as the working language for international trading with western countries and getting access to the advanced technology. As MM Primer Lee Kuan Yew said:

> "… the day we started was a very painful day for me, 9 August 1965, because all out of a sudden, we were out on our own and we had to make a living by ourselves. … when we were asked to leave Malaysia, we knew we were in for a very difficult time because they were going to bypass us and deal direct with the rest of the world. We also had at that time confrontation from Indonesia. So, the future looked very bleak, but we had to make a living for our people; at that time, it was just over two million people" (Lee Kuan Yew, NHK Interview, December 18, 1999, Singapore).

But the fear that only exposure to English for Singaporeans will make them "westernized" or "decadent" or "morally corrupt" was still haunting in early founders' mind.

- Sociolinguistic Perspective

Pennycook (2000), an applied linguist, has stated that "language policy can only be understood in the complex contexts of language use". Inheriting from British colony period, three major ethnic groups, Chinese, India and Malay are geographically and ethnically divided and coexist in Singapore and the evidence from contemporary Singaporean landscape—Chinatown (Chinese), Little India (Indians) and Kampong Glam (Malays) can still be found (Kwan-Terry, 2000; Wee, 2004). Before the year 1966, Singaporeans spoke a wide variety of home languages. For example, Chinese ethnic group spoke about ten different dialects of Chinese, such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese and Hakka. They have a common written form but are not mutually intelligible. The Indian ethnic group spoke a variety of languages from two different language families, namely, Dravidian and Indo-European, and most of them spoke the Dravidian language Tamil and others spoke Malayalam, Punjabi, Gujerati, Bengali or Telegu. So although they originate from the same ethnicity, they still cannot communicate with each other in different dialects. As MM Lee Kuan Yew said:

> We are a disparate people, different peoples. Although 75 percent were Chinese, but they came from different parts of China—Guangdong, Fujian, further north. So, we did not have close bond of blood relations and same languages or same dialects. We spoke different dialects. Then we have Malays and the Malays came from different parts of Southeast Asia, the Indians, too, from different parts of India and you can add a few others, Europeans and others. …here we have different races, difference histories, different languages, different religions (NHK interview, December 18, 1999).

To neglect this linguistic diversity and wipe out all the languages and keep English only remained seems unapproachable. Because from the beginning of Singapore, to be a harmonious multicultural and multiracial society is the government's proposed idea, which requires the respect and equal consideration to each ethnic group, including their languages even if language diversity was viewed as a problem for nation building. Just as in a speech made in 1978, the acting Minister for Culture then, Ong Teng Cheong, said:

> This diversity, for an outsider looking in, has its colorful and charming sides, but also its frustrating ones for the nation-builder, anxious to get on with his onerous and critical task (Opening of the Lunar New Year Fair, 1978).

These languages, bounded with cultural heritage and traditions, are called "mother tongues" in Singapore. But, any single mother tongue cannot be chosen as the inter-ethnic communication language because the choice of any mother tongue will be the discrimination over the other mother tongues. They are just envisaged as the bridge to the traditional culture and heritage. For instance, a school subject in 1974, Education for Living, was justified:

> … the rationale for studying Education for Living in the mother tongue is that it is hoped that pupils will be able to grasp their own cultural and historical heritage better through the use of their own language. Asian moral and social values, and attitudes, such as closeness in family ties, thrift, filial duties and loyalty, can be conveyed and understood better in Asian languages and the pupils are expected to become more aware of their cultural roots and to foster a stronger sense of nationhood if they know their own language (Gopinathan, 1976).

On the basis of analyzing historical and sociolinguistic factors, Singapore government made its language policy and expressed it in The Republic of Singapore Independence Act (1965):

> (1) Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English shall be the four official languages in Singapore.
>
> (2)The national language shall be the Malay language and shall be in the Roman script:

Provided that-

> (i) No person shall be prohibited or prevented from using or from teaching or learning any other language; and
>
> (ii) Nothing in this section shall prejudice the right of the Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language or any other community in Singapore (Government Gazette Acts Supplement, no. 1965, p. 100).

And in the field of education system, the eminent English-known bilingual language policy is confirmed. Students are expected to learn both English as well as their mother tongues in schools. Specifically, Chinese Mandarin (Putonghua) is for Chinese students, Malay for Malay students, and Tamil for India students. For the sake of consistency and convenience, Chinese will mean Chinese Mandarin in the rest of the paper. One thing should be noted that a student's mother tongue is defined by his ethnicity, not his language used at home or the first language learned. From the primary, secondary to junior college level, even the entry into universities, students must take the mother tongue as a second language and English as the instructional school language. This bilingual language education policy is the fundamental feature of Singapore's education system. Minister for Education, Tony Tan Keng Yam (1986) once said:

> … Children must learn English so that they will have a window to the knowledge, technology and expertise of the modern world. They must know their mother tongues to enable them to know what makes us what we are.

Singapore's English-known bilingualism policy is expected to ensure that Singaporeans grow up knowing both English and their mother tongue, and as a result, are able to contribute productively to Singapore's economic growth, as well as being grounded in their cultural heritage (Antonio & Wee, 2006). It's evident that English and mother tongues play different roles and both are necessary in people's social life. The knowledge of English can

be balanced and complemented by the knowledge of mother tongues to avoid the fear of "westernized" or "decadent", which removes the worries of founders and makes the bilingual education in Singapore stand firmly. Although there is shift of leaders, there is just minor modification of this policy. This is the strategic choice for Singapore government to make on the grounds of social and linguistic reality. As MM Primer Lee Kuan Yew said:

> "If you bring me back to 1965, I would say that is the policy I would still adopt…". "If we have only English and we allowed the other language to atrophy and vanish, we face a very serious problem of identity and culture". "… if we were monolingual in our mother tongues, we would not make a living. Becoming monolingual in English would have been a setback. We would have lost our cultural identity, that quiet confidence about ourselves and our place in the world" (Lee, 2000).

3. Linguistic Environment at Schools: Chinese Education Syllabi in Singapore

Enormous interest and enthusiasm around the world towards the learning of Chinese language has been erupted because of China's growing prominence and economic prosperity. But, tremendous difficulty of learning Chinese is also the truth for certainty. What makes Chinese such a tough language to master? There might be several reasons:

First, Chinese language has the most complex pronunciation system with four tones. In different contexts, even the same word will be phonetically different. What's more, the changing of tones will alter words' meaning in oral expressions. So the study of "han-yu-pin-yin", which is the sound system for Chinese characters, is considered as a sufficiently necessary condition at the initial period of learning.

Secondly, for writing, learners have to be adept with the character-stroke and hold a strong sense of order for character writing and appropriate awareness of space where Chinese characters are placed. For Chinese grammar, the sentences are syntactically connected by the abstract meanings and for Chinese foreign language learners, it will be a huge problem, not to speak of intricate change in various language situations.

Thirdly, because of the complicated writing system, the reading and understanding of Chinese is a huge challenge, which is composed with hundreds of, or thousands of characters. One has to get the "feeling" for how those words are combined with other words in a multitude of different contexts.

Even if there are enormous difficulties in studying Chinese, Singapore government has never stopped its effort in promoting the Chinese learning. In 2004, Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee was established to review especially the Chinese education in Singapore and provide pedagogical suggestions on the matters of course framework, teaching methodology, textbooks, test, teaching training, etc. For the following part, different syllabi will be explained and compared by the order of education levels.

3.1 Chinese Education Syllabi for Primary Schools

In the years of 2007 and 2015, two Chinese education syllabi for primary schools were released respectively. Both of them have covered the following ideas of curriculum concept, teaching objectives (including subentry objectives), teaching framework, and teaching suggestions as well.

For the curriculum concept, several common ones remain consistent in both syllabi, such as the aim at improving students' Chinese language proficiency, stressing on Chinese practical value in life, meeting the students' individualized differences, developing their thinking patterns, promoting their autonomy study, and fostering their learning efficiency, etc. However, two fresh ideas are enriched in the 2015 syllabus. They are expressed as cultivating students' affection and morality to sustain the Chinese culture, and focusing on students' learning process and assessing their achievement efficiently. The reason behind it might be that scholars and syllabus makers have realized the limitation of Chinese linguistic study with no culture and more and more important role culture education plays in sustaining the traditional heritage for younger generations.

For the curriculum objectives, training linguistic competence, enhancing humanistic quality and promoting social communication ability are the three fundamental ones appearing in two syllabi. No enormous differences are found in regards to linguistic competence in two files. In detail, Chinese education on primary level should prepare students to understand the appropriate topics from life, radio programs and other media, talk with other people and write to express their simple feelings and opinions clearly, and communicate with others in Chinese by combining the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. While concerning the humanistic quality, the syllabus in 2015 stresses the importance of whole-person development, students' devotion to the traditional cultures, their respect to different cultures and the international awareness. It is correspondent with the

curriculum concept mentioned previously, which highlights the importance of cultures. Last, on social communication ability, besides the imaginative thinking, creative thinking, the syllabus in 2015 further includes the critical thinking, which is a way of looking at problems or situations from a fresh perspective and will suggest unorthodox solutions. Meanwhile, the idea of students' learning ability stretches from autonomy study ability in 2007 to inquiry learning and life-long learning in 2015. And the roles of modern technology are fully asked for in 2015 as an efficient way for students to browse and collect information, communicate with others in interactive both oral and written forms.

Actually, two sublevels are divided within primary level, namely Fundamental Sublevel (FS) from primary 1 to primary 4 and Orienting Sublevel (OS) from primary 5 to primary 6. According to students' learning varieties, general Chinese course and advanced Chinese course are provided for FS students and meanwhile, basic Chinese course, general Chinese course, and advanced Chinese course are provided for OS students. Generally, the students with lower learning ability are suggested to enter basic Chinese course, and those who have intermediate ability will go for general Chinese course, and those who have advanced ability will be advised to enroll advanced Chinese course. Modular Curriculum Structure is applied in two syllabi to cater to the students from different family backgrounds and various learning talents and make Chinese education more flexible. Basic Chinese course is composed of 70%-80% core units and 20%-30% school-based units. General Chinese course is composed of 70%-80% core units and 20-30% lead-in units, reinforcing units, school-based units, and deep-broad units. And Advanced Chinese course is composed of 70%-80% core units and 20%-30% school-based units or deep-broad units. For FS period, the teaching focus is on listening, speaking, character recognizing, character writing, and reading. While for OS period, the teaching focus is changed to listening, speaking, reading, and essay writing. And in 2015 syllabus, the interactive oral communication is required for both FS and OS students, which reflects the importance of interaction between people around the world and the tendency of international communication in reality.

On the time allocation, the syllabus in 2015 reduces the class time by 0.5 hour from primary 1 to primary 4, shows no difference on primary 4, and increases the class time by 0.5 hour from primary 5 to primary 6, which means the learning burden for lower level students will be lessened and obviously shifted to the higher levels.

3.2 Chinese Language Syllabi for Secondary Schools

In 2010, Mother Tongue Languages Review Committee (MTLRC) was established. It plays the role of reviewing the whole mother tongue education in Singapore. In an important review in 2011, MTLRC reported that the reason for students to learn mother tongues was to make them have a deeper understanding of their own culture, literature, history and profound cultural identity. With these elements, they can communicate with others in mother tongues and remain contact with the people in the world, who share the same language and culture. Furthermore, no matter how different the students' language learning ability and family backgrounds, the Education Ministry will take efforts to help the students achieve the mother language proficiency as the students' potentiality can do.

The 2011 syllabus explains that the secondary Chinese education should be based on students' differences, follow the language learning rules, stress on Chinese practical use in life, develop students' thinking ability, integrate the promotion of linguistic proficiency and social quality, and foster students' autonomous study. To achieve that, five types of Chinese education courses are provided to secondary students, namely, Basic Chinese (BC), Chinese B (CB), General Academic Chinese (GAC), Quick Chinese (QC) and Advanced Chinese (AC). To cater the various needs, a suggestion about the proportion of skills in different courses is made for the reference of schools and teachers.

Table 1. Proportions of different skills in various courses

Language Skills	Basic Chinese	Chinese B	General Academic Chinese	Quick Chinese	Advanced Chinese
Listening and Speaking	65%	50%	40%	35%	25%
Reading	25%	30%	30%	35%	30%
Writing	10%	20%	30%	30%	45%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

From the above table, we can discover that Basic Chinese, Chinese B and General Academic Chinese attach importance to listening and speaking skills, then reading and writing. Quick Chinese values listening, speaking and reading, then writing. While, Advanced Chinese have a regard for writing, then reading, and then listening and speaking.

For language skill proficiency, the syllabus makes a clear list of requirement for each course. For example, Chinese B's language skill education targets are listed as:

1) Be able to listen and understand appropriate narrative, illustrative and practical Chinese materials;

2) Be able to express the opinions and feelings on general topics and communicate with others in Chinese;

3) Be able to read appropriate narrative, illustrative and practical Chinese materials, and appreciate simple Chinese literature works;

4) Be able to write narrative essays and practical essays on appropriate level;

5) Be able to recognize and pronounce 1600-1700 common words, and write 1100-1200 among them.

And for humanistic quality, the syllabus sheds light on the issues of life value and attitude, sustainment of traditional Chinese culture, love of family members, society, nation and the world, and interest in aesthetic.

On the aspect of social communication ability, imaginative thinking, creative thinking, critical thinking, autonomous study, cooperative learning are still on the list. Meanwhile, the ability to apply modern technology to communicate with others is required, too.

Apart from this, a subentry grading graph based on skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing is constructed in 2011 syllabus for secondary students from level 3 to level 7. Take reading as an example:

Table 2. Grading for reading

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7
Reading	BC(S1-S4) CB(S1-S2)	CB(S3-S4)GAC (S1-S4) QC (S1-S4) AC (S1)	GAC (S3-S4) QC (S3) AC (S2)	GAC (S5) QC (S4) AC (S3)	AC (S4)
	Be able to grasp the basic methods of recognizing and reading Chinese characters				
	Be able to read simple narrative materials with the guidance of teachers	Be able to read simple narrative and illustrative materials	Be able to read narrative and illustrative materials and simple argumentative Chinesematerials	Be able to read narrative, illustrative and argumentative Chinese materials	
	Be able to read simple practical Chinese material with the guidance of teachers	Be able to do preliminary reading ofsimple practical Chinese materials	Be able to read simple practical Chinese materials	Be able to read comparatively complex practical Chinese materials	Be able to read complex practical Chinese materials
	Be able to understand the emotions expressed in the essays and pick up the brilliant Chinese sentences or paragraphs	Be able to do preliminary appreciation of simple Chinese literature materials	Be able to do preliminary appreciation of Chinese literature materials	Be able to appreciate Chinese literature materials	Be able to appreciate Chinese literature materials deeply

*The letter s means 'secondary' in the table. BC means Basic Chinese. CB means Chinese B. GAC means General Academic Chinese. QC means Quick Chinese. AC means Advanced Chinese.

From the above table, we find out the steadily increasing requirement from left to right on the aspects of learning materials and skills.

3.3 Chinese Special Program for Secondary Schools

In secondary schools, what needs to be mentioned is the Chinese Special Program, which provides a chance for the students whose mother tongues are not Chinese to study Chinese as the third language. In the years 2006 and 2015, two syllabi are released to guide the teaching of Chinese for students whose mother tongue is not Chinese. For the third language education, Chinese Special Program is to cultivate students' communication ability in Chinese and understanding of cultures in Singaporean Chinese community as well. The linguistic teaching focus is on the listening and speaking, which is based on social life. Han-yu-pin-yin is mentioned as the priority of teaching before learning Chinese strokes and characters. English could be employed as the working language when necessary. The time for spending on learning in each week in the classrooms is 3.5 hours. And listening and speaking constitutes 50%, reading 30% and writing 20%. Through comparing the syllabi in 2006 and 2015, we can find two differences clearly. One is on the grammar teaching. The other is on topics of textbook. In 2006 syllabus, explicit grammar teaching is thought as unnecessary, instead recognizing grammar principles implicitly from different Chinese sentences. However, 2015 syllabus argues that grammar learning is an indispensable and difficult part of learning Chinese. Teachers should introduce and explain the grammar in the textbooks to the students, even with the help of English. The comparative teaching method between English grammar and Chinese grammar is advocated, too. And for the topics of textbook, in 2006 syllabus, the topics are including:

Self: Self-introduction, hobbies, habits, and related value

Family: Family members, forms of address, loving, respect the aged and love the young, family harmony, and related values

Friend: Get to know friends, understand the other racial people, help each other, loyalty, and related values

School: Environment, subjects, school activities, loving, communicating, and related values

Society: Community environment, community activities, loving, discipline, racial harmony, patriotism, related values

While in 2015 syllabus, the topics of textbooks are changed to:

Self: Self-introduction, hobbies, aspiration, personal life

Family: Members, family life

School: Relationship between teachers and other classmates, choollife, environment and facilities

Community: Community life, community environment and facilities

Country: Related topics

For "Self" topic, "aspiration" is added as one of the topics students should know in Chinese lessons. For "family" topic, items such as forms of address and respecting the aged and loving the young don't exist any longer. For "school" topic, "relationship between teacher and other classmates" is mentioned. "Community" and "Country" topics replace the "society" topic evidently. This shift shows the interest change of Chinese education.

3.4 Chinese Education Syllabi for Pre-University Schools

In the year 2006, a Chinese Language/Chinese Language & Literature Syllabuses for pre-university was released by Curriculum Planning and Development Division of Education Ministry. In Singapore, pre-university includes Junior College and Upper Secondary Schools. There are three different levels of Chinese course provided to pre-university students—H1, H2, and H3. H1 Chinese course gives prominence to the basic Chinese language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. H2 course values both Chinese language skills and students' appreciation of Chinese literature. While H3 course makes it further and encourages students to express their opinions on literature works and learn to create their own ones. The textbook for H1 is only on modern Chinese language, with topics on self, family, society, nation and the world. However, for H2 and H3 students, they have to learn all the subjects of modern Chinese language, ancient Chinese language and Chinese literature works. Specifically, the topics of modern Chinese texts cover:

Self: Know yourself and others; protect yourself and respect others; individual development and discipline; think independently; moral; personal value; belief in equality

Family: Kind consideration; respect the elders; be loyal and keep promise; communicate and keep harmonious; show solicitude and support; love family

Society: Love society and care for it; be disciplined and follow the rules; seek common ground while accepting the existing differences; active participation; society's benefit is higher than personal benefit

Nation: Singapore is our country, where we live; we must keep the racial and religious harmony; we must appoint people on their merits; we must stand on our own feet; we must protect our nation by our own; we must be confident of the future.

World: Know the world; live peacefully and dependently; protect earth and environment; feel concerned about mother country and aspire a greater career in the world

According to these topics, 18 pieces of articles are selected as the designated texts, and among them, 10 are compulsory ones, which students must study in schools. These articles were all written by famous authors from China, Malay or Singapore, such as Lu Xun (鲁迅), Yu Qiuyu (余秋雨), Bi Shumin (毕淑敏), etc.

For Ancient Chinese language course, 7 classical Chinese articles are selected as designated ones, such as The Master of Five Willows (《五柳先生传》), Memorial to the Emperor Stating My Case (《陈情表》), Story of Old Tippler's Pavilion (《醉翁亭记》), etc.

For H2 Chinese Literature Work course, 5 poems in Tang dynasty, 5 poems in Song dynasty, 3 modern poems, 3 modern short stories, 1 modern novelette and 1 modern drama are included.

For H3 Chinese Literature Work course, five groups of literature works are provided for students to choose one as an intensively reading material. Group 1 covers 4 chapters in Confucian Analects (《论语》). Group 2 covers 6 poems in Tang dynasty and 6 poems in Song dynasty. Group 3 covers 5 chapters in The Art of War (《孙子兵法》). Group 4 covers 5 episodes in A Dream of Red Mansions (《红楼梦》). And Group 5 covers 5 episodes in Heroes of the Marshes (《水浒传》).

In the year 2012, a new H1 syllabus was released by the Curriculum Planning and Development Division of Education Ministry. In this document, H1 course is stated to be oriented by the education of students' linguistic competence, interaction skills, thinking patterns, and social quality with the help of practical Chinese materials. To achieve this, 85% core units and 15% selective units should be simultaneously open to the students. The time of learning in each week is 4 hours. The textbook topics are changed from self, family, society, nation and the world in 2006 to environment protection, growing experience, love towards the nation and world, culture and life. Meanwhile, two selective units, appreciation of music and movies, internet and media, are supplemented. The framework of topics in 2012 is constructed as follows:

Table 3. The framework of topics in 2012 for pre-university H1 Chinese course

	Main Category		Sub-category		
	Teaching aim: To know the importance of protecting environment				
	C1	Environment Protection	Protect the nature/animals	Environment Pollution	Save Energy/ renewable resources
Core Units (85%)	***Teaching aim: To know self and the relationship between self and others***				
	C2	Growing Experience	Personal Experience	Friendship	Family Affinity
	Teaching aim: To be based on Singapore and have international view				
	C3	The love towards nation and the world	Care for the Community	Patriotism	Global Villager
	Teaching aim: To know the role of cultures in social life				
	C4	Culture and Life	Habits and Hobbies	Festivals	Creative Culture
	Teaching aim: To know the social effect and cultural meaning of films and music				
Selective Units	E1	Appreciation of Music and Movies	Eastern and Western Music	Eastern and Western Movies	Idols

(15%)	***Teaching aim: To know the effect of media and internet on people's life***				
	E2	Internet and Media	Internet Communication	Numeral Science and Technology	Eastern and Western Media

*For the selective units, only one category is required.

In the year 2014, a H2/H3 Chinese Language and Literature Syllabus was released as a parallel file with H1 syllabus in 2006 for pre-university students. Compared with the syllabus in 2006, the topics in Modern Chinese textbook are changed greatly. The topics of youth, community and nation, and global trend replace the topics of self, family, society, nation and the world in 2006.

Table 4. Categories of textbook topics in 2014 for pre-university H2/H3 Modern Chinese course

	Main category	*Sub-category*		
1	The youth	Growing	Family Love	Friendship
2	Community and Nation	The care of Community	National Identity	Multi-cultures
3	Global Trend	Culture Development and Challenge	Society and Economy Development and Challenge	Politics Development and Challenge

Furthermore, for H2 literature work course, 6 ancient Chinese articles, 10 poems in Tang and Song dynasty and modern times, 4 modern short stories, and 2 modern dramas are selected as designated ones. Only small portion of articles remain the same as the ones in 2006, and most of them are fresh ones added into the syllabus.

For H3 Literature Work course, there are only 4 groups. Group 1, Confucian Analects (《论语》), has 4 articles. Group 2, Poems in Tang and Song dynasty, has 12 poems. Group 3, A Dream of Red Mansions (《红楼梦》), has 5 episodes. And group 4, Shih Chi (《史记》), has 5 chapters. Changes are seen in the chapter selection of Confucian Analects, Tang and Song dynasty poems and A Dream of Red Mansions. The Art of War (《孙子兵法》) and Heroes of the Marshes (《水浒传》) doesn't exist in 2014 syllabus any longer.

Several characteristics of Chinese Education Syllabi in Singapore can be identified and summarized:

Firstly, the Chinese education in Singapore presents crystal multi-target in clear-cut multi levels.

There are various Chinese education syllabi for students along their road of education, from primary school to pre-university school. And the syllabi are constructed and integrated to help educate students' language skills, communication skills and social quality as well. They are tailored to meet the students' cognitive, affective and intelligent varieties in different levels. Even the arrangement of textbook topics satisfies students' perception of things from simplicity to complexity. Within the same level, different types of courses are constructed and provided to meet students' potentiality of learning. For example, in secondary schools, as many as five types of Chinese courses are provided.

Secondly, the syllabi are always on the way of adapting with changing linguistic environment and contexts locally and internationally.

For example, the 2015 primary syllabus borrows the prevalent education theory worldwide and proposes the ideas of whole-person development, critical thinking, inquiry learning, life-long learning. As for the topics of textbook, it makes an adaption to include the topics of self, family, school, community and country, replacing the topics of self, family, friend, school and society in 2006. Greater modification can be identified concerning the topics of textbook in 2012 and 2014 pre-university syllabi, compared with those in 2006. To make things more detailed, topic sub-categories divided from main categories have been listed, either. Even for the same topic, the coverage of topic is altered to fit the change of global issues.

Thirdly, stimulating and maintaining students' interest in learning Chinese is the evergreen idea appearing in all syllabi.

For foreign language learning and teaching, the significance of learners' interest is never overstated. It affects students' attitude and devotion toward foreign language learning and ultimately determines the learning result. Many foreign language researches have testified that students tend to achieve better results with high interest of

learning, and fail the learning if there is no interest or low interest. For the sake of teaching efficiency, many related issues, such as teaching suggestions, including teaching methods, teaching materials, teaching time allocation, the application of modern technology, are provided in all syllabi.

4. Social Movement Support: Speak Mandarin Campaign

Chinese practical use cannot be achieved just in educational context by schools and classrooms. The learning of Mandarin in schools was thought to be hindered by the home use of other Chinese dialects, such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese and Hakka in early period of time. Hence, in 1979, Singapore government decided to take on the Speak Mandarin Campaign, which advocated the Chinese families to use Mandarin as the predominant household language instead of Chinese dialects. Later, it becomes a year-round campaign and uses publicity and activities in the community to create awareness and facilitate the learning of Mandarin. There will be a Chinese slogan each year for certain target audience. For instance, in the year 1979, with the whole Chinese community as the target audience, the slogan is "Speak More Mandarin, Speak Less Dialects". In 1984, "Please Speak Mandarin. Your Children's Future Is in Your Hands" was proposed as the slogan, making Chinese parents the target audience. In 1996, the slogan took the form of "Speak Mandarin, Create New Horizon", and the target audience was English-educated Chinese working adults. In 2009, "Chinese Language? Who's Afraid of Who" was proposed and target audience was the youths. Its effect exists in all fields of work and brings about a decrease of dialects use as the predominant household language from 81.4% in 1980 to 30.7% in 2000, and then to 19.2% in 2010. This rapid and sharp decrease of dialect-speaking Chinese family situation is also accompanied by a drastic increase of Mandarin-speaking Chinese family. Households that claimed to use Mandarin as the dominant language at home increased from 10.2% in 1980 to 47% in 2010 (Department of Statistics, 2011). Mandarin replaces the other dialects and has become the lingua franca of Chinese ethnic group in Singapore. The term "Huayu" in Singapore carries similar meaning of "Hanyu" which is also known as Putonghua or Mandarin.

5. Conclusions: Related Problems and Criticism

We have explored Chinese education in Singapore's bilingual education context, explained and compared the similarities and differences between syllabi on various levels. However, there remain problems and issues for more and deeper consideration.

First, should the Chinese dialects, such as Teochew, Hokkies, Cantonese, be wiped out of linguistic repertoire completely? The Chinese education policy and Speak Mandarin Campaign, which make Mandarin as the standard Chinese language learnt and used in schools and society, have made young generations of Mandarin speakers unable to communicate with their dialect-speaking grandparents. With the decreasing of older generation, this may not be the issue in the future. However, from the point of language diversity and cultural variety, the value of sustaining Chinese dialects in life and keeping them as a minority linguistic phenomenon cannot be ignored.

Secondly, although the Chinese education and Speak Mandarin Campaign have increased the importance of Mandarin in society, with the emphasis of English value in bilingual education, a significant number of Singaporeans have currently arisen to speak English at home rather than Mandarin. In fact, according to Education Ministry's statistics, the number of Chinese students from English-speaking homes rose to 50% in 2004, and English has overtaken Mandarin as "the primary language used in homes of Primary 1 Chinese pupils" (Wee, 2011). This phenomenon leads to the worries that if English will replace Mandarin and emerge as the lingua franca in Chinese community? If that happens, the mother tongue education will lose its original meaning.

Thirdly, the earlier expectation that the majority of Chinese Singaporeans are capable of being highly proficient in both Mandarin as well as English is challenged. In fact, only a minority, estimated at appropriately 10% of the student population, is thought to be fully bilingual in English and the mother tongue (Wee, 2011). Just as Singaporean scholar, Wee (2006) points out, the sheer number of students who face difficulties with Mandarin has led the state to concede the existence of a real learning problem which makes the state abandon its earlier position concerning the mastery of two languages. In fact, the existence of Singlish, which is viewed as deviation of standard English and claimed by many Singaporeans as linguistic marker of the Singaporean identity, expresses the problems of language education self-evidently.

Fourthly, the definition of mother tongue, such as Mandarin, in Singapore is a puzzling issue. Whether mother tongues are treated as L1 or L2 is still an issue discussed heatedly. For the definition of L1, it means the language a person has learned from birth or within the critical period, or a person speaks the best and so is often the basis for sociolinguistic identity. In this case, if Chinese Singaporeans learnt Chinese from birth at home, Chinese

should be thought as L1. While in Singapore, English is the dominant language in educational and social contexts, which make the other mother tongues, such as Mandarin, as the L2 language although not the second rate language. This fuzzy definition will result in the uncertainty of teaching methodologies. L1 and L2 acquisition are two distinctive things after all.

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