

# **Policy & Plurilingualism:**

*Language policy, practice, and ideology in Indonesia & Singapore*

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## I. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the ways in which explicit language planning has impacted language practices and ideologies through policy at the national level in the countries of Singapore and Indonesia. I specifically investigate the extent to which language planning shifted practice, ideologies, and policies toward the decline of hegemonic minority languages. Within the application of the two field sites, this means I have sought to understand the shifting role of Mandarin in Singapore and Javanese in Indonesia. My guiding questions have been as follows:

- To what extent did language planning efforts shape language practices and language ideologies (philosophies) through national policy in Indonesia and Singapore?
- How effective were these language policies in achieving their desired outcomes? How can policy be improved to accommodate emerging patterns and concerns?
- What role does national identity play in language practices, philosophies, and policies within Singapore and Indonesia?

In pursuing a degree in both Linguistics and Global Politics, the overlap between the construct of the nation-state and creation of language ideologies was of particular interest to me. Language was one of the many dimensions through which the idea of the nation expressed itself. Similarly, in my time spent abroad in Chile, I became intrigued how colonization and independence movements affected local language in not only how it was spoken, but how non-Spanish language was conceptualized within the developing national contexts. As a language learner myself, I understood the appeal of learning a language spoken around the world; but I began to wonder: what really was the *local* language of the countries I was visiting? In investigating the nexus of national identity and national language planning, I could see how different countries managed language from the inside, all with the goal of identifying discursive and practical mechanisms through which more could be done to protect minority languages, and therefore the cultures they represent.

I begin this investigation with background on the theoretical underpinnings of Language Policy and Planning (LPP), a discipline that defies a singular understanding of the concepts of language and nation. I then provide background on the language ecologies of Singapore and Indonesia, and why I thought these two were particularly interesting countries to examine. The main methodology used in this research is a collection of language ideology interviews conducted in Singapore in Malang, East Java, Indonesia in the summer of 2024; funded through the J. Roland Pennock Undergraduate Fellowship in Public Affairs. In the analysis section that follows these interviews, I have found that themes of national identity were deeply entrenched in the way that consultants viewed their language use as well as the value of a given language, particularly in regards to concepts of pragmatism in Singapore and formality in Indonesia. I follow this with a discussion of the implications of these discursive relationships within the context of future language planning, and finally offer my proposed areas of improvement for language policy within the national contexts. Finally, I remark on how these language planning

efforts have positioned Singapore and Indonesia's approaches within the larger context of LPP literature. Ultimately, I argue that language policy is an effective way to defend against heritage language erosion, and it is best strengthened through association with national values as understood and enacted on the community level.

## II. Background

### A. *Of Language Policy & Planning*

Often tucked into the larger scope of applied linguistics, the academic study of Language Planning<sup>1</sup> came about in the late twentieth century, and most large scale language planning has been carried out in the 'context of national development' (Ruiz, 1984). As waves of independence movements took place across the globe, newly formed nations asked themselves questions surrounding who the people of their new countries were, and in many cases, what language they were going to speak. Since then, the field has used a wide variety of frameworks and theories wherein "behavior may be poured to cool and harden for analysis" (Cooper, 1989). Despite having 'theoretical robustness', the field of Language Planning & Policy has no central theory that anchors the majority of literature (Johnson, 2013). Therefore, to aid in the orientation of this investigation, I have given a variety of background and preliminary discussion to situate myself within the existing academia.

For the purposes of this thesis, the broader discussion of LPP has been limited insofar as it is relevant to my pursuits on the question of how language policy has impacted language ideologies and discursively produced national identity in Indonesia and Singapore. This includes an introduction to the foundational theories upon which my research relies: the link between policy and power, the dimensions of language policy application, and the relation between language planning and the modern nation. I conclude with an explanation as to how each piece of this puzzle fits together to create the theoretical backdrop of my particular investigation.

#### i. *Early Conceptualizations*

The 1960's saw the birth of the discipline of Language Planning. Spurred by the interest of newly independent states to create unified language systems to facilitate internal communication, linguists were charged with the task of formalizing language (Johnson, 2013). Initial input into the field skewed towards the technical, with the earliest definition of the term *language planning* originating in 1959, as Einar Haugen standardized the Norwegian alphabet (Haugen, 1993). At this time, language was viewed as a concrete material that was able to be intentionally controlled and manipulated, otherwise put as "a thing in itself, an objective, identifiable product" (Canagarajah, 2007). Therefore, there were normative understandings of how ruling bodies should seek to shape languages, opting to scientifically mold languages to be the most efficient, economical, and clear as possible (Tauli, 1958). This approach was quickly critiqued from scholars across multiple disciplines, attributing this line of thinking to the

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<sup>1</sup> When discussing the field as a whole, I have capitalized Language Policy & Planning. For the general practice of language planning, I have kept it uncapitalized.

continued and growing dominance of colonial languages across the globe. The central concern surrounding this line of thinking was that it would then be most efficient to continue using the tongue of the previous ruling class, in this case the colonial powers for the 20th century (Ricento, 2000). In this critique, a shift is marked away from the idea of language existing within strict normative bounds, and towards a more inclusive, discursive understanding.

*ii. Introductory Divisions in Popular Theory*

One of the earliest distinctions in the study of language planning was the divide between corpus and status planning (Kloss, 1969). Later, a third body of language planning was added: acquisition. The differentiation between the three lies within the focus of the policy enacted. Corpus planning refers to the systematization of the words or structures of a language itself. It is the nature of work that Haugen was describing when he wrote that, “the activity of planning a normative orthography, grammar, and dictionary for the guidance of writers and speakers in a non-homogenous community” (Haugen, 1959). The next genre of language planning takes shape in status planning, or the ‘deliberate efforts to influence the allocation of functions among a community's languages’ (Cooper, 1989). In status planning, the operative interest of planning efforts –as they often take shape through the installation of policy– is to create clear uses of language within distinct social space. In other words, it's the guidance toward the allocation of functions of languages/literacies in a given speech community (Hornsberger, 2013). This is the sphere of language planning that is most often enacted at the national level, with many countries denoting certain languages to be *official*. This demarcation outlines the languages which a government has specified as appropriate, by law (Cooper, 1989).

The third area of language planning is acquisition planning, an area concerned with “efforts to influence the allocation of users or the distribution of languages/literacies, by means of creating or improving opportunity or incentive to learn them, or both.” (Hornsberger, 2013). This takes place largely within the educational sphere, where students are exposed to language planning via both the language of instruction and as learned content itself.

Table One: Hornsbergers’ matrix of Language Planning

*Adapted from Johnson, 2003*

Types	Policy Planning Approach	Cultivation Planning Approach
Status Planning (Uses of Language)	Officialization Nationalization Standardization Proscription	Revival Maintenance Spread Interlingual Communication
Acquisition Planning (About Users of Language)	Group Education/School Literary Religious	Reacquisition Maintenance Shift Foreign Language

	Mass Media Work	Second Language
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Dr. Nancy Hornsberger goes one step further and offers a matrix by which language planning’s methodologies can be understood within their applications of intersections of type of planning, as discussed above, and the approach an action is taking. The divisions of approaches are based on whether the action concerns itself with form (Policy Approach) and function (Cultivation Approach) (Johnson, 2013).

### *iii. Orientations*

Before language planning can take shape within any of these three forms (corpus planning, status planning, and acquisition planning), it must first be theoretically approached from a certain **orientation**, or an assumption about the role of language within a society (Ruíz, 1984). The oft-cited paper *Orientations in Language Planning* by Richard Ruíz distinguishes three orientations that any group engaging in language planning may take: language-as-problem, language-as-right, and language-as-resource.

The first of these orientations, **language-as-problem**, uses a similar normative approach as early language planning; seeing language as something to be revised, systematized and streamlined. It was this language-as-problem approach that was most often used by linguists as they worked to lexify, codify, and refine languages within a development context (Ruíz, 1984). It should be noted that this approach to language –again, as something normative and controllable as mentioned in earlier sections– was an effective tool for the ruling class. Elites could use precise ways of practicing language to socially codify their language as correct in order to acquire and maintain social status (Cooper, 1989).

The second orientation, or **language-as-right**, becomes a key player in the discussion of languages as a unifying factor for national development. Described as an effort to make essential governmental functions available in native languages, language-as-right oriented works often strive for “the right to personal freedom and enjoyment” in one’s mother tongue (Ruíz, 1984). In the literature, this manifests itself often as advocacy for bilingual education. The third orientation as proposed by the literature is that of language-as-resource. The foundations of this approach lie in the belief that language is “a resource to be managed, developed, and conserved,” that “regards language-minority communities as important courses of expertise” (Ruíz, 1984). The greater question comes in how the language-as-resource orientation manifests itself, as it often aims to increase the status of minority languages. In this way language planning efforts that are centered around this approach are effective in bridging divides across classes within a single community (Ruíz, 1984). It is due to this power to unify that policies often take this approach when seeking to give official status to multiple languages in the national context (Cooper, 1989).



#### *iv. Areas of Impact*

Central to any LPP analysis is understanding the shapes that impact will take. It would be incomplete to take the understanding that language planning is the sole result of its own efforts, meaning that language planning can only take shape intentionally. Many scholars are quick to point out that LPP is an area that is informed and influenced by a wide range of factors, from the social, historical, political, to name a few (Spolsky 2013, Cooper 1989). Therefore, in order to best understand where the effects of language planning are largely visible, there is a distinction between the three areas of impact: language practices, language ideologies, and language policy (Spolsky, 2013).

The first of the three, ***language practices***, is defined as “the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up a linguistic repertoire”, or put most simply, “*what people actually do.*” (Spolsky, 2013). It is the way that language is created in the day to day, larger concepts made discrete by what is spoken, read, written or otherwise communicated within a language community. These sets of language practices are informed by conventional rules that are societally set through ***constructive interaction***, meaning that as we interact with members of our speech community, we continually embody and inform ourselves about what is appropriate language practice (Oyama, 2000).

The second set, ***language ideologies*** (also referred to as language beliefs) is more abstract. One conceptualization of language ideologies is that they are “cultural conceptions not only of language and language variation, but of the nature of language in the world” (Rumsey, 2015). It is how a community understands and conceptualizes language use, with an assignment of values to certain phrases, dialects, and registers (Spolsky, 2013). Oftentimes, language ideologies are the ways through which judgements are made about what kind of language is valued in certain spaces, giving preference and prestige to language varieties that might be associated with non-linguistic positively-associated characteristics and institutions, like social class or level of education.

The third manifestation of language planning efforts is in the form of ***language policy*** itself. Language policies can take form in a variety of ways, from the explicit clarity of an official state language to the implicit assumptions drawn amongst small social groups, policies are the “plans resulting from language-management or planning activities that attempt to modify the practices and ideologies of a community” (Spolsky, 2013). This tripartite division as proposed by Spolsky (of practice, ideology, and policy) is useful in giving a framework the fullest possible reach that language planning efforts can execute, across domains that are clear cut (explicit language policy) or inherently ephemeral (language ideology). However, many academics across the field note that while language planning efforts have certainly made large impacts, they operate in the same spheres as other factors that have considerable impact.

#### *v. Language, Discourse, and Power*

In order to best understand how language policy exerts power and influence across these three facets (practice, ideology, and policy), there must be a link between language and power.

This relation finds itself in the way of shaping discourse. A discursive approach to language planning means seeking to understand the foundations and nature of the conversation surrounding language planning, and that “the discourse of language policy can hegemonically normalize particular ways of thinking, being, and or education within a given language community.” (Ruíz, 1984). Some view discourse as “recontextualised social practice”, meaning that language (discourse), is the recontextualization of social practices within another medium (Pennycook, 2013). Discursive analysis is an inherently ambiguous approach to understanding a given subject, that in application to language planning, provides particular insight insofar as language planning efforts both shape and are actively formed by larger discussions surrounding language.

One of many such approaches to understanding language discourses is Critical Language Planning. In this manner of thinking, language planning has sought to describe the discourse surrounding language use within the context of how it will best impact and inform the interests of the ruling elite class of the time (Tollefson, 2006). In this way, language planning is one of the many ways in which people sought to acquire and maintain power (Cooper, 1989). Critical Language Planning takes a discursive approach to understanding the ways in which societal power is wielded through language, and makes this claim on the basis of language planning generating power through constructing the bounds and hierarchy within the larger public discourse. This control is exerted through limiting and promoting certain areas of language practice, and is often executed by ideological engines like religious and educational institutions (Cooper, 1989).

The wielding of this discursive power can take many shapes across different disciplines, but in the language planning sphere, the most common, and often impactful, way in which power is exerted through policy. This argument understands power as “the ability to influence the behavior of others,” and in this fashion the agents that are creating language policy are responsible for creating the link between the two (Cooper 1989, Johnson 2006). The appearance of this power is evident in what is called in the sociolinguistic tradition, **domains**; or “sociolinguistic contexts definable for any given society by three significant dimensions: the location, the participants and the topic” (Fishman, 1972). Domains serve as the conceptual limits to areas of appropriate language use, meaning that as the domains change, the language ideologies shift accordingly and vice versa. These units of analysis are central in “making the connection between sociological (macro-sociolinguistic) factors and linguistic (micro-sociolinguistic) realizations,” which allows connections to be made from the experience and thoughts of an individual and how they reflect larger societal discursive thinking (Fishman, 1972).

Language planning, then, seeks to shape the discourse and domains surrounding language use through positioning these amorphous topics into something more concrete: policy. The chain of influence from policy to ideology uses discourse and domains as vehicles, or “a textual manifestation of an attempt to control the production of truth & knowledge as discourses” (Ball,

1993). Seeing this link between policy and ideology has allowed many to cut out the middleman of discourse and domains, instead arguing that:

*“State language policies, therefore, have more to do with the regulation of language ideologies than with the regulation of local language practices”*

-Alistair Pennycook, 2013.

It is within the process of making explicit the unarticulated collective assumptions surrounding appropriate language use, informed by language ideologies, where language policies find their footing. Otherwise put, policy is the “agreement reached in and through embodied talk that is conventionally “resemiotised” into alternative and less negotiable semioses such as written summaries, courses of action, or more durable materialities” (Ideema, 2001). The linkage between power, language, and policy is not limited to the top-down distinction of policy makers and the general public, in fact, discursively one must inform the other as well. This dual understanding, the idea that “language is a product of discourse, and practices are relocalized in language” is central in finding richer sociolinguistic meaning through the lens of language policy (Pennycook, 2013). Therefore, language policies, and practices of language planning more generally, are important and insightful gateways into understanding particular language ideologies and practices.

#### *vi. Within the Context of Nation Building*

Language planning can exist on many different scales, one of the most common of which being at the national level. Thanks to the historical associations of the field with nationalist movements in the 1960’s, there are ample examples of language planning being employed across newly formed nations: Israel, Indonesia, and Ireland to name a few. In the formation of these nations, language policy was often used as a part of a political agenda towards unification (Johnson, 2013). In many cases, the newly emerging legal corpus of these nations include specific mention of language policies, which makes “understanding of LPP impossible without an understanding of the law” (Johnson, 2013).

There are multiple ways in which nations have sought to define and influence the language practices within their borders, many of such countries buying into **monolingual reductionism**, or the *one nation, one language* ideal (Piller, 2001). This idea is such that a nation should have one universally shared tongue that marks belonging for both the people and territory of the nation in question. Monolingual reductionism has also served to identify and strengthen discursive unity within newly liberated nations, as one singular language would facilitate intra-state communication and define parameters of the ingroup and outgroup (Piller, 2001).

The use of language as a tool for unity is not ill-advised. In many cases, the association between linguistic behavior and group identity can be so strong that a linguistic system may serve as an informal criterion for ascertaining group membership (Cooper, 1989). In fact, the association of national identity and explicit language policy is one that has worked so effectively that languages have become symbols of their respective national movements. In reference to

Ireland and Israel, the Irish and Hebrew languages “had become proper expressions of nationhood” (Cooper, 1989). Other nations took advantage of the multiple languages spoken within their borders, and gave official status to several languages; seeking to capitalize on opportunity afforded through speaking both internationally used languages and protecting internal shared heritage (Johnson, 2013).

Either way, language ‘forms a cultural system’ that became a defining category of the modern nation state, a criterion often within the bounds of the ‘imagined community’ that ties members of a nation together (Spolsky, 2003; Anderson, 1983). In this way, through the encoding of abstract notions of nationhood, language discourse, and belonging, language policies have become a lens through which governments seek to define their language discourse, and subsequently their national identity.

*vii. So what? How all this jargon has been applied in this paper*

As it has been shown, the field of Language Policy and Planning is vast, and takes many nuanced dimensions that make it difficult to encompass every aspect of information into a singular theory. Therefore, taking what I have discussed above, I have understood Language Planning as it takes shape in Singapore and Indonesia as efforts towards the creation of a national identity through language. This process is well documented throughout the language planning cannon, and is fairly standard as political elites then, and now, believe that shared language gives the modern nation, “historical authenticity and thus, legitimacy” (Liu & Ricks, 2012).

In understanding the effect that language planning has had on the three main domains, as proposed by Johnson, of policy (written law), practice (what people say), and philosophy (what people think about language and their language ideologies), I can understand if and how national identity plays a role in language practices, and use the common discursive threads to inform recommendations for policies more targeted at heritage language protection. This task has also been informed by sorting each fieldsite into one of Ruíz’s language orientations, as it provides more concrete scaffolding within which the amorphous ideas of national identity, values, languages, and prestige operate, and directions for future revision.

*B. Linguistic Ecologies of Field Sites*

I have chosen to investigate Singapore and Indonesia as my areas of focus within this thesis due to the distinct routes that they have taken in regards to how they sought to formalize their language in relation to the formation of the nation-state upon independence from their respective colonizers. In order to understand how themes of language ideology, policy, and national identity interplay with each other, a more long-term historical approach to the formation of the language ecologies is needed, provided through the following background.

*i. Singapore*

Even as a fledgling shipping port on the strait of Malacca, Singapore had been multi-ethnic, and therefore multi-lingual long before inception as a nation. Historical populations included speakers of Malay, Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese, and Tamil, as well as other

languages, detailed in Table 2 (Sim, National Library Board, 2020). Under the imperial rule of the British, English was introduced as the working language of Singapore, and often used as the language of higher education and business with the West (Goh, 2015). In many ways, this savvy with the English language aided greatly in positioning Singapore to become a point of great economic activity between North America and Eastern Asia.

**Table 2:** Most Spoken (local) Languages in Singapore

*Adapted from Cavallaro & Serwe (2010)*

<i>Indian</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Malay</i>	<i>Others</i>
Tamil	Mandarin	Malay	English
Bengali	Hakka	Javanese	Malaccan Creole
Gujarati	Hainanese	Baba Malay (Peranakan)	Singapore Sign Language
Hindi	Min Nan (Hokkien)	Bazaar Malay	
Malayalam	Teochew	Orang Seletar	
Punjabi, Eastern	Yue (Cantonese)	Boyanese	
Sinhala			

Since then, the country of Singapore has continued to grow as a multi-ethnic city-state, and has incorporated four official languages (English, Mandarin, Tamil, and Malay) into national legislation with a mandate for bilingualism of all citizens in its 1965 constitution. These four languages were chosen out of the above array of local languages spoken for their large representation of the four major ethnic groups at time of independence: Chinese, Indian, Malay, and Other. Efforts for bilingualism had a large historical precedent, as the People’s Action Party of Singapore had been pushing for increased bilingual education in Chinese medium schools since its inception in 1959 (Sim, 2020). As the efforts progressed, the study of a second language was made compulsory in primary schools in 1960 and in secondary schools in 1966. While historically most Chinese speaking Singaporeans used smaller Southwestern languages, the 1980’s marked a shift towards mandated Mandarin teaching in Singapore (National Library Board, 2020). This change is representative of a larger perception on language in Singapore, often described as “overall ‘**linguistic instrumentalism**’, with the economic utility of the mother tongue languages increasingly highlighted in national discourse” (Starr, 2023).

#### *ii. Indonesia*

According to several linguistic surveys, the number of established living languages in Indonesia is 710. Of these languages, 704 are indigenous and 6 are non-indigenous. Furthermore,

17 are institutional, 72 are developing, 110 are vigorously used, 431 are in trouble, and 80 are dying. Simply put, there is a lot of linguistic diversity in Indonesia, and with the arising demographic shifts happening at the hands of national development, many languages are at risk of being lost (Ebhard, Simons & Fenning, 2024). However, historically, Indonesia has a linguistic history that reflects an appreciation for its rich diversity.

Despite having no shortage of indigenous languages to choose from, Indonesia's constitution of 1945 mandates that Bahasa Indonesia, an engineered variant of Malay, is to be the national language. Similar to the issue posed in Singapore, the conversation surrounding national language in Indonesia was focused on creating equity amongst ethnic groups. Many members of less populous groups were worried about the dominance of the largest ethnic group, the Javanese, cementing linguistic domination by making Javanese the national language. Thus, when Indonesia freed themselves from Japanese occupation in 1945; they created a new, 'unbiased' language to serve as the national unifier: Bahasa Indonesia (Sulistiyono, Suyata, and Rahayu, 2017). The structure of Bahasa is most closely related to Western Malay, and is spoken everywhere across the archipelago (2017).

According to Dr. Joseph Errington, the invention, dissemination, and continual maintenance of Bahasa has been referred to as 'miraculous', serving as the the only way to facilitate communication between the mutually unintelligible local languages in Indonesia. The current use of Indonesian (another name for Bahasa Indonesia) is such that it is the designated language for governmental, financial, and legal settings. There is also a continued tolerance for, and even push to preserve, the hundreds of other languages found within the country (Errington, 1998).

One such language is Javanese, the second largest language community in Indonesia. An estimated 80 million people speak Javanese, and while that number is far larger than other languages found in Indonesia, papers such as *Can a Language with Millions of Speakers Be Endangered?* Ravindranath and Cohn (2014) suggest that without officialized incorporation of Javanese into state policy, the language is at risk. With this in mind, I have investigated how Javanese –particularly the highest register of *kromo inggil*– is threatened by linguistic policy in Indonesia, and what parts of the current language planning allow, and potentially promote, such erasure as they are expressed through policy, practice, and philosophy.

#### *a. Javanese: Both Hegemonic and at Risk*

Native to the island of Java and boasting a large speaker population, the language Javanese is not the first that comes to mind when considering an endangered language. However, despite the cultural and volume advantage that Javanese has, there are concerns surrounding a linguistic shift away from the language, beginning with its highest register *kromo inggil*.

Javanese's linguistic stronghold is in the "ethnic heartland of Central and East Java" (Errington, 1998). However, the language has grown and spread with the increased centralization of Indonesia as a country, and beyond as "a century of migration has led to the growth of large, distinctively Javanese ethnic communities elsewhere in Indonesia and the world" (Errington, 1998). As an ethnic group in Indonesia, the Javanese are likewise dominant, socially,

economically, and politically. Other ethnic groups' dissatisfaction with the idea of Javanese becoming the language of the nation on independence in 1945 was a key motivating factor in the engineering of Bahasa Indonesia (Ravindranath, 2014). This idea is similarly expressed in the paper studying the development of language policy within Indonesia, where Rahimi writes that, “Indonesia made language policy to refuse hegemonic status of Javanese language which was the major group in Indonesia and chose an aboriginal lingua franca that cannot be a threat to any one ethnic group” (2015). Thus the basis of much of national language policy is with the discursive understanding that Javanese need not be protected, as it is already stable.

On most scales of language endangerment, the sheer number of Javanese speakers places the language well outside the realm of endangered, which is why the slight decline in the use of Javanese in recent years prompts questioning. As noted in recent literature, “Javanese is maintained as the language in most interactions in the village, but city dwellers tend to use Indonesian or are Indonesian dominant bilinguals” (Vander Klok, 2019). Many of Indonesia’s languages have less than 100,000 speakers, and share Javanese’s current problem of lacking official status (Cohn, 2014). As the second most linguistically diverse nation on the planet after Papua New Guinea, there is potential for massive language loss to occur in Indonesia if linguistic shift away from regional language and towards Bahasa and English is not stopped, principal through policy.

### **III. Methodologies**

The central analysis of this study is based on a series of sociolinguistic interviews that were conducted in July and August of 2024. The interviews followed a semi-structured approach, to “allow for direct discussion of the relevant questions with potentially no time constraints” a technique commonly used by other sociolinguistic researchers (Vander Klok, 2019). I met with consultants in Singapore in public, casual settings over the course of roughly 45 minutes to discuss with them their particular language practice, ideologies, and knowledge of language policy. In Indonesia, these same interviews were conducted during the work day. In particular, I was looking to discuss the impacts of this policy on the use of hegemonic minority languages in each of my field sites. In application, this meant talking to English/Mandarin bilinguals in Singapore, and Bahasa Indonesia/Javanese bilinguals in Malang, East Java. Across the 18 interviews I conducted, I also included speakers of non-hegemonic minority languages to understand how the vitality and strength of these hegemonic minority languages is representative of a larger issue.

To achieve my goal of understanding the effect national policies have had on personal linguistic practices and ideologies, I then conducted a Critical Discourse Analysis through an interactional sociolinguistic framework to identify, relate, and compare the ways language was executed and conceptualized within Singapore and Indonesia. Critical Discourse Analysis, or the “identification of the (often covert) ways in which power is enacted through the written and spoken discourse structures of everyday interactions” is an appropriate methodology as I am

interested in the ways the state both sustains and reproduces authority over national identity through language (Holmes, 2013).

Moreover, I am engaging this material within a interactional sociolinguistic framework which understands casual conversational participation as full of “features of discourse that index a range of different kinds of contextual information, such as age or ethnicity, or stances associated with particular social groups” (Holmes, 2013). In this way, I structured my interviews into more an investigation into personal narrative accounts, a strategy that has helped to work against some of the pressures put onto consultants by the very format of interviewing itself, which is “affected by societal differences in the interactional goals of the participants” (Briggs, 1986).

#### *A. Overview of Participants*

I conducted 18 interviews with participants aged 19-24. All of the consultants in this study were college or university students, or had graduated within a year of conducting the interview. All of the participants were nationals of their respective countries, and considered themselves fluent in at least the first national language of their countries (English and Bahasa Indonesia, respectively). I chose university students as my central target for this study due to the key role that young, educated people play in embodying idealized forms of languages.

The intentionality behind this particular demographic of participants is informed by an understanding of how a number of social factors have effect on sociolinguistic work, including speakers’ sex, age, measures of socioeconomic status, and ethnicity (Hoffman, 2013). This understanding of the intersectionality of the sociolinguistic material prompted me to make *judgement samples*, or to target participants that meet predetermined criteria of the study, such as relevant social categories (Hoffman, 2013). To make these judgements, I looked to an understanding of who the most influential members of a language community typically are.

As discussed by Lippi-Green, the **standard language ideology** is a bias towards an abstract concept of language that is perceived to be the most prestigious variety, often the variety spoken by the upper middle class (Johnson, 2013). In their own words, Lippi-Green discusses this standard language ideology as, “the language of the educated, in particular those who have achieved a high level of skill with the written language ” (Lippi-Green, 2013). In both of my field sites, I sought to analyze the linguistic ideologies and practices of university students as they fall squarely into this ideology; meaning that theirs is the speech that other members of the larger speech community, in this case, the cities of Malang and Singapore, will value and in some ways, even unknowingly try to replicate. Using this line of logic, I understood university students to be a potent portion of the larger language community in terms of linguistic influence, and a group that may serve as a diagnostic for the rest.

This methodological approach I’ve taken is supported in other related scholarship, where the upper middle class –particularly women– are noted as leading the shift towards language change in Indonesia (Vander Klok, 2019).



It's also worth mentioning that the nations of Singapore and Indonesia are both relatively young; only having been declared independent nations in 1965 and 1945, respectively. In Singapore, today's university students are largely the children of the first generation of full English medium school Singaporeans, since the nation was fully embodying English Medium education beginning in 1987 (Starr, 2019). Logically, this entails that they are one for the first to have the whole application of the Mother Tongue Policy, as their parents have undergone the same system and reproduced the ideological understandings of language that they learned under the policy within their own households.

### *i. Singapore*

I sourced my consultants for these interviews in Singapore through snowball sampling via the channels made available to me in the Swarthmore Linguistics Department. I worked with professors at Singapore Management University (SMU) and the National University of Singapore (NUS) to distribute the promotional materials detailing the nature of the project, interview participant constraints, and compensation to students across the departments of linguistics and political science (Appendix A). Generally, as noted by participants, both of these schools are considered relatively prestigious in Singapore, with NUS having a particularly strong linguistics focus and SMU providing a larger business background. The perceived prestige of membership to these universities was another factor that aided in considering the particular language practices of their students a part of the prestige dialect, especially in a country where university level studies are fairly commonplace.

Once initial interest began to arise, I invited participants to extend an invitation to participate in the study to their friends within different disciplines at their universities. This was in an effort to diversify the academic points of view represented; as I anticipated a bias towards minority language preservation from students previously knowledgeable of linguistics (or having had the interest in linguistics in the first place). However, I don't believe this educational background had any particular effect.

### *ii. Indonesia*

In Indonesia, I chose my field site of Malang, East Java through a similar rationale. Home to the Universitas Negeri Malang (UNM), the city offered a chance to understand university student's opinions on the relationship between Javanese and Bahasa Indonesia from the perspective of a prestigious regional university. Additionally, Malang has historically spoken Javanese, but is now experiencing an increase in newcomers to town as students relocate from around Indonesia to attend UNM, which has initiated some changes in language use to accommodate for non-Javanese speakers, as was explained to me through my interviews.

Additionally, as I do not have the Bahasa or Java language skills necessary to conduct interviews, I relied heavily upon the support of the BIPA<sup>2</sup> department at UNM. Collaborating with faculty at UNM, I directly sourced and interviewed ten students that were working to teach

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<sup>2</sup> *Bahasa Indonesia untuk Penutur Asing*, or Indonesian language learning for Non-Indonesians

Indonesian over the summer to international visitors. Of these students, eight spoke both Bahasa and Javanese, the other two having knowledge of a different minority language in Indonesia, Maduris. It should be noted that these interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and translated by a certified translator, and that the subsequent analysis is conducted based on my personal observations and the translated content of these interviews.

### *B. On the Nature of Interview Content*

The questions I asked for these interviews were created in such a way that they prompted narrative storytelling and open ended responses. A copy of the initial framework for these questions is available in Appendix B. However, following a semi-structured framework, I did not adhere strictly to these questions and often diverged. I attempted to prompt my consultants down a train of thought that allowed me to see both their intrinsic motivations for their language use and the larger societal pressures or discourses that shaped the sociolinguistic landscape. Many of my participants had first-hand experiences with language policy and focused on the implication of language policy as it appeared in their education. I adjusted my approach and centered much of my analysis around the impact of the Mother Tongue Policy in Singapore and the National Education Act of 2003 in Indonesia, which I have discussed in their respective analysis sections.

Prior to the beginning of the interviews, participants were given a consent form in English (and translated into Bahasa, for participants in Malang) and made aware of their rights as participants. Upon completion of the interview, they were also given the opportunity to stop being a part of the study at any time, a right they continue to have.

### *C. Note on Reflexivity*

As is unavoidable with the very nature of interviews as a methodology, my identity and positionality as a researcher probably had an impact on the nature and content of the interviews.

Firstly, I am a white woman with no previous first-hand knowledge of the areas of Singapore or Indonesia. While Singapore has always been a cradle for multiple ethnicities, it was clear that I wasn't local. It's possible that the clarity of my outsidership—from my American English to my inability to accurately order the coffee I wanted—had an effect on the way people thought to interact with me as a researcher. I suspect that these effects would be such that participants looked to be more general with their thinking so as to simplify the concepts at hand. I attempted to quell these potential anxieties about my lack of cultural savvy through extensive prior research and by introducing myself as an academic first and foremost. In this way, I believe I was fairly successful in achieving a balance between presenting myself as a scholar and as a member of the community outgroup.

Secondly, I believe my relative closeness in age to my interview participants was to my advantage in terms of breaking the potentially frosty barrier between researcher and participant. As an undergraduate student myself, I was quick to introduce the concepts of informality and friendliness as depicted in the two distinct cultures. In Singapore, this meant I always offered to purchase a coffee, tea or snack for my participant at the coffeehouses the interviews were conducted at, and prefaced the recorded portion of the interview with some background on who I

was and what I was interested in, or a light hearted anecdote about how much I was enjoying local food. In Indonesia, this effort to engage as a peer took shape as I learned some basic Bahasa to be able to introduce myself, which effectively worked to set expectations for academic language use low. I offered snacks and gifts (with my right hand, as is customary under Islamic tradition) and always accepted whatever was offered to me prior to the start of the recorded section of the interview.

I believe this approach was well received as many of my participants expressed strong interests in knowing more about me, my travels, and my research after the interview had concluded. In establishing a more peer-to-peer relationship, I attempted to limit the societal, professional, and cultural differences that can have an impact on the data derived from sociolinguistic interviews (Briggs, 1986). However, to posit that I, or any such academic, is capable of existing outside the confines of the colonial ties between academia and colonization, is unimaginable and not reflective of my experience or data.

#### **IV. Interviews & Analysis**

For the bulk of my investigation I have created connections between the content shared in my interviews by consultants and with established findings in the literature and policy. In avoiding presenting my ‘raw data’, which are entire transcripts of conversations, I have presented my findings thematically and organized them within the tripartite division proposed by Johnson in the above Background section (policy, planning, and ideology, or as I have written, philosophy). As such, important or particularly salient quotes are shared within their appropriate themes, and much of what was discussed has been paraphrased. In this way, the presentation of my data and the creation of my analysis are discursively intertwined. To see a sample of unedited transcripts of my interviews conducted, please refer to Appendix C.

##### *A. Singapore*

Now in the third generation of Mother Tongue policy students, research on the linguistic practice of Singaporeans reflects a shift away from household use of Mother Tongue languages towards the use of English as a household language across different ethnic groups (Wee, 2003). Across the board, Mandarin is seen as the dominant Mother Tongue language group, however this has not protected the language from feeling the effects of this language shift (Cooper, 1989). Many Mandarin students have reported feeling dissatisfied or anxious about their Mandarin proficiency, which has unfolded into a decrease in use across younger speakers in particular (Starr, 2019). This is particularly concerning when considering the position of strength that Mandarin has as an L2 in Singapore (as shown in Table 3 below). In interpreting this table, it's important to understand that while Malay and Tamil appear to be doing well as Mother Tongue languages, their ethnic speaker populations only make up around 20% of the total population of Singapore (CIA Factbook, 2024). In this way, should the current Mother Tongue Policy be insufficient in protecting the status and use of Mandarin, then one could infer that languages with a smaller speaker population would feel an amplification of these negative effects.

**Table 3:** Language most frequently spoken at home (figures in %)

*Adapted from Wee (2003)*

Chinese Homes	English (23.9), Mandarin (45.1), Chinese dialects (30.7)
Malay Homes	English (7.9), Malay (91.6)
Indian Homes	English (35.6), Tamil (42.9)
Others	English (68.5)

## **Policy**

Many scholars in the field of Language Planning and Policy claim that any young nation can't ignore the question of language for long, and in this case, Singapore acts as a promising case study (Rincento, 2006). As previously established (see Background section), Singapore was a multi-lingual space far before it was formalized as an independent nation. Census data show that in the 1950's and 60's, there were more than thirty three Mother Tongues spoken on the island, and through the intentional shaping and enacting of policies –not limited to those discussed below– Singapore was successful in creating a largely multilingual identity for itself surrounding language use (Hakeck & Slaughter, 2015).

The following language policies were the largest efforts by the Singaporean government to influence language use, the impact and discursive powers of which are the subject of my investigation. They are:

- Official Languages and National Language
- National Bilingual Policy
- Speak Good English Movement
- Speak Mandarin Campaign

### *i. Official Languages and National Language*

As is stipulated in article 153 of the Constitution of Singapore, Malay is considered the national language, a move largely considered to be a symbolic nod towards the nation's roots in the Malaysian peninsula to which it once belonged (Dixon, 2011). The other three languages: English, Tamil, and Mandarin share status with Malay as official languages, and English is the language of instruction. Often referred to as the 'first among equals', English serves as the principal language in use in Singapore (Siemund & Li, 2020).

### *ii. National Bilingual Policy*

Linguistic instrumentalism, as discussed in the Background section, developed in Singapore during the 1970's and 80's, when the Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew pushed for English –the historical lingua franca between ethnic groups– as the language of educational instruction nationally. The motivations for this move were two fold: the promotion of internal

linguistic equity (as every ethnic group had to learn a new language) as well as the opportunity for external economic growth, particularly in collaboration with the West (Starr, 2023). English in Singapore had at this point existed in many iterations, but many had reservations about it serving as the national language and medium of instruction. Dr. Rebecca Starr describes the contestation over this policy that:

*“For postcolonial societies with a history of colonial-language-medium education, for example, the decision to introduce education in indigenous languages (often referred to as ‘mother tongue education in this context’) gives rise to challenges relating to inclusion and equity in terms of the resources and institutional support granted to the languages spoken by particular sub-communities.”*  
-Starr, 2023

In this way, both the Mother Tongue Policy was the Singaporean way of meeting these two values in the middle. An economic progression could be achieved through the use of English in the public sphere, while cultural heritage was simultaneously maintained in the home.

### *iii. Speak Good English Movement; established 1979*

Singaporean policy didn’t stop at the inclusion of English as a national language, but also further outlined *how* Singapore was going to speak English. Due to the high linguistic diversity, Singapore’s variety of English became a distinct variety, often seen as a global English in the ‘outer circle’, meaning that the language holds cultural value, but isn’t seen as native to the place (Kachru, 1985). Seeing as some of the motivations of maintaining the status of English after declaring independence was for economic gain, Singaporean administration was concerned that the distinct variety of Singaporean English (or, Singlish as it later came to be known) was affecting the ability of Singaporeans to do business with the West (Pennycook, 2013). With this in mind, the Speak Good English Movement was launched on April 29 2000 to promote the use of ‘grammatically correct English’, as defined by British Standards of grammaticality (Sim, 2020).

While in the current day, English is the home language for many Singaporean families, the Singaporean variety of English is still perceived as less correct or prestigious as Western varieties (Starr, 2023). The Speak Good English Movement was successful in increasing the knowledge of British English, however it was met with significant distaste from the local populations, according to my consultants. They cited classist and colonialist ideologies as the root of the Movement, a topic that I have discussed further in the philosophies section within this analysis. On the topic of the issues with the Speak Good English movement, Robbie Goh writes that:

*“Singlish had long played a role in post-independence (post-1965) and modernising Singapore as a distinguishing mark between the growing Anglophone-educated professional elite, and the less well-educated class more closely tied to vernacular social life and languages.”*

It is also worth noting that since the end of the Speak Good English Movement, the Singaporean government has had shifting stances on Singlish, including celebrations of the dialect on its national day in 2016. However, this governmental support didn't last forever, nor was all-encompassing, as discussed in my interviews collected, and there are continual debates around the grammaticality, 'brokenness' and identity politics of Singlish.

#### *iv. The Mother Tongue Policy*

The larger shift towards bilingualism was made concrete with the mandatory addition of a 'Mother Tongue' course to be taken by all Singaporeans, guaranteeing a continued proficiency and cultural tie to the languages of Mandarin, Tamil, & Malay. Historically, many language policy and planning theorists have seen Mother Tongue education as an intrinsic right (Ruíz, 1984). At the time of the incorporation of English into the public sphere, many were worried that the cultural heritage of Singapore would be lost, with the local languages of Chinese dialects, Malay, and Tamil being the first parts of heritage to go.

To combat this fear, the Singaporean government set up the Mother Tongue (MT) Policy, where students would begin learning their ethnically-assigned Mother Tongue during primary school as a subject. This was made with the understanding that the majority of student's Mother Tongue education would take place within the home, not the school. This distinction is made below:

*"Students will learn their Mother Tongue: Mandarin for the Chinese, Malay for the Malay community and Tamil for the Indians. English was to become Singapore's working language, while the mother tongue would serve to strengthen an individual's values and sense of cultural belonging."*

-Cheryl Sim, National Library Board of Singapore, 2020

The effectiveness of this policy has been investigated previously, and many find that while students are interested in learning heritage languages, they remain dissatisfied with the level of competence that they receive through the Mother Tongue Policy (Starr, 2023). It is also possible today that students who do not identify with one of the three MT's offered may substitute the course with certain European or Asian Languages, however these courses are not offered in schools, leaving it to be a task of the individual (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2020).

Many scholars have pointed out the contradictions of limited language practices within the MT policy, especially considering the continued influx of immigration into Singapore (Goh, 2015). Put simply, "despite the rhetoric that students must learn their own MT to connect with their heritage, those of minority heritage have nonetheless been required to study Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil in school" (Starr & Hiramoto, 2019).

This tension and contradiction in the policy, as briefly stated here, has been expanded upon in the philosophies section, as it was largely influential in the interviews I conducted with Singaporean students.

*v. Speak Mandarin Campaign; established 2000*

Language policy was not limited to English. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew also implemented the Speak Mandarin Campaign, or SMC, from the years 1966-1979 (Yeen & Yak, Singapore National Library Board, 2020). The goal of this movement was to promote the use of Mandarin Chinese and not ‘dialects’ (Teochew, Hakka, and so on), the motivations lying in the future usefulness of Mandarin and facilitation of inter-ethnic communication in Singapore (Starr, 2023).

The methods of this campaign were to engage the public in as many forms of Mandarin language learning as possible, including a free phone line with language practice and two cassette tape recordings of lessons (Yeen & Yak, 2020). It is from this campaign’s great success –as there was almost a 70% decrease in the use of Chinese dialects –that Mandarin came to be a part of the Singaporean linguistic ecology, despite being a ‘somewhat novel conglomeration of historically ethno-linguistically distinct populations’; with a ‘limited history’ in the country (Starr & Hiramoto, 2019).

## **Practice**

A main goal in collecting these surveys was to understand then practiced speech of young Singaporeans, in relation to how it has been impacted by national language policies. By investigating how young, educated Singaporeans speak, I can capitalize on the use of their prestige dialect to make inferences about how the larger group of Singaporean’s may be shaping this language use as well. In this section, I take a qualitative approach to understanding what languages my consultants speak and how they make the choice of what language to speak. Coupled with data synthesis from supporting literature and the Singaporean census, I have given a large scale overview quantitatively that is given more nuance through my interviews. Seeing the goal of language policy is most directly to create discursive spaces where languages are deemed appropriate, and to encourage the use of those languages within those created discursive spheres, how Singaporeans account for their own language practices provides insight into the effectiveness of Language Planning efforts. This is all to fit within the tri-dimensional model of Language Planning suggested by Spolsky (2003).

*i. Role of Mandarin Chinese*

In my interviews conducted, I was interested in the levels of practice and philosophy surrounding the speaking of Mandarin Chinese by Singaporeans. As one of the four official languages of the nation, Mandarin is taught widely in schools as an optional language, and is the most common Mother Tongue taken amongst students. Other studies surrounding the MT policy have found that there is a commonly held belief that Mandarin is the preferred Mother Tongue, and that as an ethnically Chinese majority country, Singapore sometimes has Mandarin as the

dominant Mother Tongue, while the four (English, Malay, Tamil, and Mandarin) are supposed to be equal (Starr, 2019).

#### a. From Mandarin MT Speakers

In understanding the relative effectiveness of language policy in Singapore, one must first define the impact of the policies within the limitations of their own goals. Within the publicly announced goals of the Mother Tongue initiatives in Singapore, the point of English and Mandarin/Malay/Tamil multi-lingualism was to allow for unity on the national scale through English, and heritage preservation on the smaller community level. Based upon the interviews I conducted with four Mandarin MT speakers, this has not been their experience.

Many Chinese Singaporeans don't come from regions in China where Mandarin is the most commonly used Chinese variety. As discussed in the above Policy portion, a long stream of bureaucratic campaigns made Mandarin the Chinese dialect that is used across Singapore, the more accurate heritage dialects of Teochew & Hokkien being pushed out under the Speak Mandarin Campaign (Hajek, 2014).

This bureaucratic shift was felt by many of my consultants, one of whom describes her use of Mandarin as limited to “more casual settings, especially intimate settings with my family. I feel like I would subconsciously use Chinese with them. Because it feels like a very home language to me” This particular consultant has parents that speak to each other in Teochew—which my consultant says she does not speak—and the family speaks together in Mandarin.

Similarly, another consultant describes her exposure to Mandarin as a byproduct of the educational system in Singapore, not as a bridge to her cultural heritage, “I would say that my parents actually didn't really speak much Mandarin to me when I was growing up. So whatever knowledge I have of it was either from my grandparents, or from something I learned in school”.

In extreme cases, it seems that the MT policy was a failure in providing language skills to ethnically Chinese students, especially those who do not speak it at home. One consultant described her language use as one dimensional, “frankly speaking, I just consider myself monolingual, actually. Because I just don't feel confident speaking Mandarin at all.”

Mandarin as a tool for connection with other, older generations that hadn't learned English under their education, was another prominent theme. A different consultant added that this use of Mandarin as a generational bridge was one of the most important ways that she can connect with elders in the Chinese Singaporean community, “[The importance of speaking Mandarin is felt] especially by my friends that are from families with multiple generations who speak to their grandparents in Mandarin or their grandparents.” My fourth Mandarin language MT consultant enhanced this sentiment, although was more unsure in her overall ability to communicate in Mandarin, saying that, “sometimes I speak Chinese as well, but that's only with maybe grandparents and maybe relatives sometimes. Chinese is still quite important because it's how I communicate with my grandparents, but for work and school, English mostly.”

Outside of the direct family sphere, many consultants noted that there was an advantage to speaking Mandarin in other sectors of life in Singapore. One such instance that came up many



times was the workplace, with the particular attention paid by transactions that take place at Hawker stalls (open-air food courts) around the city. One consultant described it as essential, enthusiastically letting me know that “for Chinese, in Singapore, it's very useful if you want to order food. So if you don't speak Chinese, it can be a little bit hard to order food if you go to the coffee shops and all. And I love going there, so it's best to order in Chinese just for the ease of getting your order right.” Her sentiments were echoed by another consultant, who described that “Chinese is a lot more prominent in their [Singaporeans] lives, especially since even outside of your house, it's more common to speak in Chinese and Mandarin when you're ordering food, or randomly speaking to others.” Often, in the conversations surrounding national identity and language use, these same hawker centers were mentioned as distinctly Singaporean practices, where Singlish was the dominant language. One consultant said that outside of learning it in school, she “usually only use[s] Mandarin, at least for me, when I'm ordering from hawker stores”, This tie-in for Mandarin in the larger community of Chinese Singaporeans is another manifestation of the social domains that this language policy has influenced. While not the ‘home level’ that the MT education policy sought to influence, there has certainly been a solidification of Chinese-speaking social domains in modern-day Singapore through the MT policy.

One such domain also noted was the workplace. When asking about the existence of potential prioritization of one MT over another, many Mandarin MT consultants noted that Mandarin was used in the workplace, oftentimes more than anticipated. One consultant shared that many of her classmates thought MT education was a bit of a chore until, “then we go to the workplace and then we realize we kind of *need* the Mandarin, especially when we're talking to the older clients.” This is one such anecdote that highlights a much larger discussion about the role of Mandarin in the Singaporean workplace. In regards to the Speak Mandarin Campaign of the 1970's, many academics attribute the intentional shift from the more historically accurate Chinese dialects towards the official language of Mao's China in the 20th century (Bokhorst-Heng & Silver, 2017). Seeking to be speaking the same language *literally* and *economically*, Lee Kuan Yew made a strategic move to secure Singapore's place as a business partner to the then up-and-coming Chinese markets. Another consultant highlighted this experience when she said that not only was Mandarin useful in performing her job duties, but in connecting with co-workers.

*“But from my experience in the places that I work, Chinese is spoken quite a bit, even if English is the main working language. So maybe because there were many Chinese staff there. So when I was there, they would see that I'm Chinese also. So they would be like, can you speak Chinese? So they would switch from English to Chinese sometimes. But if there are staff who don't speak Chinese, then sometimes I feel like they would be left out of certain conversations.”*

This understanding of the far-reaching value of Mandarin fluency was also expressed by a different consultant, but this time beyond the walls of the workplace. She explained that

“there's definitely just a lot more attention on Mandarin. But I think it's not just the language, it's like the people, the culture in general. You basically cover your bases by knowing both English and Mandarin.”

Above, this speaker is revealing not only a prioritization of Chinese language and culture within the cultural fabric of Singapore, but is also revealing a discursive justification for why that is happening, by having one's ‘bases covered’ through the Mother Tongue Policy. I have further analyzed into what I posit are some driving forces for these beliefs as they connect to national identity and cultural values in later portions of this thesis.

As demonstrated, we can understand that there are major arguments to be made in the defense of the MT Policy for creating and maintaining cultural communities in Singapore when it comes to preserving the use of Chinese in the personal sphere. However, the policy has been enacted in a way that is distinct from the way it has been articulated, with most Chinese MT students speaking limited Mandarin at home, or only in special circumstances. It should also be noted that three of my four Mandarin MT consultants shared that they either attended Chinese SAP Schools<sup>3</sup> or completed their higher-level subject testing (O-levels, in Singapore) in Mandarin; and are therefore belonging to a group of Mandarin speakers that have fared far above the average level of exposure and rigor of the standard MT education.

However, many of my consultants also expressed doubts in their Mandarin speaking abilities, a phenomenon well-documented in similar studies (Starr & Hiramoto, 2019). Informed in part by this internalized belief that their level of Mandarin is imperfect and somehow lacking, many of my consultants shared that they speak to their families and friends in English or Singlish.

#### a. From Non-Mandarin MT Speakers

The three non-mandarin MT consultants had differing opinions about the value of Mandarin in Singapore. Having studied the other two Mother Tongues offered (Tamil and Malay), they offered an interesting middle-man perspective about the effectiveness of the Mother Tongue Policy of preserving and creating Mandarin-speaking spheres in particular.

When prompted to speak about the potential existence of prioritization of one mother tongue over another, all three of the Non-Mandarin MT consultants offered that there is a common dominance of the Mandarin language in the workplace. One consultant shared that “Chinese is seen as more prestigious and or functional... especially within business settings,” explaining that, in her personal experience, “in the workplace sometimes they will just speak in Mandarin, and then if you don't understand you just, like, miss out on that.”

Reflected here, we can see that there is an external perception of the strength of Mandarin speaking communities. This same consultant theorized that “among my Chinese friends, I think they definitely have stronger Mother Tongue views, especially since they can, like when they speak, it's more likely to just come out natural” this phenomena, she attributes to the increased use of Mandarin in student's home lives as compared to Tamil and Malay Mother Tongue

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<sup>3</sup> Special Assistance Program, or Chinese Immersion programs for advanced MT students

students. This strength of the Mother Tongue speaking community was sometimes described as to the exclusion and detriment of non-Mandarin Singaporeans. To illustrate this point, a Tamil-MT student shared a story of a friend of hers, who, despite not being ethnically Chinese, petitioned to take Mandarin as a Mother Tongue.

*“So I think a lot of people would consider Chinese the best one, the best language to learn. I have a friend, and there's no Chinese in him, but his parents argued for him to study Mandarin in school. So I think that's the value and the strength of the Chinese language in itself. And everyone kind of wants to tap into the China market. They don't want to be left out economically when everyone's pivoting to China.”*

This anecdote taps into large discourses about the ways in which Mandarin in particular as a language has exterior, concrete applications and advantages outside the realm of cultural preservation to an extent that Malay and Tamil do not enjoy. This sentiment for the inflated sphere of application of Mandarin is also expressed from another consultant, where she describes the line of thinking about Mandarin use in the workplace when compared to other Mother Tongues.

*“But you know, sometimes when you see a job application, for example, it would be like, oh, only apply if you also speak Chinese or if you speak dialect, things like that. And it's like, you know, they would say it's not discriminatory because like, oh, you know, some of the people that we work with only speak Chinese and it's like, oh, but like, I thought we're supposed to be multicultural, multilingual, I thought we're supposed to all speak English. What happened to all of that? Yeah, right. I mean, I think that, you know, how do I put this, I guess in like our corporate environments, maybe it's less so a professional problem and more so like a networking kind of issue.”*

Therefore, it's easy to see that there is a distance between how Mandarin MT speakers conceptualize their own realms of practices when compared to the exterior perception of the same community from other Mother Tongue speakers. A similarity between the perception of the two was the use of Chinese language when ordering food, particularly at Hawker stands. One consultant shared that, in comparison to Malay or Tamil, Mandarin has ‘real use’ outside the home.

It's possible that this outside perception of the strength of the Mandarin language community is in part influenced by the Non-Mandarin MT students' understanding of the domains of practice of their own MT's. On the status of Tamil, for example, a similar tension between what is taught and what is often spoken at home was shared, with many newer arrived families from India speak different languages, namely Hindi, Gujarati, and Malayalam. (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2020) Where the policy mandated unification of Chinese

languages into Mandarin has appeared to strengthen the language community, this has not been the same in the case of Tamil, where one consultant shared a story of being approached by an elderly Indian woman on the street, looking for directions. For this consultant, her home language is Malayalam, and she was unable to help this woman with the level of Tamil that she had acquired in school. On the experience, she comments that she never planned on actually using the language she was learning, and that instead she learned it “because it's one of the four national languages. But I don't speak Tamil at home, so I have honestly lost the language.”

A different Tamil MT student offered that while she uses the language in her home, she doesn't use it with all of her family members. She explains that her sister lacks fluency, “She's a bit younger than me and she just doesn't speak Tamil at all. Like outside of school, like in Tamil class, and that's it. So even if we speak to her in Tamil, she won't reply in Tamil, she'll reply in English, so we've all switched to English.” This particular consultant attributed the difference in the levels of usage between her and her sister to the rise of social media and English content on the internet, a theme I have touched on in more depth later.

## *ii. Role of English*

As has been previously discussed, the working language of Singapore is English. A remnant of the island's time as a British colony, English is now the language used in the public domain, the language of education, business, community gatherings and so on. However, as we seek to understand the ways in which minority languages are threatened in Singapore, as prompted by national policy, we can center our venture in the way that Singaporeans conceptualize and make sense of their English use.

All of my consultants marked English and their first language, the one that they felt most comfortable using in everyday life. English is not only the language that the interviews were conducted in, but my consultants shared that they used English as a means to speak to people across different ethnic and national backgrounds, as was the original inspiration for picking it as the national language. One consultant told an illuminating anecdote about using English with her friends from a very young age, “all my friends spoke English and all my friends were Chinese, Eurasian, and a few Malay friends.”

The use of English is pervasive and dominant online as well, with the majority of my consultants referencing the use of social media as an influential factor of their language use. In contrast with the lack of social media engagement with Mandarin content shared by one consultant, “definitely I don't consume as much as Chinese media or, like... I don't consume Chinese media very much.” Many consultants shared that anglophone media was the norm in Singapore. One consultant even informed me of a trend for Singaporeans who are aspiring influencers to adopt a ‘Western accent’ to make their language—and therefore content—more palatable to Western audiences. This shift towards a more unilateral use of English was corroborated with anecdotes from several of my consultants, particularly in reference to current younger generations. Many of the younger cousins, sisters, and friends of those interviewed were reported to only speak in English, despite having learned Mother Tongue languages and living in households where English isn't the first language.

In short, the practice of the use of English in Singapore is largely consistent with prior research, perhaps even underscoring the shift away from Mother Tongue languages as discussed with consultants (Starr, 2023). The larger threads of discussion through my interviews in Singapore fully support the consensus of previous research that “In effect, over time, Singaporeans will be even more English dominant in tandem with the rise and spread of English worldwide.” (Hajek, 2014). Given the legal power of English, the dominance of English communities of practice, and the linguistic hegemony that English experience in the reported actions of Singaporeans, it garners its title as both the written and practiced official language.

## **Philosophy**

Another pursuit of this investigation was to understand the influence of language policy on given language ideologies of my consultants, particularly in relation to how effective the Mother Tongue Policy is on influencing not only the way people speak, but how they think about languages in the abstract. In understanding the assumptions made about the usefulness, prestige, or appropriateness of languages in Singapore, we can look to see how these connections can be used to shape further policy towards new goals, like smaller language protection. This component is the third piece in the model proposed by Johnson, and draws heavily from Lippi-Green’s understanding of language ideologies.

### *i. Thoughts on MT Policy*

The general discourse surrounding the Mother Tongue Policy in Singapore is a celebration of the way that the multi-lingual approach can be enacted at a large scale, and to great effect (Hajek, 2014). However, the internal attitudes of those actually taking part in the practiced policy are not so celebratory. Many of the common themes in my discussions surrounding the Mother Tongue Policy in Singapore take complementary, but distinct stances: the origins of the MT policy, the importance of multilingualism in Singapore, and the fabrication of a shared Singaporean identity. These conversations surrounding students’ lived experiences within this language policy illuminate an understanding as to how we can best set up other policies for success, even potentially incorporating some of the ideas shared for the policy’s improvement, offered in the Discussion section.

When asked about what they thought the origins and goal of the Mother Tongue Policy was, many of my consultants were quick to point out the difference between the two. In terms of the policy’s origins, the narrative reflects much of what is offered by the government, “here they want everybody to be able to speak one common language, English, but also kind of have some of their own language and stuff like that, so you don't forget your roots” another consultant offered that it has to do with the early challenges of such diverse demography, “I think it's probably because Singapore is very multiracial. It has always been. So I think people in Singapore at that time, wanted to retain their roots by having fluency in their Mother Tongues.” When asked about the selection of English as the working language, thoughts somewhat reflected the official narrative of the English language serving as the ‘neutral’ language between ethnic groups (Singapore Ministry of Culture, 2023). One consultant offered, “the government

was pushing for English as the common working language. So I'm guessing that in order to make sure that everyone could still retain their roots as they wanted, and at the same time, the government could push Singapore to be an English-first country.”

The divergence from the government narrative comes in the motivations for English specifically. Where much of the state literature attributes the selection of English to its pre-existence in the city and state and adherence to no single ethnic group, many of my consultants shared that they attributed the choice of English to the fact that it would be far more of a strategic move for the larger Singaporean economy. For example, one consultant shared that they, “think maybe they [the government] thought it would bring more opportunities to Singapore.” This economic hegemony of the English language cited in every interview for the rationale behind the selection of English, another consultant sharing that “that the government intended for students to be able to learn a language that is beneficial for them economically, which is English, but also be able to learn a language that so-called connects to their culture.”

Economic access and savvy were consistently signaled as the main motivators for the introduction of English. This was the beginning of a much larger thread revealed through my interviews about the centering of effectiveness, efficiency, and pragmatism, not only in Singaporean language use, but in the Singaporean national identity.

Many of my consultants were quick to praise the MT system, claiming that despite the academic rigor in learning two languages concurrently, they were overall grateful for the opportunity to connect with their cultural heritage in a way that would have otherwise been impossible. One consultant stated that, “I feel like I place some emphasis on my cultural background, even though I know that I'm not able to speak my dialect [Teochew]”, and that “I guess like that policy was kind of like one way of doing it to like help people like keep in touch with their roots.” Interestingly, both of these quotes were taken from interviewees that did not study their actual Mother Tongue (Teochew and Malayalam, respectively) through their MT classes offered in school. So, yes, my data supports the claim that the Mother Tongue policy is effective –and it is discursively conceptualized as effective– in connecting students to a larger Singaporean identity, but not necessarily their own cultural ‘roots’.

In these discussions there is a discursive tension illuminated between the imagined Singaporean national identity –as manifested through the Mother Tongue Policy and the broader CIMO (Chinese, Indian, Malay, Other) categorization– and the actual ethnic identities of Singaporeans. Bolstering this divide, I posit, is the shared assumption that English as a language carries little cultural significance in terms of fostering a shared Singaporean identity.

The fabrication of a larger shared identity in Singapore through the Mother Tongue Policy operates not necessarily through the maintenance of its original speaker communities as was designed. Instead, many of my consultants theorized that it was the struggle of learning a MT that cemented feelings of camaraderie amongst their peers. They shared that, “it creates a shared experience, because if I talk to someone who even learned Malay as the Mother Tongue school or Tamil, and then we're all like, oh yeah, we've had such a hard time learning two languages.” Some posited that even though this hurdle of learning two languages simultaneously

was something that defined their belonging as a Singaporean, “in the education system, it's always been ingrained as like, [bilingualism is] something that's always been Singaporean and always been important.” and, “a unified sort of thing to be like, yeah, everybody speaks two languages”. In this aspect of communal struggle and experience, the MT policy has been effective in the synthesis of a national identity.

There have also been some aspects of retention and strengthening of the smaller speaking MT communities of Malay and Tamil through the MT system. The only Malay MT consultant I spoke to shared her own experience finding access into the Malay community primarily through her Malay teacher, “but I think a common thread throughout the three schools that I was in is that the number of people speaking Malay was very small. So it was a very close-knit class. It was unique and kind of like, because we're so close-knit, it's kind of like one of the defining things of my education journey.”

She shared how, in contrast to her Mandarin speaking friends who often shared their Mandarin teacher with thirty other students, she had more one-on-one attention from her Malay instructors. This allowed her to more intensively study the language, asking questions and writing extra assignments to gain higher fluency in a way that wouldn't have been logistically possible in a more crowded classroom. Thus, there is certainly an element of solidification of an internal network, the Malay community, that is fomented under the Mother Tongue Policy, even if distinct from the original communities of practice imagined by the policy.

Despite overall concerns about difficulty, long-term impact, and equal application of all languages, there was an overwhelming consensus that multi-lingualism, maintenance, and promotion of heritage language learning is central to the Singaporean identity and is something to be protected. Each of my consultants expressed this opinion to varying extents, even expressing that this value extends past the student population, “I think a lot of people still consider that bilingualism, or at least the ability to move between different languages, is part of the Singaporean identity.” Another consultant shared this opinion, “just because like in Singapore, very multicultural isn't that? In a way, it's also like a unified sort of thing to be like, everybody speaks two languages, you know?” In these examples, which are representative of the larger database, there is an emerging discourse that solidifies the concept of a Singaporean people not as one particular speech community surrounding the national language (i.e. English) but rather a community of multilingual individuals. One consultant offered a tiered interpretation of this same idea, wherein “similarly it's kind of so many different languages or maybe like three main languages clustered under the big English language.” Here, the language hegemony of English is reflected as the ‘umbrella’, and the potential for any given Singaporean to speak either Tamil, Malay, or Mandarin is the dimension of the relation that marks belonging to the larger Singaporean speech community.

There is also a larger understanding that language is a key way to promote growth within the smaller language communities. In this way, language, culture, and identity are strongly discursively linked. This idea comes from thoughts given by consultants such as “when you hear about like Chinese languages being homogenized, and then you have to speak like Mandarin

only, it like, it is sad to see, because it's like losing a part of heritage” and that without the Mother Tongue Policy, “students really wouldn't be motivated to learn their Mother Tongue or connect with their cultural heritage.” Many went on to share that should the Mother Tongue Policy not exist, (implying a hypothetical future wherein everyone speaks English, and English alone) it would be detrimental for Singaporean society at large, explaining that “if I could only speak one language, then I think there will be erosion of cultural heritage.” A different consultant shared a more extreme picture, “[If] we can't speak our languages our Mother Tongues as well as we should, it'll play a big role in feeling like we're no longer caring about our culture. We're just moving towards hyper-capitalism”

Therefore, the above synthesis indicates that the Mother Tongue Policy has been successful in generating an understanding of importance surrounding language as an invaluable cultural relic, and in preserving the original speaker communities in turn. However, there was a common undercurrent that this narrative isn't wholly genuine. In striving to find and foment a national identity for a relatively young country (Singapore only gained full independence from other nations in 1965), the Mother Tongue Policy has also seemed to create a discursive distance between the larger imagined Singaporean national identity that is envisioned through policy and the internal definitions of community informed by its citizens, particularly surrounding language use.

This sentiment is best reflected in instances where students study languages under the Mother Tongue Policy that don't align with their own familial or heritage language practices. In one such example, for kids who learn a Mother Tongue in school that's not the one that they actually hear at home, one consultant shared, “it might be really hard for them to learn and it might create some sort of identity crisis in that sense for them.” This concern reflects that the very act of learning a second language –in a system that was designed for you to be speaking said second language at home– can be disheartening when not given adequate support. The same consultant highlighted this point in saying, “actually, the policy can have that harmful effect in the sense that it doesn't encourage them to embrace *their* culture. It just makes them very turned off from the whole thing.” In a wider lens, this more intentional disconnect from the pseudo-alignment of heritage cultures that many students face is also manifested in the switching of MT languages. In one such given example, a student of mixed Indian and Chinese heritage chose to take Mandarin instead of Tamil, despite more personally aligning with the Tamil community. In this sense, the system often fails to connect students with larger conceived notions of heritage, and in doing so prompts students to look at language learning as an opportunity for more career oriented success.

### *ii. English, a powerful tool but cultural void*

As evidenced through the policy decisions made in Singapore, English became the main language of operation due to its ability to both unite the Singaporean people under one tongue (that of their previous British colonizers) and to engage in trade internationally. In the long term, this has meant that English always has, and in many ways continues to be, associated not with the Singaporeans who speak it but rather with the cultural hegemony of the West. As described



by Wee, “the Government also fears that exposure to English can lead Singaporeans to become ‘Westernised’ or ‘decadent’ (2003). In this way, the increasing sphere of English use within home settings in Singapore signals the realization of this threat, especially when paired with the identification distancing that takes place within Singaporean’s conceptions of their own English use. Despite being the language of choice, English continues to be discursively aligned with the West in Singapore, seen as a language that carries no cultural value for Singaporeans.

#### a. Internally

An unforeseen, but prevalent theme of discussion in interviews with consultants was the implicit distancing of the English-speaking realities of Singaporean life and the idea of Singaporean culture and heritage. When discussing the dominant use of English in Singapore, the language is discussed as the contrast to the more culturally valued Mother Tongues. By this, I mean that despite the fact that English is the dominant language in Singapore, the language is not associated with the Singaporean identity to an extent that mirrors the entrenched association of Mandarin in the Chinese community, Tamil in the Indian community, and Malay in the Malaysian communities of the country.

For example, one consultant shared, “The Singaporean identity was kind of constructed with the narrative that ‘oh it’s like so many different races coming together to unite under one big Singapore identity,” and she later compared the same categorization of the different ethnicities in Singapore under one label to the different Mother Tongue languages falling under the English umbrella. On the note of the continued and worsening decline of non-academic use of Mother Tongue languages, many consultants stressed that this would be detrimental as a loss of culture. One consultant explained it to me as “kind of losing the Singapore identity in the sense that you’re no longer embracing your ethnic views”. Made visible here is the contradiction between the larger language ideologies and practices within the imagined Singaporean community, and the daily practices of Singaporeans. If most Singaporeans are now, as my interviews indicate, speaking English as their primary language (a distinct shift from the use of Mother Tongues sixty years ago with the nation’s founding), then speaking English becomes the cultural reality of the Singaporean linguistic landscape.

In this way, English is still conceptualized as ‘other’ and ‘foreign’, not a hallmark of the larger culture. The most direct representation of this idea was offered in my interview with Claudia (name anonymized), a Mandarin Mother Tongue speaker and student of International Relations. When asked about the origins for the Mother Tongue Policy, she shared that the policy was created “Not just because like the government thinks that like culture is like inherently like valuable or whatever, right? But also because they [the Singaporean government] see some sort of value in implementing a policy that would create a cultural identity for Singaporeans outside of the West.” Here, the co-conceptualization of language equating to culture can be seen not only in the importance of Mother Tongue language retention, but also in the larger discourse of English being representative of the West, and vice versa; despite the fact that most Singaporeans primarily identify English as their first language.

## b. Externally

Interestingly, while this is how Singaporeans appear to conceptualize their use of English within the bounds of their own nation, (distanced, and not really integrated into a larger Singaporean ‘culture’) my interviewees indicated that within the larger scope of SouthEast Asia, there are other negative connotations that strongly link Singapore and English use. I posit that these external negative connotations influence the separate and unconnected status of English in the internalized notions of culturally significant language. One consultant remarked that their increased use of English and alleged quality of Mother Tongue usage (particularly Mandarin) “... looks very good on paper, but over time, we kind of look snobbish to the Southeast Asian community.”

This idea came up in many anecdotes, with one consultant commenting that when speaking English, but poor Mandarin, in the workplace “ it comes out as very pretentious when they act as if they're no longer Singaporean, it's kind of like acting white in Singapore.” Another Mandarin Mother Tongue consultant went so far as to refer to herself as a ‘banana’, a crude expression of her identity as externally, visibly, Chinese; but feeling more internally Western, particularly in regard to the difference between her daily use of English and more infrequent use of Mandarin. Again, here a deeper entrenchment of English as a manifestation of the West is presented, and in that same way externally aligns Singapore with the West, at least to its neighbors in SEA.

This same sentiment was echoed in other interviews, with the same racial binary of English equating to whiteness appearing, particularly in the contrast between the taught forms of English and the spoken forms of the language in Singapore. When asked about the development of Singaporean English, or Singlish, one consultant shared that when she is using Singlish, she is often chastised, and corrected towards speaking “good English.” Her thoughts are expressed below:

*“There's no such thing as good English. It's very prescriptive, you know what I mean. Super prescriptive. Like you're just following, like, what white people are saying.”*

In this way, it appears that the external confirmation of English language as a Singaporean practice influences conceptions of how Singapore is seen across the great South East Asia region, with particularly negative connotations; one consultant even alluded to the incorporation of English as ‘selling out’ to the authority of British colonialism. This negative external perception of the interrelatedness of whiteness, English, and colonialism has fueled the rejection of English as a cultural mainstay within internalized Singaporean discourses, as discussed above.

## c. English as an perceived economic advantage

In understanding all of this, a new dimension began to emerge that defined how English *did* become the chosen language of the state: its perceived economic advantage. When thinking

about the origins of English as the language of the state and the continued growth of English as the main language used in Singapore, many of my consultants attributed both events to the wide scale access the English language provides as an economic tool.

One consultant, studying international business management, put it quite simply, “they [the Singaporean government] thought it would bring more opportunities to Singapore. Maybe it was a survival kind of strategy. Because at that time, we were still developing the country, and English was becoming the most widely spoken language.” Here, the importance of international trade is highlighted as the primary factor. Understanding English to be a growing language not only in the West, but around Asia as a whole, was also considered in this discussion, as one consultant gave the example that if Singapore established itself as an English speaking environment, the nation could “branch out the big economies like ASEAN<sup>4</sup>, India, and China, in addition to the global market kind of thing.” Some consultants even attributed the fact that they were one of the few predominantly English speaking countries as one of the main factors why Singapore had experienced such large commercial success in its sixty years as a nation, and said that without English, “there's no way to do business –you know how like pro-capitalist we are–without English, there's no way to build this country. So English is super important.”

Ultimately, across all of my interviews, the understanding of English as being selected for its pre-eminence as the language of global commerce was the far more dominant discourse as opposed to being a ‘neutral’ language when it came to why the founding Singaporean government chose it as the official language (Bokhorst & Silver, 2017). Over time, with the flourishing of English as the primary home language, Singapore has experienced a linguistic shift from through the generations that was in part facilitated by the Mother Tongue Policy; a shift that carries with it the understanding the English is the language of Singapore or its pragmatic, economic value (Fishman, 1991).

### *iii. Efficiency & Pragmatism*

At the core of understanding how English has grown and why Mandarin appears to be faring better against language shift than the other Mother Tongue counterparts, common themes have emerged regarding the way the two are conceptualized; principally the nexus of practicality, efficiency, and pragmatism. I argue that these concepts, often correlated to a sense of Singaporean national identity, help to inform the success of these languages.

In my conversations with consultants, the introduction of the idea of pragmatism was one of the initial pieces of information shared. In relation to the origins of language policy, one such consultant shared that “when it comes to language policies, the government is very focused on, like, a pragmatic approach towards our policies,” and “pragmatism is still one of those most... central ideas. A lot of it is like we want to think about what's the *best* way we can go about this [language policy]. How are we able to reap the most benefits from what we do?” In this particular portion of this interview, the consultant was sharing why they thought English was the

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<sup>4</sup> Association of SouthEast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Economic ground consisting of Brunei Darussalam, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam– a market with a GDP of more than \$2.9 trillion and a population of 647 million people (ASEAN, 2024).

chosen national language of Singapore, and later alluded to this *pragmatism* as being effective in the economic orientation.

A different interview shared a similar understanding of the genesis of Singaporean multilingualism, “but I feel like this bilingual policy right is largely driven by practicality. Not just because like the government thinks that like culture is like inherently like valuable or whatever, right?” This echoed other’s similar opinions on the role of English as the language of commerce, and how the international role of English in the economic sphere highlighted it as a pragmatic choice for a national language, “I think English is the most prioritized, useful language, for sure, because it's the language of commerce.” Perhaps most directly put, one consultant shared that choosing English as the national language was a bit of a no-brainer, explaining that the decision “And it makes so much *pragmatic* sense. If I'm going to perfect any language, it's going to be English.”

The perception of the dominance of English in the larger international economic market is therefore widely understood to be the motivating factor for its selection as the national language and its subsequent growth. This demonstrated widespread understanding of this truth helps to give understanding why Singapore appears to be undergoing a strong language shift away from Mother Tongue languages and towards English monolingualism, particularly in non-Mandarin MT groups (Starr, 2023).

Mandarin benefits from a similar discursive relationship to the idea of pragmatism, efficiency, and utilitarianism in relation to economic advantage. This link is highlighted through the various anecdotes that were shared with me of students choosing to study Mandarin as their MT language as opposed to the one that is ethnically assigned to them. On many such occasions, consultants shared that,

*“When parents are deciding like ‘oh what language should my kid take’ they're thinking about future prospects. I know many Malay kids who ended up learning Chinese just for advancement purposes; because everyone kind of wants to tap into the China market.”*

Here, similar to English on a global scale, Mandarin Chinese is understood to be the language of commerce, at least in China. The parallel between the way this idea is linked to social and economic advancement is easily drawn to the way English is conveyed to operate within other international markets.

These ideas of economic advancement, pragmatism, and practicality were constant themes across all of my interviews, and for good reason. Many of my consultants offered that these utilitarian concepts were central hallmarks of the Singaporean national identity, citing the former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s approach to governance of the young nation. One such example from a Mandarin MT student was “his [Lee Kuan Yew’s] entire approach, every single thing that he did when he was in power was all about pragmatism. So what was important was whether or not something would have utility, it's a very utilitarian mindset. Just cost benefit analysis.”

Therefore, as the two languages of English and Mandarin are conceptualized as pragmatic and utilitarian, they provide linguistic capital that is justified through the accumulation of economic capital. This has been tied into the understanding of Singaporeans values, as the yields of economic capital that have been made possible by large-scale competence in English and Mandarin have justified their sections as national languages in a way that Malay and Tamil have not benefited from.

#### a.Singlish

A non-recognized contender for the fifth official language of Singapore is **Singlish**, the name given to ‘Singaporean English’, or the variety of English that has been created through English as the state medium in a country with such high linguistic diversity. Regular contact and transactions between the other Singaporean languages of Malay, Tamil, and Mandarin has fostered the creation of this, “Singaporean model of English” (Kheng & Chua, 2011). Most literature indicates that Singlish was originally spoken by those who received little to no English education, however, as discussed below, my findings indicate that its use has expanded over time and is now commonly used among the younger generations as a point of ingroup identity marking.

#### Efficiency in Singlish

In this exploration of language policies, practices, and philosophies in Singapore, a dialect that arose in conversation that is *not* covered by the Mother Tongue Policy was Singlish. Singaporean English (dubbed Singlish) was constantly understood in my interviews to be one of the ways that local Singaporeans spoke to each other, and many of my consultants attributed the value of Singlish to its efficiency in communication, as well as its cultural value of being emblematic of modern-day Singapore.

When asked about their language use most broadly, most of my consultants were quick to mention Singlish. Many attributed its primary characteristics to being efficient, for example. One such consultant described the dialect as “But most of the time like Singlish is a lot more I would say *efficient*. You get the point across like really quick... yeah. If you're talking about *efficiency*, *Singlish is super efficient*.” Many other consultants echoed this point, one saying that “the point of Singlish is being hyper *efficient*. It's like an English word, but it's like in a Singlish context, so you are taking out all the other irrelevant words Singlish's characteristic lack of connecting words marks it as sometimes difficult for the unfamiliar listener to understand, however many consultants stated that for them, the brevity is helpful “you get your point across in like as few words as possible, and everyone understands you.”

While it is unsurprising that Singlish appears to follow the trend set up by the success of English and Mandarin for having perceived value in its practicality and efficiency, Singlish was also described as a keystone of the Singaporean identity. In contrast with the discursive distancing of English as the everyday language of the people, Singlish was championed as the truly Singaporean way of speaking:

*“So Singlish is one of the ways that people have learned how to communicate with each other, without actually having to speak in standard English. Singlish is one of the very few things that we have. That I would say is a unique thing to Singapore.”*

There was a sense of pride amongst my consultants when asked about their Singlish use. Many of them said that it was used most commonly in the most casual settings, talking to their peers, or when ordering from another part of Singapore, the hawker stall. One consultant even went on to say that “Singlish definitely has more, like, cultural value than what bilingual policy, like, offers.” and that Singlish represents “the authentic like Singaporean identity, right? If you don't have Singlish, where are you going to get that from?” The roots of Singlish were attributed to the multi-cultural aspects of Singapore, a quality that is valued not only on paper but in practice as well. On the topic, a consultant reported that she feels most Singaporean when speaking Singlish “Because Singlish itself is built on a lot of different languages, coming together with Malay, Chinese, different dialects, English, all of it.”

It would be imprudent to not note another aspect to Singlish that arose when discussing it with my consultants. In response to questions surrounding their own personal Singlish use, many of them responded that the variety was more common with the lower class, particularly those who did not have jobs that interacted with non-Singaporeans. My consultants shared that “the Singlish accent can be seen as kind of, like, cartoonish or sounds kind of ridiculous on the global scale.” Here, my consultant is indicating that while fully comprehensible within the bounds of Singapore, Singlish is not used with the larger community.

Despite initial efforts from the government like the aforementioned Speak Good English campaign that sought to diminish the use of Singlish across the country, the dialect has been successful in maintaining its role in the larger fabric of Singaporean society. I posit that this successful maintenance is due to its two-fold appeal as both efficient and marking of in-group belonging as a Singaporean national. This understanding of overlap between the two categories of Singaporean identity and Singlish use is best reflected in one consultant's reflections on a friend that didn't understand the variety, describing “she's definitely not very familiar with Singlish even though she considers herself Singaporean.” Demonstrated above, there is an expectation that every native Singaporean can understand and speak Singlish.

### *B.Indonesia*

Language policy in Indonesia has a history that predates the modern nation. In the historical Hindu-Buddhist Kingdoms of Java, there are some registers of language that were only reserved for use by the highest of royalty, and some only used within religious spheres (Pennycook, 2013).

In recent years, with increasing globalization and development of larger metropolises within the nation of Indonesia, some academics have pointed to a language shift that is happening from ethnic and heritage languages towards Bahasa. As larger metropolitan centers grow and people begin to lose direct contact with the smaller community settings, there is a loss

in the use of heritage languages. In some studies conducted by Ravindranath & Cohn (2014) as well as investigation from Vander Klok (2019), it appears that this language shift isn't only impacting smaller speaker groups of language, but also languages with a larger speaker population such as Javanese.

Javanese as a language is made up of several registers, some of which have roots in the aforementioned practices that were established with the development of the language during the Hindu-Bhuddhist kingdoms. The current expressions of register in Javanese are generally divided into two: the lower register, *ngoko* and the upper register; *kromo inggil* (Ravindranath & Cohn, 2014). There is some evidence to suggest that this upper register, normally saved for formal situations, is being pushed out of use as Bahasa has become used for the same purpose, the redundancy of options allowing for the decay of *kromo inggil's* speaking population. From my interviews and subsequent analysis, I hope to understand the policies that made this possible, the daily language practices of Javanese speakers themselves, and the philosophies surrounding their language use. This approach will allow for an understanding of motivations for language shift, and therefore the creation of policies that will protect against it.

## **Policy**

### *i. Youth Pledge of 1928*

Following a significant period of colonization from the Dutch, wherein there were many language policies regarding Dutch language use in schools, government and other public spaces; the youth of Indonesia met to create a plan for the new post-colonial nation. The guiding factor of this conference was the notion of *one nation, and one language*; and it is from this point that we most clearly see the alignment of national identity and language use in the country. Serving as the foundation for most of the early political and governmental organization in Indonesia, the Youth Pledge of 1928 serves as the basis for understanding the development of the Bahasa language as not only a means of communication, but also as a political indicator of national pride and identity in Indonesia in particular (Juanda, 2022).

In this pledge, agreements were also made that allowed for adjustments in the Indonesian language. These adjustments were meant to accommodate technological developments, new terminology, and the creation of formal entities (like governmental institutions) to decide Indonesian use. These authorities have been described as “playing a role in improving the language,” such as laws that mandate the use of Indonesian in court and the media (Juanda, 2022).

While an older policy that has long since been revised and changed, the Youth Pledge of 1928 marks an important beginning of the strong discursive association between Indonesian language and the creation of a larger Indonesian national identity, which is the central basis upon which the later policy sits. This became more and more relevant with the further encoding of Bahasa Indonesia into the national fabric through different political eras of the country. The continuity of the importance of Bahasa as a national symbol can be seen “through the Independence movement, the promotion and development of Indonesian as the dominant

language during the Sukarno era (1949–1967), and its further institutionalization in Suharto’s New Order (1967–1998)” (Ravindranath, Cohn, & Yanti, 2022).

*ii. Constitution of 1945: Article 36 Section XV*

Upon declaring independence from the Japanese following the end of WWII, Indonesia had the opportunity to formalize its language. As established, Bahasa Indonesia is “a relative of Javanese language, namely Western Malayo-Polynesian.” and the language was formalized as the language of the people in the Article 36 Section XV “The State's Flag, Language, and Coat of Arms, and The National Anthem” of The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (Sulistiyono, 2017).

Considering the hyperdiversity of Indonesia in terms of language and ethnic groups, the language of Bahasa has always been correlated to understandings of unity and nationhood, as expressed through the national motto that was also officialized in this constitution :*Bhinneka tunggal ika*, or “Unity in diversity” (Errington, 1998). This law, passed as a part of the larger constitution seeking to define the government of the new nation of Indonesia, places the speaking and learning of Indonesian as both the national and official language of the state. In application, this means that most things officially produced for the public are produced in Indonesian.

*iii. The 2003 National Education Act, Article 33*

The most central policy to our analysis of language ideologies in Indonesia is the one that has had the most direct impact on the language learning of the consultants; Article 33 of the 2003 National Education Act. Within the various articles of the Act, Bahasa Indonesia was mandated as the language of education at all levels, whereas before it was mostly used in universities and higher level high schools (Sulistiyono, 2017). In turning the attention toward Bahasa as the language of instruction at all grade levels, there now less (to no) mandated time in schools to learn the local heritage languages, and instead, local languages are protected under a different set of laws that provide protects for “ethnic culture, local knowledge, and traditional noble values” (Sulistiyono, 2017).

This ruling is not absolute. In many parts of Indonesia, should the level of proficiency in Bahasa not be sufficient enough to provide for the effective teaching of new material, lessons may be taught in regional languages. However, when it comes to state-level testing, university admissions, and other officialized events, they are conducted in Indonesian. Therefore, there is some flexibility built into this policy, however, it maintains the privileged position of Bahasa and encourages student’s mastery of the state's official language.

**Practice**

Indonesia is a widely diverse country in terms of language, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds. All of these factors lead to wider distribution of experiences and perceived levels of proficiency with Javanese, Bahasa, and English. For the purposes of understanding how Indonesians are undergoing a language shift from their local languages (focused on Javanese, in



particular the highest level: *kromo inggil*) towards Bahasa due to nationalized language policy, I conducted interviews to discern how language was used.

As the second prong in my approach to understand the impacts of language planning in Indonesia, I targeted my interviews towards understanding when and how consultants used the languages at their disposal. In general, my consultants considered themselves Bahasa/Javanese bilinguals, with two other consultants noting that they don't speak Javanese at all as they are not from East Java; and their local communities speak different languages (Errington, 1998).

Noted in the methodology section of this thesis, Malang was the field site for these interviews, with a particular focus on the students of one of the several universities in the city. Malang is a strong candidate for fieldsite not only for the practical considerations of sourcing consultants through established networks available to me, but also because it is a city that has historically spoken Javanese that is –due to the university–experiencing large influxes of non-Javanese immigration, and therefore on the forefront of language shift.

It is also worth noting that Javanese-Bahasa codeswitching was a daily occurrence during my time in Malang. While I am not proficient enough in either language to notice the fast change between them (particularly within the same sentence), my guide anecdotally explained that she would code switch between using Bahasa to order at the restaurant we ate lunch at and using Javanese to pay the parking lot attendant, and that this sort of change was largely the standard practice amongst most young residents of Malang. While an illustrative point of the language shift and practices in of themselves, it's more important to note that these below practices describe the daily interactions of university students. However, informed by an understanding of language ideologies, we can see how the underlying principles that guide the decisions behind these actions are being enacted on the daily scale throughout the community, as other community members share experiences with and seek to emulate the speech of the university-educated middle class (Pennycook, 2013).

Additionally, I would like to note that in reporting my findings in this section, I have sometimes referred to my consultants in both the first and third person when quoting them directly. This is due to the reports of the translator and the conventions of my transcript, which I have kept as untampered as possible.

#### *i. Role of Javanese & Kromo Inggil*

Of the ten consultants I spoke with in Malang, seven noted that they had some level of fluency in Javanese. With these seven, five of them stated that Javanese is what they would consider their native language, with the other two saying that they speak some if it, however wouldn't claim it as their first language.

When discussing the overall level of Javanese (particularly the *ngoko*, or more informal register) spoken; my consultants shared that for many of them it was the language of daily life, within the bounds of informal social settings. For example, one consultant shared that he chose to speak Javanese because it was, “obviously way easier to understand and to be understood. because it's his mother tongue and he uses it all the time to talk to people.” In this interview in particular, the mentioned ‘people’ refer to “my friends in my high school, and also with my

teacher from high school, like, my Javanese teacher.” Similarly, another consultant said that, “she would use Javanese to joke around with her friends and hang out”; a sentiment echoed in a third conversation where a consultant stated that her family would “use Javanese at home fully because everyone there, including the neighbors, they talk in Javanese.” Even more to this point, Javanese is used with family members outside of the immediate household, with one consultant reporting that, “he speaks Javanese with his extended family, like grandma, aunts, and uncles who he rarely sees.”

While it initially appears that Javanese is most understood in domestic settings, it was shared that Javanese also makes its way into educational settings, albeit with maintained informality. In between classes or when getting meals, my consultants indicated that they would speak in Javanese (*ngoko*) during these times.

When asked about how consultants would determine which social spaces to use Javanese in, the first consideration was age and followed by perceived ethnic identity. Should the audience be younger and appear to be Javanese, one would opt first to speak with them in the *ngoko* register of Javanese. It was also suggested that Javanese is used in informal business settings, like at a market or with street vendors. One such consultant shared that “during a transaction, maybe like in a market or something like that, or just passing by people or just people in the neighborhood that's in the close quarters, usually they're Javanese, so we'd speak in Javanese.” This same consultant shared that while she would normally use Bahasa Indonesia when first meeting someone, particularly at the university, if she “would consider this person to be friendly, she would switch to Javanese.”

Regarding the overall use of casual, lower-register Javanese, the consultants expressed that it was a language that was very strong in presence not only in Malang, but across the island of Java. This was not the same when discussing their use of the higher register of Javanese, *kromo inggil*.

When specially prompted to discuss their use of the higher register, many of my consultants were quick to note their lack of proficiency in *kromo*. Situations where *kromo inggil* was used were described as similar settings for *ngoko*, however with a relationship where the speaker wanted to address the listener with greater respect. On the topic, one consultant shared that, “if they would talk to someone in Javanese, the lower register, then he would also reply that. But if it's Javanese elder, he [the consultant] would try to speak in *kromo*.” This example appears to indicate that age is the most influential factor for determining register, and ethnicity is the aspect from which a speaker decides to use Javanese in the first place.

Additionally, formality was a continued prompt in the choice of *kromo* or *ngoko*. Many consultants, including my translator, shared that they attempted to use the *kromo* register when speaking to their families or their in-laws, one consultant even expressing anxiety over his level of proficiency in *kromo inggil* in relation to his one-day family, explaining that:

*“I really need to study language, specifically the kromo inggil language because what if I got married one day and had a Javanese wife, and Javanese family? I have to be able to talk to them in kromo inggil.”*

The above quote illustrates the importance of the factor of formality in choosing when to use Javanese to communicate. Within communities that all share Javanese heritage, relation also plays an important role in what register is most appropriate to speak, a language planning practice that has hundreds of years in history on the island of Java (Juanda, 2022).

Age of the listener continued to be an important factor in deciding what language to speak, especially considering geographic limitations as described by one of the consultants. Malang, as a comparatively large city in the Eastern part of Java, benefits from a diversity in ethnicity and languages that prompt the mastery of the national tongue, however; this is not always the case. On the role of Javanese use on the national scale, one consultant explained that it's a vital language to maintain,

*“Because there are a lot of small regions, a lot of elderly people in rural areas can't speak Indonesian (Bahasa), so they have to speak Bahasa Jawa (Javanese). Yeah, because a lot of elderly people, especially in smaller villages or rural places, won't be able to understand Indonesian.”*

From this example we can infer that Javanese, while still playing a prominent but shrinking role in Malang, continues to have speaking population strongholds in more rural areas. Therefore, geographic setting may also play a part in shaping the spaces Javanese is used.

## *ii. Role of Bahasa Indonesia*

As is mandated by the above detailed language policies, Bahasa Indonesia is the set language for education, government, public services, and media. My conversations with consultants is largely consistent with this data, with the exception that some Javanese bilinguals have begun to use Bahasa Indonesia as their home language. As reported by two Javanese speakers, they were taught Javanese during their earlier school education, not by their families through use at home. One consultant shared that she, “considered Bahasa her first language and Javanese her second language I think; because like in my home, my family, all of my family use Bahasa a lot rather than Javanese”

In line with the policy mandated by the government in 2003, many of my consultants reported that they used Bahasa within most non-familial formal settings, as they describe, “Bahasa Indonesia is only used in certain forums, formal forums,” and “Bahasa is more formal because in academic, in school and college, in the institution, yeah, we will use oftenly with Bahasa Indonesia.” As these quotes highlight, there is large-scale adherence to the national policy at the university level, with every student having a high proficiency in Bahasa. Other, non-academic settings were also cited as moments where Bahasa would be most appropriate, for example, those where not every person in the conversation is Javanese.

On this theme, many consultants indicated that the use of Bahasa is kept when speaking outside of your local communities. A consultant that considered Bahasa his first language noted that “he would use Indonesian because he has a lot of friends that are not from Java, for example from Jakarta, from Bali, and from Rambang, and as well as his own parents, who actually talk [to

each other] in Indonesian. A different consultant shared that while they would normally try to talk to someone new in Javanese first, “if that person is from outside of the island, then he would use Indonesian.”

To this extent, the series of policies surrounding language from the 1928 Youth Pledge until Article 33 of the National Education Act of Indonesia has been wildly successful in creating, disseminating, and maintaining a language that connects all members of the nation. As the first few years of graduates are beginning to matriculate that have spent their entire education under this policy, there is a visible increase in the overall capabilities and level of comfort using Bahasa Indonesia to communicate with Indonesians from different regions. Some small exceptions to this theme were one consultant in particular who attended Islamic boarding school, and therefore felt he spoke stronger Arabic and Bahasa than he did Javanese as a result of the immersive environment.

#### a. The Shift: On Replacing *Kromo Inggil* with Bahasa Indonesia

When describing their use of the formal level of Javanese as opposed to Bahasa Indonesia, many consultants shared that their *kromo inggil* usage was not strong enough to convey the level of respect desired. In these instances, they would instead choose to address elders in Bahasa as opposed to Javanese. This shift is noted in one such interview where it’s described, “But if I’m speaking Javanese to older people, he would try to speak in *kromo*. But if he couldn’t [speak *kromo*], if it breaks down, he would revert to Indonesian.” This consultant wasn’t alone. Many respondents shared similar experiences, noting that ‘*kromo* is very difficult to learn’ thanks to its distinct verb conjugations and other grammatical structures (Vander Klok, 2019). In this way, speakers have made a choice on the larger scale: it is best to use the formal language you know best rather than a more formal language you don’t know as well, even if it feels more respectful. This decision is fairly widespread among residents, with other examples from interviews such as, “most of my friends who speak Javanese cannot speak the highest form, the *kromo inggil*..so they would say things too elderly, like politely in Indonesian” or, “but with the teachers, because *kromo inggil* is hard, so they’re [her college peers] using Indonesian”. This change in employment of Javanese and Indonesian is a signal that Malang, and presumably the rest of the island, is undergoing a **language shift**, or the “the gradual replacement of one’s main language or languages, often labelled L1, by another language, usually referred to as L2, in all spheres of usage,” (Pauwels, 2016).

Of those who indicated that they could speak the *kromo inggil* register, it was shared with me that they could only do so thanks to the strict teachings of their parents. In one such case, the consultant was actually the son of a Javanese teacher, and he noted that being able to speak the *kromo* register has put him above the majority of his peers who aren’t as proficient. He shared,

*“Because there aren’t a lot of young people who can speak kromo, they [elders] prefer to listen to it when I use the kromo dialect. Especially in some cases, when I was asked to learn with older people, for consultations and other things.”*

Understanding that knowing *kromo inggil* has some advantages, we can understand that while not promoted directly by policy, there are still spaces where knowledge of regional languages is necessary. However, the flexibility of Article 33 has paved the way for a larger, more convenient access point of language being the national language, Bahasa Indonesia. In this way, the linguistic labor can be reduced for individual speakers as Bahasa begins to encroach on interactions that would have traditionally called for the use of *kromo*. While this phenomenon is present in practice, it has also had powerful effects on the way that my consultants described their ideas about language and language policy more generally in relation to their identities as Indonesian nationals, the subject of analysis for the philosophies section of this thesis.

Another common theme suggested during my research is the understanding that there is drastically less regional language use in the larger cities in Indonesia. For example, on the prevalence of this shift, one consultant offered that, “people have become more Jakarta-centric in social media and a lot of the posts, and they need to post in Bahasa to be understood.”

### *iii. Smaller languages*

In conducting my interviews I made it a point to get perspective from non-Javanese speakers as well as to investigate the status of their own smaller regional languages. One such consultant considered Madurese to be their native language, but now lived in Malang as a student full-time. In terms of his Madurese use, he noted “In my community, if we meet a person or friend, who is from Madura, we directly use Madurese language even though in Java area. Because we see our identity, and we proud of our identity, we use Madurese.” While the Madurese language has more than 7 million speakers, there is evidence to show that the number is declining, facing a similar language shift to the larger use of Bahasa Indonesia that the highest register of Javanese is experiencing (Eberhard & Simmons, 2024).

This consultant also shared about how critical it was that everyone speaks Bahasa at the University Negeri Malang, otherwise he would have been unable to attend. On the topic of the spheres of use of Bahasa and Javanese, this consultant commented that he has tried to learn some Javanese for use at the local market, particularly with the elderly salespeople who do not speak strong Bahasa. While he was taught Bahasa in school growing up in Madura, he claims to have only spoken it ‘about 20% of the time before coming to Malang’, as the national language was taught as a subject, not as the language of instruction. On the topic of larger Madurese use as compared to Javanese, he said that more people in his community relied on Madurese alone to communicate.

### *iv. English and other international languages*

As the growing language of international commerce, I felt compelled to ask if there was any prevalence or change in the interest towards learning and using English in the community in Malang. As a tourist destination, Malang is relatively well known for the hike to Mt. Bromo and the Rainbow villages, however the city is largely residential and does not bear the same burden to linguistically accommodate mass tourism that areas like Bali and the Gili Islands experience (Manggo, 2010).

Admittedly, my consultants have some expressed knowledge of English and the anglophone world that is not necessarily available to the average resident of Malang. These consultants were working for the summer as language partners for foreigners – primarily English speaking– to learn Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, while none of them claimed high level fluency in English, their perspective on the language may be better informed than one would typically expect.

The reported domains of use for English was primarily in instances where the speakers were seeking to connect within the international community. This sentiment was best expressed in one such example being multiplayer online videogames. Despite most of this consultant's gaming team coming from other SEA countries, the common tongue that they all spoke was English. In other interviews, consultants offered that there was an increase in knowledge of English in the workplace, “They [Those hiring] value English more than regional languages. Even now, teachers also have the requirement to speak English sometimes. Maths teachers, science teachers, they need to be able to learn English even though it's for math, for science subjects. They need English proficiency.” This use of English in the educational or internationally-facing sphere was a common side note during interviews, and often English spheres of use were considered more metropolitan. One consultant argued that “it's [learning English] more prevalent in bigger cities that have more international schools and opportunities to use English. So it's more convenient for them to study English [than a regional language].

In their daily lives, consultants agreed that they used little to no English across the board, unless they were speaking with a non-Indonesian national. However many expressed the opinion that there is growing interest in learning English in order to connect with people beyond Indonesia, particularly with the younger generation, “So because of globalization, English is an international language. So you have to learn English to get to know everything.”

This interest in the international community was supported by other reports of consuming media –mainly television shows and music– in both English and other languages like Korean. As reported in one interview, “because there's more and more people talking in English as opposed to Javanese, I think young people like foreign cultures more than before.”

On a larger scale, there is little English being spoken within the community members of Malang. However, there is growing concern on the national level that as English learning interests arise, loss of regional languages would be accelerated, and therefore on a governmental level, “English is not promoted widely as there is a concern that this would threaten nationalism” (Rahimi, 2016).

## **Philosophy**

In understanding the impact of language planning efforts, the philosophies (ideologies) are the ways in which people's attitudes, presuppositions, and opinions surrounding language and language policy influence the production of knowledge. In understanding language ideologies in Indonesia, the language shift from Javanese and towards Bahasa across formal levels of interaction was discursively attributed to several different qualities surrounding the interaction of

national identity and community values. Common themes that emerged from a conversation around language use were: politeness and respect, allegiance with an ingroup, and the undeniable importance of language in culture.

*i. Thoughts on Language Policy*

As students that are involved in the teaching of Indonesian as a foreign language (an effort that is sometimes referred to as BIPA) I would anticipate that they had stronger opinions surrounding language planning than the average resident of Malang. Consultants voiced concerns about the loss of the *kromo inggil* register, and thought that on the larger scale the language policies that were in place were not substantial enough to protect against the erosion they perceived in the Javanese language community. On the issue, it was shared that, “he thinks that for the regional languages, it's not adequate at all for the policy, because the regional languages will fade away, cease to exist” other consultants shared this opinion, adding that, “in my opinion, for Bahasa Indonesia, the policy is strong enough. But for the use of regional languages, I don't think so. It is really lacking” While the flexibility in Article 33 was intended to allow for the teaching of regional languages while introducing more saliency of the national language into the curriculum, it has ultimately led to a language shift away from regional tongues, even in those as large in speaker populations as Javanese.

While this may seem bleak, there was also evidence that suggests that policy is well interpreted and respected within language communities in Indonesia. One consultant shared that “because like it or not, we should abide by the rule, by the policy that the government created.” and many consultants agreed that more policy would be effective in promoting regional languages should it be passed and enforced. According to this same consultant, on a large scale in Indonesia, “people are more aware of the national language policy,” and are more than willing to follow it, based on their national historic background surrounding the creation of their own language.

The origins of national language policy are promoted by the Indonesian government to be an expression of national identity, and have worked to discursively create a nation that was essentially co-instituted with the language of Bahasa Indonesia from the time of the Youth Pledge until the present day. Some scholars even go so far as to claim that, “no other formerly colonized nation has promoted a single, non-European language as a national and official language with as much success as Indonesia has” (Ravindranath, Cohn, & Yanti, 2022). My consultants wholeheartedly agree with the importance and value of language policy, even understanding the practice as a core aspect of their nationhood. One consultant shared that “Bahasa Indonesia is a key part for the national language identity. So the other people will know and understand what we speak.” This sentiment was largely supported by other consultants, one of which said that the national language policy was the best example of their national motto, “unity in diversity”.

Keeping this in mind, national level Indonesian language policy has been wildly effective in not only creating wide-spread fluency in Bahasa, but in impressing upon citizens the importance of language policy as a practice more generally.

## *ii. Language and Culture: Mutually informed*

As a component of daily life, language was expressed as discursively vital to the maintenance of traditional Javanese culture in every interview I conducted. There is a larger understanding of the value and threat to the Javanese language than I anticipated, and many of my consultants shared they had low hopes for the continuation of the *kromo inggil* register in the future. One consultant shared that, “In my opinion, children nowadays are not proud [to speak Javanese]. Maybe I'm the last generation that is still being said to understand *kromo inggil*.” These anxieties became particularly visible when investigating the linkages between language and culture, another consultant claiming that “language is a part of a culture, so if people in the next year that don't speak in Javanese, the culture will be declining too.”

In this way, we can see that at large scales language is used to mark membership to particular in and out-groups, oftentimes intersecting and interchangeable within a given social interaction. Regional languages, like Javanese, are characterized as more familial; not only because consultants reported speaking with their families members in Javanese, but also due to descriptions of the utility of learning Javanese language as, “so that they [outsiders] can appear more approachable, so we can approach them more.” Another consultant shared that when choosing between Bahasa and Javanese in a conversation with a friend who also speaks both, she would always choose Javanese because “It's a way to feel more connected to who you're speaking with. Because you're from the same community.”

Understanding communality is key to understanding the maintenance of the *ngoko* level of Javanese, as it appears that there is a preference to mark yourself as a member of the same ethnic group that supersedes the need to assert shared nationality, the discursive marker of Bahasa Indonesia. This expression of in-group belonging resists the pull of linguistic shift as Bahasa fails to mark a speaker as sharing the same ethnic community. On this topic, one consultant offered that this regional linguistic competence can't be lost as, “it is very important to our national identity to be able to speak regional language because language is a reflection of your character.” In this way, there is a higher level understanding that if there is to be ‘unity in diversity’ on the national level in Indonesia, then the aspects of diversity must be protected to ensure unity, and vice versa.

Bahasa is tagged as the ‘language of unity’ by many of my consultants. It also is marked as the language of formality and knowledge building, as it is discursively aligned with educational institutions and professional services. When students who had high proficiency in multiple languages used Bahasa first, it was due to the fact that they were looking to identify themselves as professional, knowledgeable, and respectful in a given situation. For example, as someone who has moved to Malang for university and did not previously speak Javanese, one constant has become particularly proud of being able to speak Bahasa. He says “We are from Indonesia, we should show our abilities to speak to each other. We should be more proud to have a good ability in Bahasa Indonesia.” This is similar in national sentiment as another quote from a different consultant, where he describes the creation and use of Bahasa as:



*“Bahasa will connect us with the other people from the other islands in Indonesia, from Sumatra, Kalimantan, and also Papua and the others. Because if there are no Bahasa in this country, we cannot understand what they speak with their own dialect and also their own languages... there would be no Indonesia.”*

In this way, it's clear that the strength of Bahasa lies in its wide applicability and its discursive alignment with the Indonesian state as both a realized being and abstract concept. When seeking to understand how to best protect languages through policy in Indonesia, understanding the networks of values that are used to determine the use of a language is critical. In the case of Indonesia, the above citations make it clear that the difference in choosing what language to use is made in the approach; either as an in-group member (Javanese) or as a broader Indonesian national (Bahasa).

### *iii. Politeness & Respect*

The largest theme to account for the change in between Javanese and Indonesian was the account of politeness. This theme was dominant, particularly in discussing the decline of *kromo inggil*. As Bahasa has become more accessible and widely understood, younger speakers of both languages are finding that they feel more polite and respectful when expressing themselves in Bahasa than they would in Javanese, even when the person they are trying to show respect towards is Javanese.

There is debate surrounding this. Few consultants indicated that they would prefer to try and fail to speak *kromo inggil* properly in order to signal the highest respect possible. Others stated that it would be less distracting and more respectful to speak correctly in the national formal language of Bahasa, using its academic and governmental associated prestige to account for their lack of savvy with the more-appropriate regional tongue (Javanese). Here, there is a particularly important concept that was explained to me by one consultant in particular:

*“There's this concept, and in Javanese I need to explain this. We have the word *sungkan*, which means that you will not feel comfortable. In a certain context, for example, you're the speaking partner, you're Javanese, and you can speak Javanese and possibly the higher level. So if you're the older person in the conversation, and I'm the younger person, and we both know that we can speak Javanese, it will be weird if I say something to you in Indonesian; knowing that I'm Javanese,”*

Here, this concept of *sungkan* is described as the cause of wanting to engage with others from as close of a discursive position as possible. Meaning, that if Javanese is on the table as an option to use, it's inherently the better option, because it marks the relation of the two participants as closer than the Bahasa. She also went on to describe the concept of *sungkan* as a guiding principle for many Javanese women, as there is a distaste for causing offence or for appearing impolite. Anecdotally, this consultant and my translator shared a laugh over the idea of

not embracing the principle of *sungkan* in conversation, saying it would make them ‘bad Javanese daughters.’ This comment was embraced by other consultants as well, who, when asked about speaking Bahasa to someone who speaks Javanese, explained that, “I think just because it feels uncomfortable. Rather than impolite. So I think it's better to use Javanese.” This comment reveals internalized concept of politeness that surrounds Javanese is an aspect that is highly valued within the language and larger culture, and an aspect that was highlighted as a value in conserving the language.

## **V. Discussion**

With the above established grasp of the policies, practices, and philosophies surrounding language planning and statehood in Singapore and Indonesia, I have discussed to what extent these policies have been effective in achieving their original goals, reviewed the recommendations made for future language policies as offered by my consultants, and noted how information from my data situates each country’s approach to language planning with Ruíz’s orientations. From this discussion, I have offered changes to policies so that the evident language shift taking place in both Singapore and Indonesia can be mitigated, and potentially provide support for revitalization.

### *A. Were these policies effective?*

In Singapore, the Mother Tongue Policy in particular has been largely successful in fulfilling its two pronged approach of increasing English proficiency and maintaining presence of heritage languages. All of my consultants claimed native proficiency in English, and also highlighted that English was their primary mode of communication outside of the home sphere. While many of the Mandarin speaking consultants claimed that they used Mandarin in speaking to family members, this has been at the expense of smaller Chinese dialects that have held a more historic presence in Singapore. Therefore, the insertion of Mandarin as the Chinese dialect of choice has been powerful in diminishing the use and perceived value of Chinese dialects, and more young Singaporeans move away from speaking dialect, and even Mandarin as a whole. In line with previous scholarship, my findings support claims made that there is some linguistic shift taking place away from mother tongue languages even with Singaporean households, as English continues to dominate the public sphere. Mandarin MT speakers often note the value of their MT language not as a connector to their heritage and culture, but rather to the economic advancement and job opportunities made available to them through their language proficiency.

This is one failure of the Mother Tongue Policy that has been proposed by both speakers of Mandarin and other MT languages in Singapore. Oftentimes, my consultants shared that pragmatism and the ability to convert linguistic capital into economic capital was the driving force of the use of their Mother Tongue. This is a discourse that surrounded the strength of Mandarin that was noticeably absent from the smaller Mother Tongue students of Malay and Tamil. Tamil use in particular seemed to be on the decline as in many instances my two Tamil consultants shared that they personally did not speak Tamil in what they considered to be a native capacity and struggled to find friends with whom to practice.

On the larger scale, many of the non-Mandarin MT students noted a perception that Mandarin was the favorite of the Mother Tongues, again largely in part of the economic opportunity to engage outside of Singapore that knowing Mandarin allowed for. This is one additional weak spot in the Mother Tongue Policy that originally sought out to claim the three MT languages as equals within Singapore.

Overall, the MT policy has been a success; largely in part of designing language policies and therefore shaping practices that closely align with larger scale nationalistic themes such as pragmatism and efficiency. There is, however, still room for improvements to be made, in order to fully realize the secondary goals of the policy –as understood by consultants– which is to protect Singaporean heritage from erosion.

Shifting gears to Indonesia, a similar argument can be made about the extent of effective implementation of the three discussed language policies. As a nation that existed without a common language, the 1928 Youth Pledge set up a powerful precedent that was instrumental in the later unification of the language and nation under the 1945 constitution. However, the most pivotal part of Indonesian language policy is that of the 33rd article of the 2003 National Education Act that set Bahasa Indonesia as the national language in education. The goal of that policy was to set up consistency in the level of Bahasa taught across schools in the nation, marking it as the official language of education at all levels; with the provision that regional languages could still be used in rural areas where overall Bahasa proficiency wasn't substantially high.

There were two goals within this policy: to unify the language of Bahasa on the altered scale and to create room for the continued teaching of regional languages as a second language. Within this first goal, the policy has been greatly effective, as every speaker I engaged with claimed a high level of Bahasa, and strong nationalistic attitudes surrounding the national languages as an indispensable part of their history and actively maintaining culture. Often claimed as the language of education, respect, and unity; this language policy greatly cemented the nationalistic ideals put forward in earlier legislation.

While there is still a large presence of regional languages across the archipelago, one of the largest regional languages, Javanese, is being pressured out of certain spheres of use partially in part by the 2003 National Education Act. Javanese has several different registers, the more formal of which, or *kromo inggil*, is being used less commonly. Normally employed as a show of respect for one's family and elders, *kromo inggil* is a register that demands use of distinct grammatical forms that are difficult to master, especially when not used frequently. As Bahasa has become the national language for education –moving *kromo inggil* out of the education spheres where it would otherwise have occurred– this register of Javanese has witnessed a growing decline in use amongst the Javanese youth. The shift is not equally spread throughout Indonesia, as areas with higher migrant communities are experiencing a faster deterioration of Javanese as Bahasa enters the home as a first language. Indicated in my interviews, as Bahasa continues to grow as the unifying language factor for Indonesians when expressing respect, there is now the entrance of a different, more accessible, and less linguistically laborious option.

It is with the language shift in mind within even the most traditional of Javanese families that I argue that the flexibility within the National Education Act has strengthened the deterioration of *kromo inggil*, as there are now inconsistencies at the statewide educational level surrounding the teaching of regional languages. In this way, households must take it upon themselves to create internal language policies that reflect their own values. In such, the nationalized appeal to unity has beaten out individual interest in maintaining smaller community ties; which is signaling a larger shift in the way that Indonesian communities identify towards a more nationalistic and pan-ethnic appeal as seen in large cities like Jakarta.

### *B. Can language shift be stopped?*

In Singapore, my consultants had many ideas of how to reform and reinvigorate the MT Policy as it is implemented in education through two main avenues: first, in increasing the sphere of use of their non-Mandarin Mother Tongues, and also in redefining the scope of Mother Tongue education to include a more accurate representation of what modern Singaporeans households use as their native language as opposed to the abstracted understandings of national practices that are discursively formed through the current Mother Tongue Policy.

Firstly, in Singapore the comments of reforming the Mother Tongue Policy were centered, unsurprisingly, about generating more interest in the economic capacity of other MT languages. With the questions of Mandarin's dominance as an asset in the job market in particular, my non-Mandarin speaking consultants are quick to advocate for opportunities to make Tamil and Malay advantageous as well. Again, the alignment of pragmatism and efficiency in the application of these languages was seen as paramount in the idea of revitalizing these language communities.

Secondly, suggestions to improve policy included broadening the scope of eligible languages to include Chinese dialects, non-Tamil Indian languages, and even some completely foreign languages like Japanese or Korean as interest grew. In this suggestion, consultants unveiled that their understanding of the Mother Tongue Policy was more about individuals keeping an understanding of their family's heritage, not necessarily about fomenting a larger understanding of what it means to be Singaporean through cultural heritage. With the inaccurate representation of Mandarin, Tamil, and Malay as the 'true' home languages, implied under the Mother Tongue Policy, many consultants became disillusioned with the process of second language learning in general. Some, who already spoke non-MT languages at home, like Hindi or Teochew, shared that they have learned less of their actual heritage language as a result of having to learn their assigned Mother Tongue so extensively. In this way, another suggestion became important, which was to limit the difficulty of these classes by focusing on non-graded heritage elements like song, food, and dance that are affiliated with each Mother Tongue.

On the topic of social unity, many of my consultants argued that in terms of an authentic Singaporean Identity, the government should spend less time criticizing Singlish and instead use those efforts to support it as a cultural product of the nation. Use of Singlish, noted by my consultants to only take place between Singaporeans, was one avenue through which my consultants said the government could promote a shared identity through language.

### *C. Within Ruiz's Orientations*

To position my findings within the larger context of LPP literature, I have placed Singapore and Indonesian language policies as operating within different orientations as proposed by Ruiz in 1984. While no set of policies can monolithically be categorized into one of these orientations, examining how the sets of policies have created environments that align with one or more of these orientations provides insight in how to best contextualize future policy. By continuing within similar bounds of orientation, policies can capitalize off of current practices and momentum to steer practice and philosophy in the desired direction.

#### *i. Singapore: Language as a Problem, then Resource*

My interviews, and the larger literature surrounding Singaporean language policy note that at the nation's inception, language was seen as a problem. After decades of British colonization, there was a need to standardize language in order to create internal communication within the newly formed country. Historically, language has been used as a space where different ethnic groups clash (Liu & Ricks, 2012). In assigning English as the language of use in Singapore, the government made a bold statement defining how Singapore will seek to solve puzzles surrounding the creation of a multiethnic state. Everyone had to learn something new under this English policy, and while citizens were encouraged to maintain their heritage languages at home, there were concrete and discursive boundaries to where the private/public, and therefore Mother Tongue/English divide lies.

As the nation developed and English became accepted as the canonical language, Singapore began to see more economic value coming in from their language policies. As Chinese markets grew, and Singapore began to participate in them as a Mandarin-speaking nation, language policy and philosophy shifted in orientation to now be geared towards expanding horizons 'pragmatically.' Thus, with the standardization of the Chinese dialects into the teaching of Mandarin, Singaporean policy oriented itself to see language as an external resource, not only of rich cultural and historical heritage; but of potential to help churn profits.

Now, with the shift away from Mother Tongue and the growing in a positive attitude toward the local Singlish variety, Singapore has a chance to integrate a new resource. In a nation whose own youth described a struggle to find a sense of cultural unity and national identity; the use of Singlish is in some ways the nationalistic artifact that the Mother Tongue Policy sought to create. Should the Singaporean government seize this opportunity, the language current ecology as manifested through policy, practice, and philosophy is such that advantageous policy can be passed to maximize language as a resource. Internally, with the promotion of Singlish as a national pride; and externally with continued support for second language learning with the promotion of economic opportunity.

#### *ii. Indonesia: Language as a Right, then Resource*

Not dissimilarly, Indonesia was faced with similar questions surrounding the operations of a nation wherein there was no shared language upon declaring independence in 1945. Instead of incorporating the language of their colonizing nation(s), Indonesia chose to create their own

national language, Bahasa Indonesia. While an unorthodox approach initially, this decision is largely indicative of Indonesia's position surrounding language as a right. In such contexts, as posited by Ruíz, language is understood to be, "not only access to formal processes like voting, civil service examinations, judicial and administrative proceedings, and public employment which are influenced, but the right to personal freedom and enjoyment." (Zachariev, 1978). At the nation's inception, there was no challenge to regional languages across the Indonesian archipelago. In this way, access and use of these languages was unquestionable; and to deny or shift use away from them would be to strip a community of its only language of practice. Also limited by challenges in infrastructure, economic capacities, and overall moves towards the West, Indonesia originally looked to regional language as a right, which is reflected in the relative flexibility of their language policies as it relates to internal regional language practices. This approach is seen in the data collected insofar as there is continued understanding of regional language use within different ethnic communities.

However, Indonesian planning simultaneously understood their national level language to be a resource. When understanding belonging to the nation as a political entity in Indonesia as opposed to a particular ethnic group, the formal tongue of Bahasa Indonesia is undoubtedly a resource. Defined by Ruíz as having a goal of "greater social cohesion and cooperation", the language-as-a-resource foundational orientation was originally projected in Indonesian language policy, pushing for Bahasa to not only unite the Indonesian people under a common language, but a common identity.

In recent times, with the erosion of the spheres of practice and overall use of the highest register of *kromo inggil*, not to mention other smaller regional languages, Indonesia will soon again shift within the language as a resource orientation. As Bahasa has grown to be the L1 of increasingly more speakers, particularly within larger cities with a variety of regional languages, there is little protection or insurance for the use of regional languages like Javanese. Should the concerns of consultants on the topic of regional language protections be met through policy, the government would need to lean into regional languages as a cultural resource, and do so by driving more structure for community-level instruction in formal settings and consistency in regional language use.

### *iii.A Limitation*

On the limitations of this study and its analysis: I have been far more successful in conducting discourse analysis work in Singapore than I was in Indonesia, as is evidenced by the lop-sided amount of content in favor of the former. This is not because Indonesia has less to discuss; in fact I believe it is the opposite. In its extreme diversity, nuance, and depth of language groups, Indonesia requires further explanation to reveal the discursive underpinnings of policy and opinion than I was able to achieve. My lack of depth of analysis lies in the singularity I had to reduce my interviewing to, as I was more limited by working with a translator than originally anticipated. This challenge of working through a translator constrained my ability to navigate the interviews to prompt deeper questioning, and limited my time usage as I had to make room in the interview for the translation to take place. In working towards future iterations of this research, I

would recommend learning more of the local language (in this case Bahasa, so as to be able to speak with all of the consultants, not just Javanese speakers) prior to conducting interviews, or extending the time of interviews to account for the translation delay.

## **VI. Conclusion**

With the above detailed research and synthesis of language ideology interviews and policy reviews in Singapore and Indonesia, I have shown that a strong way forward with the goal of protecting minority languages and facilitating stable diglossia is through discursive associations with national identity. I posit that updating national policy to better reflect the daily language practices of speakers and their associations with the value of language can help to make language revitalization a topic of conversation, and hopefully, a reality.

I would like to note that the suggestions made in the thesis will not alone stop language shift and language loss. Economic, social, historical, and a host of other factors play key roles in determining the future status of languages like Javanese; a role that is even more precarious for the smaller heritage languages the hegemony in this thesis have sought to represent. However, my own discussions with consultants as well as previous literature shows that official designation under policy can be crucial in the preservation of a language, sometimes even more so than sheer speaker population size (Ravindranath & Cohn, 2014).

In terms of further research, I would be curious to see how policy has played out in other countries globally. Looking for other perspectives from smaller language communities may find that relative hegemony actually dilutes the urgency to project a language's use, but this phenomena was outside the scope for this project. Additionally, looking for trends in successful language policy as it correlates to different orientations as proposed by Ruíz would give helpful insight in future language planning endeavors.

Ultimately, this research underscores the existence of nationalist ideologies in daily language use and highlights the unequal distribution of language prestige towards state and heritage languages as a result of these ideologies. Language status, acquisition, and planning institutions owe it to the heritage communities they represent to encourage and protect the minority languages they have; ideally through incorporating these language practices into larger notions of the nation itself. I hope that by showcasing the links in how speakers follow, conceptualise, and enact language policy, policy makers and governments alike will see the opportunities to support more pluralistic language practices as a way to honor the past and protect the future.

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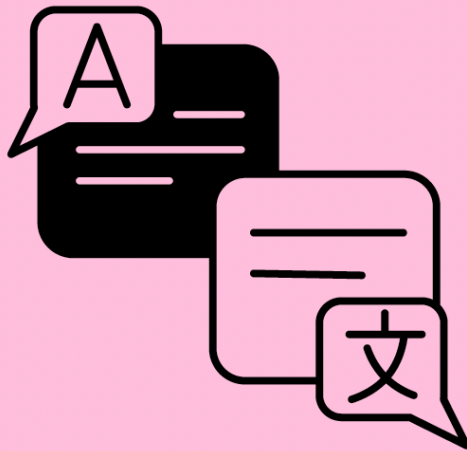
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## VIII.Appendix

### *A - Recruitment Flyer For Singapore*

# CAN WE TALK?

**Participants needed for undergraduate sociolinguistic research investigating language practices of Singaporeans!**



## DETAILS:

- Casual interviews between 30-45 minutes, on the topics of :
  - Singlish Use
  - Conversational Habits
  - Language policy & education in Singapore
- Compensation: 20 SGD per interview
- Flexible Location & Time
- Dates: 20/07/24- 30/07/24
- Confidential & Anonymous
- No prior linguistics knowledge required!

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Researcher: Hannah Humphreys, (she/her)



WhatsApp: +1 (352) 316-8803



Email : [hhumphr1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:hhumphr1@swarthmore.edu)

### Interested?

Scan the QR code and fill out the form, or contact the information above.



### REQUIREMENTS

- Proficient in English
- Between the Ages of 18-25
- Current University Student
- Resident of Singapore for 10+ years



B - Sample of Question Outline  
(Information Substituted for Indonesia in Malang)

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Personal Demographics

1. Name
  2. Age
  3. Gender
  4. University
  5. Subject of Study
  6. How long they have lived in Singapore (min 10 years)
- 

How long has the family been in Singapore?

How do you ethnically identify? And your parents?

**What languages do you speak at home/ growing up with your parents?**

- What languages did they speak between themselves, and growing up as well?

**Personal Identity and Language Choice:**

Is there a relationship between language and your personal identity? In what situations do you find yourself using different languages?

What factors influence your language choice?

Do you consider yourself multilingual? How does speaking multiple languages play a role in your personal identity?

**Shared Heritage and Language Preservation:**

What role does language play in preserving cultural heritage?

Does the Mother Tongue Policy make an impact on national identity in Singapore?

How important is it to you personally to preserve indigenous languages or regional dialects? Why?

**Perception of National Language:**

How do you feel about the status and use of English in Singapore?

Do you believe bilingualism effectively represents the national identity of Singapore?

Do you use Singlish? If so, how would you describe your Singlish use? When, with whom, and why do you use Singlish?

### **Impact of Language Policy:**

**How aware are you of the legal language policies in place here in Singapore?** How do you think language policies in Singapore have influenced language use and attitudes among different generations?

What do you think the purpose of national language policy campaigns are? (For example the Speak Mandarin Campaign in the 70's?)

Have you personally experienced any effects of language policy in educational or professional settings?

### **Diglossia and Language Hierarchy:**

How do you perceive the hierarchy among languages in your country? Are certain languages seen as more prestigious or functional than others? Specifically, is there a difference in the spaces of use for Chinese (Mandarin), English, and Singlish?

How do Malay and Tamil take up space linguistically in Singapore (meaning how, if at all, are they used?)

### **Media and Language Representation:**

What languages do you encounter most frequently in the media (TV, newspapers, online content)? How does this reflect societal language preferences?

How do you think media representation affects language attitudes and practices among the population?

### **Language in Educational Settings:**

How have language policies affected language instruction and learning in schools and universities?

Do you think there are disparities in access to education based on language proficiency or policy?



### **Language in Academic Disciplines:**

In your experience, which languages are most commonly used in academic discourse and research in [Indonesia/Singapore]?

How does language choice impact knowledge dissemination and academic opportunities?

### **In the Office**

Do you consider that some languages are more important than others in the workplace? Which is the order of importance of proficiency in each language?

What are, in your personal opinion, the goals of language policy here in Singapore? Do you see multilingualism as it stands now continuing into the future- how or how not?

What values of Singaporean identity and culture do you think are reflected in the national language policy?

Are there flaws in the Singaporean Mother Tongue Policy? Anything that could be done to improve the system?

*C - Sample of an Interview Transcript*

I am “SPEAKER 01” and the consultant is “SPEAKER 00”

SPEAKER\_01

All right. Hello. This is an interview with [NAME], right?

I asked her, could you just go ahead and say your name, age, university, gender, and subject of study?

SPEAKER\_00

I'm Kai En. I'm from [NUS]. I'm [XX] years old. Soon to be year three.

I identify as female. And anything else?

I don't know.

How long have you lived in Singapore?

My whole life. I was born here.

SPEAKER\_01

Perfect. All right, good stuff.

All right, cool. So just to get the ball rolling, could you tell me a little bit about your languages?

What languages do you speak? Where do you speak from?

SPEAKER\_00

Essentially, I think I'm a pretty balanced bilingual.

I speak English and Mandarin Chinese.

My family speaks the Teochew dialect, but I am unable to understand or speak it.

Generally speaking, when it comes to dialects in Singapore, I only pick up bits and pieces from conversations with friends.

I feel like I use English and Mandarin Chinese quite interchangeably.

Because at home, I tend to use English with my siblings and Chinese with my family, my parents, and my grandparents.

Because it's difficult for me to use dialect with them.

So it's good that I'm able to communicate with them in Chinese as well.

When it comes to my friends, I think it depends because sometimes we just happen to be in a situation where I'm speaking Chinese with them.

Some of my friends are more comfortable with that, and I'm cool with that.

Generally speaking, individually, I feel that when I use social media, I would default more to English.

Unless I happen to know that I'm speaking to someone who is more fluent in Mandarin.

In which case, I'll be communicating with them in Mandarin.

So most of my social media consumption is still done primarily through English.

But sometimes I use sites like Billy Billy, which is more Chinese-focused.

So I feel that I have somewhat of a balance, but still primarily towards English in the sense of the internet sphere and stuff.

My parents use both English and Chinese with me.

So growing up, that's how I picked up the languages and I went to school.

And I think most people know that Singapore has this mother tongue policy where you basically have to go through class specifically for that language.

I understand that there are different modes of education in Singapore.

But for most Singaporeans like myself, we tend to go to school in primarily English.

Because I think that most people know that in the past, Singapore has had Chinese-focused schools or Malay-focused schools, for example.

But most of us still go through education in primary English.

But the thing is that for me, in secondary school, I went to an SAP school, which is a special assistance program, essentially.

And the way the government frames it is mainly as a way to maintain the Chinese culture in Singapore for students who happen to have an interest in it.

So although we still use primary English there, there is still more focus on learning Chinese culture.

Because we happen to have a class that's meant to teach us the history and different aspects of the culture, like opera or tea ceremonies, these kinds of things.

SPEAKER\_01

And so you would say that you learned both Chinese and English at home and at school?

Fairly balanced.

Moving on, when you're in a more open setting, what factors influence your language choice?

SPEAKER\_00

I think it mostly depends on who I'm talking to.

Like if I'm talking to people who are around the same age as me and it's more of an academic kind of situation, I would tend to use English.

Because most of my technical knowledge is still in English.

But in more casual settings, especially intimate settings with my family, I feel like I would subconsciously use Chinese with them.

Because it feels like a very home language to me.

For me, I feel that a lot of people in Singapore, if they're of Chinese descent, tend to use English and Chinese in the same sentence, like code switching.

So for me, it might just come subconsciously, I use Chinese when speaking English or vice versa.

SPEAKER\_01

And could you be referring to Singlish in that code switching or is it distinct?

SPEAKER\_00

I guess people would call it Singlish.

For me, it's just kind of like, if I'm speaking in Chinese and I don't know the Chinese word for it, I'll just say English and hopefully the point gets across.

But if I'm speaking to my grandparents or something, obviously I can't expect them to know the specific English terms.

So I would try and just break down my ideas in Chinese rather than use English with them.

SPEAKER\_01

So would you say that you consider yourself multilingual?

SPEAKER\_00

I guess. Yeah, multilingual, specifically, just two languages for me.

SPEAKER\_01

And how would you say that that plays a role in your personal identity?

SPEAKER\_00

I feel like, the thing is that with Singaporeans, some of them, because of how they come to learn their mother tongue, they don't really like using their mother tongue.

But for me, it feels like I'm not the best at it, but I feel like I can still hold conversations.

So to me, that is a sense of like, wow, I'm able to communicate with people in more than one language.

And it feels good to know that I haven't lost this part of my identity.

Because to me, I feel like I place some emphasis on my cultural background, even though I know that I'm not able to speak my dialect.

So I think that it's even more important to me that I'm at least able to use Mandarin Chinese so that I at least have some connection to my culture.

Because I think a lot of people know that the younger generations, they may not be using the dialect so much now, like Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese.

It tends to be going down, especially in Singapore.

But I think that some people who currently are picking up for media consumption, I feel, but generally it's still going on a downward trend.

So to me, it's very important that I'm still able to speak Mandarin Chinese.

Because it's something that makes me me.

It's a bit difficult to explain because I feel like identity is very nebulous.