English as a 'mother tongue' in Singapore

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ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the role of English and what it represents to speakers of the three major ethnic groups across three different age groups in Singapore. This paper reports a study conducted on 436 Singaporeans of different age and ethnic groups, looking at their language use and perceptions of English as a marker of their identity. The Singapore government has always been cautious about according the 'mother tongue' status to English. The latest 2010 census however reveals that over 30 per cent of Singaporeans report English to be the primary language used in the home, an increase from about 20 per cent in 2000. What remains unclear is the extent to which English has penetrated the psyche of the everyday Singaporean. The results in this study suggest that English in Singapore has to be reconceptualized as a new mother tongue, and to do so requires a reconfiguration of what it takes for a language to be a 'mother tongue.' This paper will take this on by adapting Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson's (1989) and Rampton's (1995) objections and definitions of the term, and propose a set of conditions that can be used to define the term *mother tongue*.

INTRODUCTION

What makes a language a 'mother tongue' in Singapore? This question can be answered from two completely different angles. The first and also commonplace and easy way to answer this question is to take it from the perspective of language policy. Singapore has three mother tongue languages assigned by the state. Mandarin-Chinese, Malay, and Tamil are the designated mother tongues of the Chinese, Malay, and Indian communities respectively. This assignment of mother tongues is however not based on any sound linguistic criteria, and I will not, in this paper, rehearse the state rhetoric on the mother tongues at length. The second, and linguistic way to answer the question of what makes a mother tongue in Singapore requires an exposition of what defines the term *mother tongue* using linguistic criteria. This exposition however is by no means straightforward. Numerous linguists have contested this term (e.g. Coulmas 1981; Paikeday 1985; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1989; Davies 1991; Rampton 1995; Bonfiglio 2010) and many have expressed reservations for the use of the term *mother tongue*, especially in multilingual contexts. The task of this paper is not to contribute to the existing literature by challenging the use of the term *mother tongue*, but rather to unpack the different constructions and present, for my purpose here, a working definition of this term that I can use and apply to the Singaporean context. I will, in particular, take on Rampton's (1995) objections and reconfigurations of the term *mother tongue*, and at the same time, rework Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson's (1989) definition of the term, and propose a set of conditions that can be used to define 'mother tongue.' Applying these conditions to Singapore, I argue that English can and should be thought of as a mother tongue for Singaporeans.

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As mentioned earlier, the mother tongues in Singapore are state-assigned, but English is not one of the languages designated as a mother tongue. English serves the function of being the official language, language of administration, and the medium of education in the city-state of Singapore. English is also the lingua franca, serving as the link language of communication for Singaporeans of different ethnic groups. Despite the importance of English in Singapore, the state policy has always been cautious about according English the status of mother tongue for Singaporeans. This in fact goes against the realities of language use in Singapore, as the use of English is so widespread that, according to the Census of Singapore (2010), 32.3 per cent of the population claimed English as their dominant home language, an increase from 23 per cent in 2000, 18.8 per cent in 1990 and 11.6 per cent in 1980. This suggests an increasing trend of English replacing the other languages in the home domain – a point also made by a few others (e.g. Pakir 2000; Lim 2009; Wee 2002; 2013). I am not suggesting here that we can simply use the numbers from this census and make a move toward assigning English as a mother tongue for Singaporeans. Home language use is only one of many other conditions for a language to be considered a mother tongue. What this paper aims to find out is the extent to which English has penetrated the psyche of the everyday Singaporean to the point that it can be considered a mother tongue for Singaporeans. Has English become the language Singaporeans use to express their national, ethnic and cultural identities? Are there differences in language use and representations across Singaporeans of different age groups and ethnic groups? This paper thus investigates the role of English and what it represents to speakers of the three major ethnic groups across three different age groups in Singapore. This paper reports a study conducted on 436 Singaporeans, looking at their language use and perceptions of English as a marker of their identity.

CONSTRUCTING THE 'MOTHER TONGUE'

Linguists who have written about the 'mother tongue' (who very often also tend to discuss the concept 'native speaker' in the same breath, primarily because of the kinship metaphor they both share), tend to find the underlying folkloric notion of the genetic ownership of language problematic (Bonfiglio 2010: 1). This genetic ownership is problematic because it automatically attributes authority to the speaker who has been presumably born into a particular culture and language, and who has also acquired the language in question as his or her first language. The discomfort and dissatisfaction scholars have with this term have been well illustrated (e.g. Coulmas 1981; Paikeday 1985; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1989; Davies 1991; Rampton 1995; Bonfiglio 2010), and the discomfort lies in what the terms *mother tongue* and *native speaker* imply. The idea of being a 'native speaker' of a language and as a logical consequence, having the language as one's 'mother tongue' implies at least five things, and I quote Rampton (1995: 336–337) at length here:

1. A particular language is inherited, either through genetic endowment or through birth into the social group stereotypically associated with it.
2. Inheriting a language means being able to speak it well.
3. People either are or are not native /mother tongue speakers.
4. Being a native speaker involves the comprehensive grasp of a language.
5. Just as people are usually citizens of one country, people are native speakers of one mother tongue.

Each of the above five implications of what makes the term 'mother tongue' or a 'native speaker' is inherently problematic. For one, languages are not genetically endowed, but rather acquired through social settings. Being born into social group X does not necessarily mean that one will speak language X well; and not being born into social group X does not mean that one cannot speak language X well, as acquisition of a language can take place outside of the social group. One also cannot assume that a comprehensive grasp of the language comes with being a 'native speaker' of the language. We all have, in our daily encounters, known at least one so-called 'native speaker of English' who cannot write or speak better than many 'non-native' speakers. Also, the assumption that a 'native speaker' has comprehensive competence of his or her mother tongue perpetuates the view that if one knows more than one language, one is less likely to be competent in one, if not both (e.g. Hamers and Blanc 1989; Martin-Jones and Romaine 1986; Baker 1988). It is bizarre to conceive of the idea that there is a limit to the number of mother tongues one may have as numerous multilingual nations in the world see children born in multilingual environments who will lay claim to multiple mother tongues. There is no doubt that the terms 'mother tongue' and 'native speaker,' when laden with such assumptions, do not resonate with linguistic realities. To believe in the above presuppositions is, to some extent, privileging the Chomskyan view that a person's inherent, internal psychological knowledge of a language is paramount, and thereby ignoring the social forces that contribute to language acquisition and use. Rampton's solution is to do away with these terms and move away from the idea that language is a genetic property, but rather, work from the view that language is a social activity. Rampton thus offers a framework that replaces 'native speaker' and 'mother tongue' with the terms *language expertise, language inheritance*, and *language affiliation* (Rampton 1990, 1995; Leung, Harris and Rampton 1997).

The notion *language expertise* refers to the proficiency of a speaker in a language. Rampton (1995: 340–341) makes it clear that expertise is to be differentiated from identification. A speaker can be an expert in a language but not feel any sense of identification to the language. Also, expertise is learned, not inherent or inherited, and this allows speakers to be experts in more than one language. More importantly, expertise can be certified and assessed, reviewed and disputed. Fundamentally, expertise emphasizes the speaker's knowledge of the language instead of where the speaker comes from, or the community in which the speaker is born into.

There is no denying that there is an affective element in the construction of the term 'mother tongue.' While the term *language expertise* does not cover that affective aspect, the next two terms, *language affiliation* and *language inheritance*, bring to the fore the emotional, historical, and social ties a speaker has toward a language. *Language affiliation* refers to the attachment or identification that a speaker feels toward a language, whether or not the speaker is attached to the community in which the language is spoken. *Language inheritance* then refers to the ways in which a speaker can be born into a language community or cultural tradition, and it does not matter if the speaker does not have language expertise in that language, or feel any affiliation toward that language. In other words, one can simply inherit language X by virtue of being born into the tradition, but yet not speak the language or even like that language.

Rampton's idea of using neutral terminology to capture the essence of 'mother tongue' is not uncommon. Stephens (1976, cited in Bonfiglio 2010: 12) reports the census collection in southern Carinthia between 1923 and 1959, which asked questions not about mother

tongue or native language, but the participants' thinking language, cultural language, everyday language, and household language. Indian censuses of old also refrained from using the term 'mother tongue.' It evolved from 'the language spoken by the individual from the cradle' in 1881 to 'parent language' in 1891 to 'language ordinarily used' in 1901 to 'language ordinarily spoken in the household' in 1991 (Pattanayak 1998: 125). The wisdom behind these old censuses concurs with Rampton's framework in that there are a few important elements that need to be addressed when dealing with a speaker's 'mother tongue,' and they are: language of the household, language most frequently used, language that represents heritage or culture, and finally, language that represents one's self.

Instead of coming up with a list of terms to replace the term 'mother tongue,' Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1989) address the problem of the term 'mother tongue' by refining its definition. According to Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1989: 452–453), one's 'mother tongue' can be determined by any of the four following criteria, namely, origin, competence, function and identification. Origin refers to the language(s) one first learned. Competence refers the language(s) one knows best. One's mother tongue can also be defined by function, which is the language(s) one uses most. Finally, the 'mother tongue' can be determined by identification, which is the language(s) one identifies with as well as the language(s) one is identified as a native speaker by others. As one can choose to think about one's mother tongue by any of these criteria, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson further state that one not only can have several mother tongues, one's mother tongue can also change during the course of one's life-time.

It is quite clear that both Rampton (1990; 1995) and Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1989) are really talking about different aspects of the same thing, and using different terminologies. There are also some problems and implications to some of the terms they have proposed. Using some elements of what both Rampton and Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson have offered, I present here a refinement of the definition of 'mother tongue.' In my definition, one's 'mother tongue' can be conceptualized by one's *language inheritance, language expertise, language function*, and *language identification*. What I have done here is to have adopted two of Rampton's terms, and two from Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, and I explicate my four conditions in more detail in the following.

The first condition for defining 'mother tongue' is by looking at one's *language inheritance*. Language inheritance refers to the linguistic repertoire that the child is exposed to from birth. I stress the word 'repertoire,' for in the case of a child born to multilingual parents, the child's language inheritance does not pertain to a single language, but a whole set of languages that the parents use when communicating with the child. Rampton's idea of language inheritance implies that one's language inheritance stems from a monolithic, monolingual community or cultural tradition, of which one is necessarily endowed. In multilingual communities, this construction is perhaps inadequate. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, on the other hand, view one's mother tongue from an acquisition perspective. One's mother tongue, according to them, can be defined by 'origin,' which is the first language that one acquires, presumably from one's mother. The term 'origin' is problematic as it connotes an essentialistic link between the speaker and the cultural group or community that he or she is born into. It therefore suggests that a child must necessarily own, learn, and ultimately speak the language of the group or community. To refer to a language origin, by default, denounces all other possibilities for having a mother tongue that is not 'original.' In my conception of language inheritance, there is no reference to an

origin. A speaker therefore can inherit a language or languages, but this same speaker has the right not to accept the inheritance.

One's mother tongue can also be defined by a second condition, namely, *language expertise*. This is an uncontroversial term, referring to, as Rampton says, one's proficiency in a language. This is exactly also how Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson define what they refer to as *competence*. I would however not use the use of the term *competence* to avoid allusion to the Chomskyan notion of linguistic competence. Under this condition of language expertise therefore, one can say that one's mother tongue is the language that one is most proficient in, and expertise can be assessed by proficiency in speaking, writing, and comprehension.

The third condition for defining 'mother tongue' is *language function*. Language function refers to a set of pertinent and personal domains of which a language is used most. The domains that I am referring to here are not the domains of work or school, for very often, the languages used in these domains are not within one's control or choice. What I am referring to here are domains which one can choose which language to use, and these domains are personal. Language function therefore can be teased out in four main ways, the first of which is the *language of the home*. The language of the home is the language that one chooses to communicate with members living in the same household. It is important to note that this is quite separate from *language inheritance*, which refers to the language repertoire one is exposed to within a community. One also cannot assume that members of the same language community live in the same household. One's household could well be made up of different members ranging from partners to siblings to housemates. The next language function is what I will call the *language of leisure*, which points to the function of language in one's leisurely entertainment. This refers to one's choice of language in a whole gamut of leisurely activities such as watching movies and TV shows, listening to the radio, engaging in online games and so on. The next function is what I will name the *language of intimacy*, and this refers to the language chosen to communicate with one's closest friends and significant other. This is, I must emphasize, quite separate from the language used to communicate with one's parents. Parents, to some extent, set the linguistic medium, and offspring very often do not have the autonomy to make a linguistic choice in a parent-child interaction. As close friends or partners in a relationship however, the language choice is negotiable, and one typically can choose to converse in a language that both parties are most comfortable with. Finally, the fourth way in which language function can be defined is what I will call the *language of the self*. This is the language that one uses when one is talking to oneself, for example, when one counts.

The fourth and final condition for defining 'mother tongue' is *language identification*. Language identification is the language used by a speaker for community identification, and this community can be ethnic, cultural, or national. More importantly, language identification also takes into account the language a speaker uses for self-identification; in other words, the language that a speaker believes is his or her own language. This is quite different from Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson's construction of *identification*, for, by their definition, not only does the speaker need to identify with the language, he or she requires the identification from others. In this regard, a speaker will necessarily always seek acceptance from other 'native speakers' who, for reason of birth, status or color, have the authority to decide who has the right to own the 'mother tongue.' This takes away the autonomy from the speaker, and strips the speaker of the right to determine his or own mother tongue. Rampton, on the other hand, returns the power to the speaker. Although

slightly different, Rampton's idea of *language affiliation* emphasizes an affective element – a liking, a love, a passion toward a language – and it gives the speaker the autonomy to act on that affect. The problem then is that this allows one to have an affiliation for a language that one is not proficient in or has no ties with. Rampton's idea of *affiliation* makes it quite possible for anyone to say that one has affiliation to French for some perceived romantic reasons, or a passion for Korean because one wants to ride the K-wave. Yet most would object to allowing a speaker who has this affiliation for French or Korean to claim these languages as mother tongues. *Language identification*, as I will define it, is simply the ways in which the speaker uses the language for identification, be it ethnic, cultural, national, or self. This identification does not require any external recognition, nor does it require any basis in cultural heritage.

In this paper, I use the terms *language inheritance*, *language expertise*, *language function*, and *language identification* as conditions for a language being a 'mother tongue,' and the 'mother tongue' can be defined as such. I will detail, in the section following the next, a questionnaire designed using these four conditions, and show how English can be conceived as a mother tongue for Singaporeans.

'MOTHER TONGUES' IN SINGAPORE

Can English really be a mother tongue for Singaporeans? Much has been written about the mother tongues in Singapore from the language planning and policy angle (e.g. Kuo and Jernudd 1994; Ho and Alsagoff 1998; Gupta 1998; Wee and Bokhorst-Heng 2005; Stroud and Wee 2007; Lim 2009). Numerous others have talked about the growing importance of English in Singapore (e.g. Platt and Weber 1980; Pakir 1991; Wee 2003; Vaish et al. 2010). Yet few come close to suggesting that English can be a mother tongue in Singapore, and fewer providing empirical evidence to support the point. Some others touch on the issue, but not directly using the term *mother tongue*. Bokhorst-Heng et al. (2010), for instance, look at English in Singapore in terms of linguistic ownership. To claim ownership of a language is to 'assert a specific relationship between the speaker of the language and the language itself' (Wee 2002: 283) to the degree that speakers 'project themselves as legitimate speakers with authority over the language' (Higgins: 2003: 615). Using Higgins' (2003) model of linguistic ownership, which is based on grammatical and acceptability judgments, Bokhorst-Heng et al. (2010) conclude that Singaporeans are legitimate owners of English as they can confidently make judgments on the correctness of grammatical sentences. What the authors have shown, in fact, is that Singaporeans have expertise in English, but say nothing about the speakers' identification to the language.

Wee (2002) is one of the earliest to broach the idea of giving English the status of mother tongue, not for all in Singapore, but specifically for the Eurasian community. The Eurasians, a category originally created by the colonial bureaucracy, refers to 'colonial subjects who were offspring of European fathers and Asian mothers' (Rappa 2000: 157). Wee argues that it is not possible for the state to make English the mother tongue because of the heavy stakes the state has laid in its ethnic and mother tongue policies. The central thesis of the state's argument is that the mother tongues are necessary because they act as cultural anchors, preserving one's Asian heritage, beliefs and traditions. They also act as shields against the undesirable Western influences that come with the use of English. Since the very construction of the mother tongue is for the preservation of values, then making English a mother tongue would require the state to concede that there is no need for the

other mother tongues to serve as cultural ballast. If there is no need for cultural anchors, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil, are useless as official languages. This undermines the very core of the state language policy.

A decade later in 2013, Wee comes back with the same point, but argues with a slightly different tack. Wee (2013) suggests that there are signs that English is replacing other languages as the home language, as shown in census data. Wee also argues for the need to rethink Singapore as an Asian society, and if one can do so, one can then 'abandon the dichotomy between English and the official mother tongues,' and therefore free up English to take on the official role of 'mother tongue.' He further adds that there are signs that Chinese Singaporeans have difficulty coping with Mandarin Chinese in schools, despite the fact that it is a designated mother tongue for the Chinese students, suggesting the possibility of taking away Mandarin-Chinese as a mother tongue. He concludes that the above are 'good reasons for why the government should reconsider its decision to deny English the status of an official mother tongue' (Wee 2013: 112). Wee's argument has suggested the need to look closely at the linguistic realities facing the Singaporean community – from language use in the home to language expertise of mother tongues to identification of national identity.

As can be seen, the only way to conceive of English as mother tongue in this city-state is to move away completely from the state's construction of 'mother tongue' in this uniquely Singaporean fashion, and think of the 'mother tongue' solely in linguistic terms, and as I proposed earlier, by the conditions of *language inheritance, language expertise, language function*, and *language identification*.

DATA COLLECTION

This study involves a total of 436 participants answering a set of questions about their language use and identification. The questionnaire was administered by the author and her team of research assistants, who would meet with each participant individually. Each session lasted about 15–20 minutes. Most of the participants were students at the author's university and the students' network of family members and friends. The data was collected over a period of six months in 2012. Participants were grouped by their ethnic groups, across three age groups. A total of 480 participants were initially recruited in this exercise, though despite efforts to ensure that all the questions in the questionnaire were answered, only 436 returned fully completed questionnaires. The other 44 incomplete questionnaires were therefore discarded and disregarded for the analysis. Of the 436 participants whose responses I will analyse and report in the following sections, 221 were Chinese Singaporeans, 126 were Malay Singaporeans and 89 were Indian Singaporeans. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the participants' ethnic group and age group.

The participants were all English speakers and all had at least 12 years of formal education, at the time of data collection, they were aged between 18 and 80. As many Singaporeans, especially those from the Chinese and Indian communities, would have come from different linguistic backgrounds, some care was taken in the choice of participants to ensure some degree of comparability. All the Chinese participants were proficient speakers of Mandarin, though many of the older participants also spoke other languages such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese or Bazaar Malay. All the Malay participants were speakers of Malay, and some of them, especially the older speakers, indicated that they also spoke languages such as Javanese and Boyanese. As the Indian community in Singapore

Table 1. Breakdown of participants' ethnicity and age group (by number)

	Chinese	Malay	Indian
Age: 18–29	115	65	34
Age: 30–49	63	32	30
Age: 50–80	43	29	25

N = 436

consists of different Indian linguistic groups, only Indian participants who spoke Tamil were recruited for this study, for the sake of consistency. The reason for choosing Tamil speakers in this study is because they form the majority of the Indian community in Singapore, and Tamil also happens to be the official designated mother tongue of the Indian community.

Education level of the participants was not controlled so as to maximize the number of participants recruited in this study, though the questionnaire did ask for that piece of information. As such, in terms of education level, 98.7 per cent of the participants aged between 18–29 had a post-secondary education. In contrast, 78.6 per cent of the participants aged between 30–49 and 28.09 per cent of those aged 50 and above had schooling beyond secondary school. The participants also came from varied occupations. While most of the older participants had already retired, they previously held jobs in business, education, manufacturing and service industries. Besides the youngest group of participants who consisted primarily of tertiary students or undergraduates, the rest of the participants came from a wide range of occupational backgrounds.

The banding of the age groups was not entirely arbitrarily done. The categorizations in the age groups were loosely based on some landmark events in the history of language policy in Singapore. The linguistic ecology before language management policies took place in 1965 was far more diverse, with myriad languages spoken and used, and Bazaar Malay serving as the lingua franca. English was instituted as the official language of Singapore only with the coming to power of the ruling government in 1965. This would mean that the participants who were born before 1965 were most likely to be multilingual (beyond the four official languages of Singapore) and would have experienced their childhood in a linguistically diverse community, and presumably had less formal education in English. These participants form the 50–80 age group. In the same vein, participants born in the 1960s and 1970s (age band 30–49) can be said to have experienced their childhood in the transitional phase of the education policy – where there were still schools in the Chinese, Malay and Indian mediums, but dominated by English-based schools. This group of participants would most likely have had more exposure to English than Bazaar Malay (since English had already become the official language and used in more domains), compared to the older group of participants. Singaporeans of the youngest age group however would have undergone (or be undergoing) their education within the well-oiled bilingual education machinery of the current system. The youngest group, one can expect, would be effectively bilingual in both English and their designated mother tongues, and therefore have stronger affiliation to English and their mother tongues as compared to the older participants.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In addition to basic questions requesting information such as the participants' age, ethnic group, nationality, education level and occupation, the questionnaire was designed with 20 questions to elicit responses to the participants' language inheritance, language expertise, language function, and language identification. Seven questions were asked in relation to *language inheritance*. The above questions pertain directly to language inheritance as they ask information of one's linguistic lineage, from one's grandparents to one's parents, and also the transmission of that language to the next generation. The questions are:

1. What language do you use to speak to your parents?
2. What language do you use to speak to your grandparents?
3. What language do/would you use to speak to your children?
4. What is the language of your paternal grandfather?
5. What is the language of your paternal grandmother?
6. What is the language of your maternal grandfather?
7. What is the language of your maternal grandmother?

The next set of three questions was asked in relation to *language expertise*. These three questions seek to find out, not only the speaker's perceived proficiency in a language, but also the speaker's ability to present an extended narrative such as telling a story, and writing – the two skills in a language that signal expertise. The questions are:

8. What is the language you are most proficient in?
9. What is the language you will use to tell a story?
10. What language would you use to write a diary?

The next set of seven questions were asked in relation to *language function*, and they are:

11. What is the main language used in your home?
12. When watching TV, what language channel are you most likely to tune in to?
13. When listening to the radio, what language station are you most likely to tune in to?
14. What is the language you use to speak to your spouse or significant other?
15. What language do you use with your best friends?
16. What language do you count in?
17. What language do you use to speak to yourself?

These seven questions seek to tease out language function in the four main ways as explicated earlier in the paper. The first of which is the *language of the home*, with a question asking specifically for the language used in the household. The next language function is the *language of leisure*, which points to the function of language in one's leisurely entertainment. I therefore have two questions asking for the participants' language of choice in TV and radio programs. To tease out one's *language of intimacy*, I have two questions asking the participants the language they choose to communicate with one's closest friends and significant other. Finally, the fourth way in which language function can be defined is the *language of the self*, and this is done by asking the participants the language that they use when talking to themselves, or very simply, when they counts.

The affective and identification aspect of 'mother tongue' can then be affirmed with the following three questions that were asked in relation to *language identification*, and they are:

18. What language defines you as a member of your ethnic group?
19. What language defines you as a Singaporean?
20. What language, when you hear it spoken, you can identify as your own language?

These questions deal directly with the identification aspect of language. Questions were therefore asked to elicit the language that identifies one as a member outside the home domain, specifically, one's ethnic group, and nationality. Finally, and most importantly, the final question goes beyond the boundaries of family, community and nation, and asks specifically for the language that one uses to build one's own identity.

RESULTS

The results of this study will be presented in four subsections, starting with *language inheritance*, followed by *language expertise*, *language function*, and finally *language identification*. Many of the responses from the Chinese participants include languages such as Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese, Cantonese, and so on, and I will group them together and refer to them as 'others.' For the sake of consistency, the 'others' category will also be used classify responses related to Indian languages such as Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu and Bengali, as they form a very small number. The same goes for Javanese, Bahasa Indonesia, and Boyanese, the other non-Malay languages reported by the Malay participants.

Language inheritance

English does not look like a language of inheritance for Singaporeans, if one looks solely at the languages of the participants' grandparents. A large majority of the participants, across all age groups and ethnic groups, report a non-English language as the language of their grandparents. Table 2 shows the responses of the participants to the questions on the language of their paternal and maternal grandparents.

Over 88 per cent of the Chinese participants on average, across all age groups, report a non-Mandarin Chinese language as the language of their grandparents. These non-Mandarin Chinese languages include Teochew, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainanese, among others. Similarly, over 90 per cent of the Malay participants report Malay to the language of their grandparents. One however sees other languages such as Boyanese and Javanese reported by the older Malay participants, reflecting a more diverse language inheritance from the past generations. Similarly, a large majority of the Indian participants report Tamil to be the language of their grandparents, though the older Indian participants also list other Indian languages such as Malayalam and Telugu as their language inheritance.

When it comes to the actual languages used to converse with parents and grandparents however, the situation is slightly different. The use of English increases with the youngest group of participants. Table 3 shows the languages used to converse with parents and grandparents.

Over half of the young Chinese participants report English to be the language used when conversing with their parents, and another 40 per cent report using Mandarin-Chinese.

Table 2. Responses to questions on the language of paternal and maternal grandparents (%)

		Paternal grandfather		Paternal grandmother		Maternal grandfather		Maternal grandmother	
		Mandarin	Others	Mandarin	Others	Mandarin	Others	Mandarin	Others
Chinese N = 221	Young	15.8%	80.0%	19.1%	79.1%	19.1%	79.1%	19.3%	79.8%
	Mid	8.2%	85.2%	8.1%	88.7%	8.1%	88.7%	8.2%	88.5%
	Old	2.5%	97.5%	2.5%	97.5%	2.5%	97.5%	2.5%	95.0%
		Malay	Others	Malay	Others	Malay	Others	Malay	Others
Malay N = 127	Young	91.9%	6.5%	95.2%	3.2%	95.2%	3.2%	93.3%	6.7%
	Mid	60.0%	40.0%	75.0%	25.0%	75.0%	25.0%	83.3%	16.7%
	Old	53.8%	46.2%	66.7%	33.3%	66.7%	33.3%	84.6%	15.4%
		Tamil	Others	Tamil	Others	Tamil	Others	Tamil	Others
Indian N = 89	Young	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
	Mid	62.5%	36.5%	71.4%	28.6%	62.5%	37.5%	62.5%	37.5%
	Old	72.7%	27.3%	63.6%	36.4%	81.8%	18.2%	81.8%	18.2%

N = 436

Table 3. Languages used to converse with parents and grandparents (%)

		Language with parents			Language with grandparents		
		English	Mandarin	Others	English	Mandarin	Others
Chinese N = 221	Young	57.0%	40.5%	2.5%	3.4%	60.2%	36.4%
	Mid	19.0%	40.6%	40.3%	5.7%	18.9%	75.5%
	Old	2.3%	23.3%	74.4%	2.9%	2.9%	94.3%
		English	Malay	Others	English	Malay	Others
Malay N = 127	Young	20.3%	79.7%	0.0%	1.6%	98.4%	0.0%
	Mid	20.0%	80.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
	Old	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	83.3%	16.7%
		English	Tamil	Others	English	Tamil	Others
Indian N = 89	Young	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
	Mid	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	14.3%	71.4%	14.3%
	Old	8.3%	66.7%	25.0%	9.1%	63.6%	27.3%

N = 436

When conversing with their grandparents, over 60 per cent of them report using Mandarin-Chinese. This is despite the fact only a very small percentage of the grandparents claim to have Mandarin-Chinese as their language. This trend is striking, especially when compared to the older Chinese participants. English is used only by 19 per cent of the participants in the second age bracket when conversing with their parents, and 40 per cent of them use Mandarin-Chinese, with the other 40 per cent using the other Chinese languages. This is already a shift from the 74 per cent of the oldest participants reporting the use of the other Chinese languages as the language used with their parents. A similar, if not more pronounced trend is observed for the language used with grandparents. Clearly, we have a case of language shift even within the domain of language inheritance. For the Chinese community, the languages that are inherited from the grandparents are not in fact always the languages used in (grand)parent-child interactions. This situation is, to a large extent,

Table 4. Languages used to converse with child (%)

		English	Mandarin	Others
Chinese	Young	67.6%	29.7%	2.7%
N = 221	Mid	56.8%	31.8%	11.4%
	Old	44.2%	25.6%	30.2%
		English	Malay	Others
Malay	Young	73.7%	26.3%	0.0%
N = 127%	Mid	83.3%	16.7%	0.0%
	Old	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%
		English	Tamil	Others
Indian	Young	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
N = 89	Mid	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Old	33.0%	60.7%	6.3%

N = 436

due to the success of the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*, a language-planning program launched in 1979 by the government to quell the use of the non-Mandarin Chinese languages. The aim of the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* is to encourage the Singaporean Chinese community to speak Mandarin-Chinese as the common language, while attempting to eliminate all other non-Mandarin Chinese languages such as Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, Foochow, and Cantonese. These languages were denigrated by the state as 'dialects,' though in reality, as shown in Table 2, they are really the mother tongues that the different Singaporean Chinese language communities speak.

A similar trend of English being used as the language of parental communication is also observed in the Indian participants. For the young Indian participants especially, English seems to have overtaken Tamil as the language of communication with their parents, as 75 per cent of them report using English and only 25 per cent of them use Tamil when speaking with their parents. And this is not to say that these participants do not use Tamil at all, for 100 per cent of them in fact use Tamil with their grandparents. English does not dominate quite as much for the Malay participants in this instance. Even for the youngest group of Malay participants, only 20 per cent report to be using Malay to communicate with their parents. Malay is still clearly the language to be used when communicating with one's parents and grandparents, and this remains steady across the three different age groups. Just by looking at the picture thus far, one is tempted to say that the language inheritance of the Chinese and Indian communities is likely to be English in the years to come, and Malay remains steadfastly as the language inheritance for the Malay community.

The situation however is not quite so. Participants were also asked the language they use with their child, and for those without children, they were asked what language they would use with their child, if they had one. This is a question asked to determine what language inheritance they would pass on to the next generation. This is therefore really a question about intergenerational transmission. Table 4 shows the responses of the participants to this question.

Clearly, the language inheritance has changed from one generation to the next. There is no doubt that English is the language that participants are using or planning to use with their offspring. Close to 70 per cent of the young Chinese participants want to use English to communicate with their children, as are 74 per cent of the young Malay participants

Table 5. Language(s) that the participants claim to be most proficient (%)

		English	Mandarin	Others	
Chinese	Young	54.0%	34.0%	12.0%	
N = 221	Mid	30.3%	30.8%	38.9%	
	Old	19.3%	25.3%	55.4%	
		English	Malay	Others	
Malay	Young	51.7	41.7%	6.6%	
N = 127	Mid	38.1%	48.1%	13.8%	
	Old	26.1%	66.1%	7.8%	
		English	Tamil	Malay	Others
Indian	Young	55.0%	45.0%	0.0%	55.0%
N = 89	Mid	37.6%	44.1%	17.2%	38.6%
	Old	23.3%	50.6%	17.8%	31.7%

N = 436

and 100 per cent of the young Indian participants. If this is snapshot into the future ten years from now, we are looking at more than three quarters of the next generation of Singaporeans passing on English to their children. As the trend goes, English will become the language of inheritance for many generations to come. And this is not a surprising trend, for as it is, more than half of the older Chinese participants are already using English with their children. This is also the case the Malay and Indian participants, with over 80 per cent of the Malay participants in the second age group, and 100 per cent of the Indian participants in the same age group, reporting to use English to communicate with their children.

Language inheritance therefore does not simply encompass what our parents, grandparents, and our ancestors speak. The language community that we are born into, as illustrated by the above trends, changes from one generation to the next. The choice of passing on a language lies in the parents, and that language becomes the language inheritance of that child. Looking at the trends as presented in this section, it is quite clear that English has slowly taken over from other languages to be the language inheritance of many young and future Singaporeans.

Language expertise

According to the 2010 Singapore's Census of Population, over 79.9 per cent of Singaporeans aged over 15 and above is literate in English. This is not at all surprising, since English is not only a compulsory language in the school curricula, it is also the medium of instruction in all schools since 1987.[1] A fair degree of proficiency in the language is therefore needed for one to survive in the educational system. One can expect therefore that Singaporeans have language expertise in English, and this is indeed reflected in the responses to the questions in the questionnaire on language expertise. Participants were asked to indicate the language that they feel they are most proficient in, the results of which can be seen in Table 5.

For the young participants of all three ethnic groups, there is clear split between English and their respective assigned mother tongues of Mandarin-Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Slightly over 50 per cent of the participants in this age group, across the three ethnic groups, report English to be their most proficient language. At the same time, almost half of

Table 6. Languages used in writing a diary and telling a story (%)

		Telling a story			Writing a diary		
		English	Mandarin	Others	English	Mandarin	Others
Chinese	Young	89.1%	9.2%	1.7%	97.4%	2.6%	0.0%
N = 221	Mid	61.2%	28.4%	10.4%	67.7%	32.3%	0.0%
	Old	18.6%	25.0%	56.4%	51.4%	45.9%	2.7%
		English	Malay	Others	English	Malay	Others
Malay	Young	81.8%	18.2%	0.0%	95.4%	4.6%	0.0%
N = 127	Mid	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%
	Old	30.8%	61.5%	7.7%	38.5%	61.5%	0.0%
		English	Tamil	Others	English	Tamil	Others
Indian	Young	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
N = 89	Mid	55.0%	45.0%	0.0%	87.5%	12.5%	0.0%
	Old	10.0%	81.8%	8.2%	10.0%	90.0%	0.0%

N = 436

them also report Mandarin-Chinese, Malay and Tamil to be their most proficient language, for each of the three ethnic groups respectively. This can be attributed to the bilingual education program that these young Singaporeans have undergone, where all school-going children will have to read both English and their state-assigned mother tongue languages in schools. In contrast, fewer participants of the older age groups (averaging 25–30 per cent for each ethnic group) report English to be their most proficient language.

Despite the participants' reluctance to claim English to be their most proficient language, their expertise in the language is most strongly displayed in their language of writing and speaking. When asked what language they are most likely to use when telling a story and writing a diary, a large majority of the participants indicate English to be their language of choice. Table 6 shows the participants' responses to these two questions.

Almost all the young participants, across all three ethnic groups, indicate that they would use English when it comes to telling a story and writing a diary. This is clearly a sign of language expertise in the language, even though only half of them indicate English to be their most proficient language. This mismatch can be explained, for as bilingual speakers, participants may find themselves hard-pressed to choose between two languages that they are equally proficient in. There could also be a sense of perceived inferiority in English, for they may have been indoctrinated by the government's messages through the state-led *Speak Good English Movement* that was launched in 2000, that the English spoken by Singaporeans, and more specifically *Singlish*, is bad (see Rubdy 2001; Chng 2003; Goh and Tan 2007; Bruthiaux 2010; Tan and Castelli 2013, for the various arguments and reactions toward the *Speak Good English Movement*). This expertise in English is not restricted only to young Singaporeans, as about 50 per cent of the older participants also prefer to use English in writing and narrating.

Language function

As mentioned earlier, the way I would like to look at the category 'language function' is to think about it along four dimensions. The first of which is the home domain, and in this case, a question about what the main language of the household is was asked, and the results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Main language of the household (%)

		English	Mandarin	Others
Chinese	Young	59.5%	40.5%	0.0%
N = 221	Mid	46.9%	40.6%	12.5%
	Old	37.2%	23.3%	39.5%
		English	Malay	Others
Malay	Young	52.8%	47.2%	0.0%
N = 127	Mid	37.5%	62.5%	0.0%
	Old	14.3%	85.7%	0.0%
		English	Tamil	Malay
Indian	Young	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%
N = 89	Mid	67.5%	32.5%	0.0%
	Old	61.5%	30.8%	7.7%

N = 436

Table 8. First choice language when choosing TV and radio programs (%)

		TV			Radio		
		English	Mandarin	Others	English	Mandarin	Others
Chinese	Young	51.7%	45.0%	3.3%	72.8%	24.6%	2.6%
N = 221	Mid	46.3%	50.7%	3.0%	47.6%	50.8%	1.6%
	Old	22.7%	70.5%	6.8%	38.5%	59.0%	2.6%
		English	Malay	Others	English	Malay	Others
Malay	Young	84.4%	7.8%	7.8%	76.9%	21.5%	1.5%
N = 127	Mid	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	55.6%	44.4%	0.0%
	Old	35.7%	64.3%	0.0%	15.4%	84.6%	0.0%
		English	Tamil	Others	English	Tamil	Others
Indian	Young	75.0%	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%
N = 89	Mid	62.5%	25.0%	12.5%	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%
	Old	69.2%	30.8%	0.0%	53.8%	46.2%	0.0%

N = 436

The results are consistent to what has been shown thus far. More than 50 per cent of the Singaporeans from the youngest age group, across all three ethnic groups, indicate that English is their main household language. English features particularly strongly for the Indian households, for more than 60 per cent of the Indian participants in the older age groups have English as their main language in the home.

English also functions predominantly as the language of leisure. Participants were asked which language station or channel they are most likely to tune in to when choosing TV and radio programs. Considering that there are so many entertainment outlets of different languages, the fact that for the majority of the young participants, their first choice of entertainment is English-based TV programs and radio stations bears stronger evidence for English having a dominant function in their daily activities. Table 8 shows the participants' responses to the two questions on their entertainment choices.

The preference for English-based programs is not restricted to the young participants. Many of the older participants, in particular the older Malay and Indian participants, also

Table 9. Languages used with one's best friends and one's spouse or significant other (%)

		Friend			Spouse/significant other		
		English	Mandarin	Others	English	Mandarin	Others
Chinese	Young	73.7%	25.4%	0.8%	64.9%	35.1%	0.0%
	Mid	58.7%	33.3%	7.9%	47.9%	33.3%	18.8%
	Old	32.6%	27.9%	39.5%	38.1%	11.9%	50.0%
		English	Malay	Others	English	Malay	Others
Malay	Young	87.3%	12.7%	0.0%	77.5%	22.5%	0.0%
	Mid	62.5%	37.5%	0.0%	57.1%	42.9%	0.0%
	Old	21.4%	71.4%	7.1%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
		English	Tamil	Others	English	Tamil	Others
Indian	Young	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Mid	70.0%	30.0%	0.0%	89.0%	11.0%	0.0%
	Old	33.0%	60.7%	6.3%	23.3%	60.7%	16.0%

N = 436

indicate a preference for English programs over Malay or Tamil ones. One could argue possibly, that this is because of the lack of variety or availability in Malay and Tamil programs in Singapore. It could also be due to the global outreach of Hollywood and the all-pervasive American media that have caused this preference for English programs. Whatever the reasons are, one still cannot take away the fact that English functions as the language of leisure for the majority of Singaporeans.

As can be expected, English also features strongly as the language of intimacy, except for the participants of the oldest age group, where English does not play that role. Table 9 shows the languages participants use with one's best friends and one's spouse or significant other.

More than half of the participants in the two younger age groups indicated that the main language used in communication with their best friends, partners and significant others is English. The Indian participants, in particular, show the strongest preference for English as the language of intimacy. One hundred per cent of the young Indian participants use English with their spouse or significant other, and a good 75 per cent of them indicate that they would use English with their best friends. Even for the older Indian participants in the second age bracket, more than 75 per cent of them use English with their partners and friends. The same trend shows itself for the Chinese and Malay participants.

Finally, and perhaps the most telling, is how English also functions as the language of the self. Table 10 shows the participants' choice of language in counting, and when talking to oneself.

Once again, the trend is pervasively English. Almost all the young participants, across all three ethnic groups, use English to count, and also to talk to themselves. Similarly, for the participants in the second age bracket, more than 50 per cent of them use English in this same function. In terms of language function therefore, it is clear and consistent that English has overtaken other languages as the main language in the domains of home, leisure, intimacy and self.

Table 10. Main language used in counting, and when talking to oneself (%)

		Counting			Talking to oneself		
		English	Mandarin	Others	English	Mandarin	Others
Chinese	Young	82.4%	17.6%	0.0%	82.0%	17.2%	0.8%
N = 221	Mid	64.6%	20.0%	15.4%	56.1%	27.3%	16.7%
	Old	45.5%	20.5%	34.1%	43.2%	22.7%	34.1%
		English	Malay	Others	English	Malay	Others
Malay	Young	98.4%	1.6%	0.0%	74.6%	25.4%	0.0%
N = 127	Mid	87.5%	12.5%	0.0%	55.0%	45.0%	0.0%
	Old	53.8%	46.2%	0.0%	15.4%	69.2%	15.4%
		English	Tamil	Others	English	Tamil	Others
Indian	Young	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	95.0%	5.0%	0.0%
N = 89	Mid	87.5%	12.5%	0.0%	77.5%	22.5%	0.0%
	Old	10.0%	90.0%	0.0%	56.9%	43.1%	0.0%

N = 436

Table 11. Language used to mark ethnic membership (%)

	LANGS	English	Mandarin	Others
Chinese	Young	7.0%	93.0%	0.0%
N = 221	Mid	10.3%	79.4%	10.3%
	Old	11.9%	66.7%	21.4%
	LANGS	English	Malay	Others
Malay	Young	0.0%	100.0%	0.0
N = 127	Mid	12.5%	87.5%	0.0%
	Old	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
	LANGS	English	Tamil	Others
Indian	Young	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
N = 89	Mid	12.5%	62.5%	25.0%
	Old	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%

N = 436

Language identification

Three questions were asked to elicit responses on language identification. The first question asks the participants for the language that would mark their ethnic membership. Table 11 shows the participants' responses to this question.

It is very clear, from Table 11, that Singaporeans cannot delink their state-assigned mother tongues from their state-assigned ethnic groupings. A large majority of the participants indicate Mandarin-Chinese, Malay, and Tamil, as languages that identify them as members of their ethnic group correspondingly. There is still a very strong essentialistic bond between their ethnic group and the supposed 'ethnic' language. This is to be expected, since Singapore's language policy has been so strongly predicated on ethnic membership that it would have been rather startling to see a different set of results.

When it comes to identification to national membership however, the results are completely different. Table 12 shows the language the participants use to identify themselves as Singaporean.

Table 12. Language used to mark national identity (%)

	LANGS	English	Mandarin	Others
Chinese	Young	94.0%	4.3%	1.7%
N = 221	Mid	59.7%	30.6%	9.7%
	Old	48.9%	35.6%	15.6%
	LANGS	English	Malay	Others
Malay	Young	89.1%	1.7%	9.2%
N = 127	Mid	62.5%	0.0%	37.5%
	Old	53.8%	0.0%	46.2%
	LANGS	English	Tamil	Others
Indian	Young	89.0%	11.0%	0.0%
N-89	Mid	67.5%	32.5%	0.0%
	Old	53.3%	46.2%	0.5%

N = 436

Table 13. Language that participants identify as their own (%)

		(1) English	(2) Singlish/S'pore Eng.	English variants = (1) + (2)	Mandarin	Others
Chinese	Young	45.2%	28.3%	73.5%	24.8%	1.7%
N = 221	Mid	37.5%	6.6%	44.1%	29.4%	26.5%
	Old	20.5%	3.9%	24.4%	28.9%	46.7%
		(1) English	(2) Singlish/S'pore Eng.	English variants = (1) + (2)	Malay	Others
Malay	Young	35.2%	25.6%	60.8%	39.2%	0.0%
N = 127	Mid	35.0%	7.5%	42.5%	47.5%	10.0%
	Old	7.7%	0.0%	7.7%	84.6%	7.7%
		(1) English	(2) Singlish/S'pore Eng.	English variants = (1) + (2)	Tamil	Others
Indian	Young	42.8%	32.3%	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%
N = 89	Mid	40.0%	12.5%	52.5%	36.5%	11.0%
	Old	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	50.0%	16.7%

N = 436

   More than 50 per cent of all the participants, across all ethnic and age groups, use English as the marker of national identity. This is especially pronounced for the youngest group of participants, for 90 per cent of them believe English as the language that defines them as Singaporeans. This same pattern is again replicated, though with a slight twist, when the participants were asked which language they will identify as their own. For the first time in this questionnaire, the terms 'Singlish' and its variants such as 'Singaporean English,' 'Singapore English,' 'my kind of English,' make their appearance. Table 13 shows the participants' responses to this question.

   The terms 'Singlish,' 'Singaporean English,' 'Singapore English' came up in the responses of more than 25 per cent of the youngest groups of participants, and not so much in the older participants. This is perhaps a sign that the young are more aware and also more accepting of this different variety of English – a truly Singaporean language – and feel that this is a language that they can identify with. Nonetheless, if one adds up all the responses of 'Singlish' and its different variants to the ones that have 'English' as a response (which I have done in Table 13 and named it 'English variants'), one can see that English is clearly a language that Singaporeans identify with as their own. More than 70

per cent of the Chinese and Indian participants from the youngest age bracket use English as the language of self-identification, and 60 per cent of the Malay participants feel the same way. Many Singaporeans in the second age bracket also have the same sentiments, as close to 50 per cent of them identify English as their own language. English, very clearly, is the language of identification for many Singaporeans, and will continue to be so for future generations.

CONCLUSION

I began this paper by suggesting that the term 'mother tongue' warrants a new configuration, and proposed that 'mother tongue' can be defined by the following four conditions: *language inheritance, language expertise, language function*, and *language identification*. I have illustrated, for most parts of the paper, that English in Singapore, especially for the younger generations, meets all four conditions, and therefore fulfill the criteria for it to be a mother tongue for Singaporeans. As the results of this study have shown, English has penetrated almost all aspects of life for the everyday Singaporean. The findings in this study in fact come as no surprise. Singapore's censuses of population over the years have already exhibited an increasing and pervasive use of English. What this paper has shown is the extent to which English is used across different domains and Singaporeans' identification to English; and these are not data that the census would have been able to provide. Or perhaps this is the kind of data that the census takers are not interested in finding out anyway, for the policy makers will be confronted with the possibility of making English a mother tongue – an outcome that seemingly needs to be avoided at all cost.

Making English a mother tongue in policy terms, if one thinks about it simply, is a matter of giving English an additional status, on top of the other statuses such as official language, working language, that English already has. This move will not change the way of life in Singapore, and the bilingual education system that Singapore is so very proud of will remain as it is. In fact, the bilingual education system will be a lot more flexible with English as a mother tongue, because there is no longer any need for anyone to be tied to one's ethnic mother tongue. One can envisage many different alternatives to making language policies more viable in Singapore.

It is not the aim of this paper however to make any policy recommendations, even though, in recent years, some scholars have taken to giving policy advice. Wee (2013) for instance, suggests that the government needs to re-evaluate its language policies to take into account its changing population profile, and the variety of linguistic experiences that the Singaporean population now has. Wee and Bokhorst-Heng (2005: 176–177) suggest that the state can encourage Singaporeans to pick their designated mother tongues, but this has to be done 'softly, via persuasion,' though ultimately, Singaporeans should be able to 'exercise their own choice in deciding what language they consider to be their mother tongue.' I am not optimistic that the policies will change to accommodate the linguistic experiences of Singaporeans, let alone give autonomy and the freedom of choice to the people, even for something as personal as one's mother tongue. The history of language policy in Singapore does not inspire much confidence. By having a linguistic understanding of 'mother tongue' though, Singaporeans now need not be constrained to think about their mother tongues according to what the state has decreed for them, and in this way, perhaps, Singaporeans can finally have the autonomy to decide what their mother tongue is.

NOTE

1. English was institutionalized as a compulsory language in schools. Prior to their closures between 1970 to 1984, there were the Chinese-, Malay- and Indian-medium schools which provided education in Chinese, Malay and Indian languages, with English being offered as a second language. This could be seen as a transitional phase until 1987, when English was implemented as the *medium* of instruction in all schools.

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