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*ENGLISH-KNOWING BILINGUALISM IN
SINGAPORE: STRIKING A BALANCE*

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ENGLISH-KNOWING BILINGUALISM IN SINGAPORE: STRIKING A BALANCE

Q 1: How does Singapore strike a balance in its apparently successful language management?

Q 2: What are some consequences of language shifts for a country striving to build a national identity in an era of rapid globalization and accelerated change?

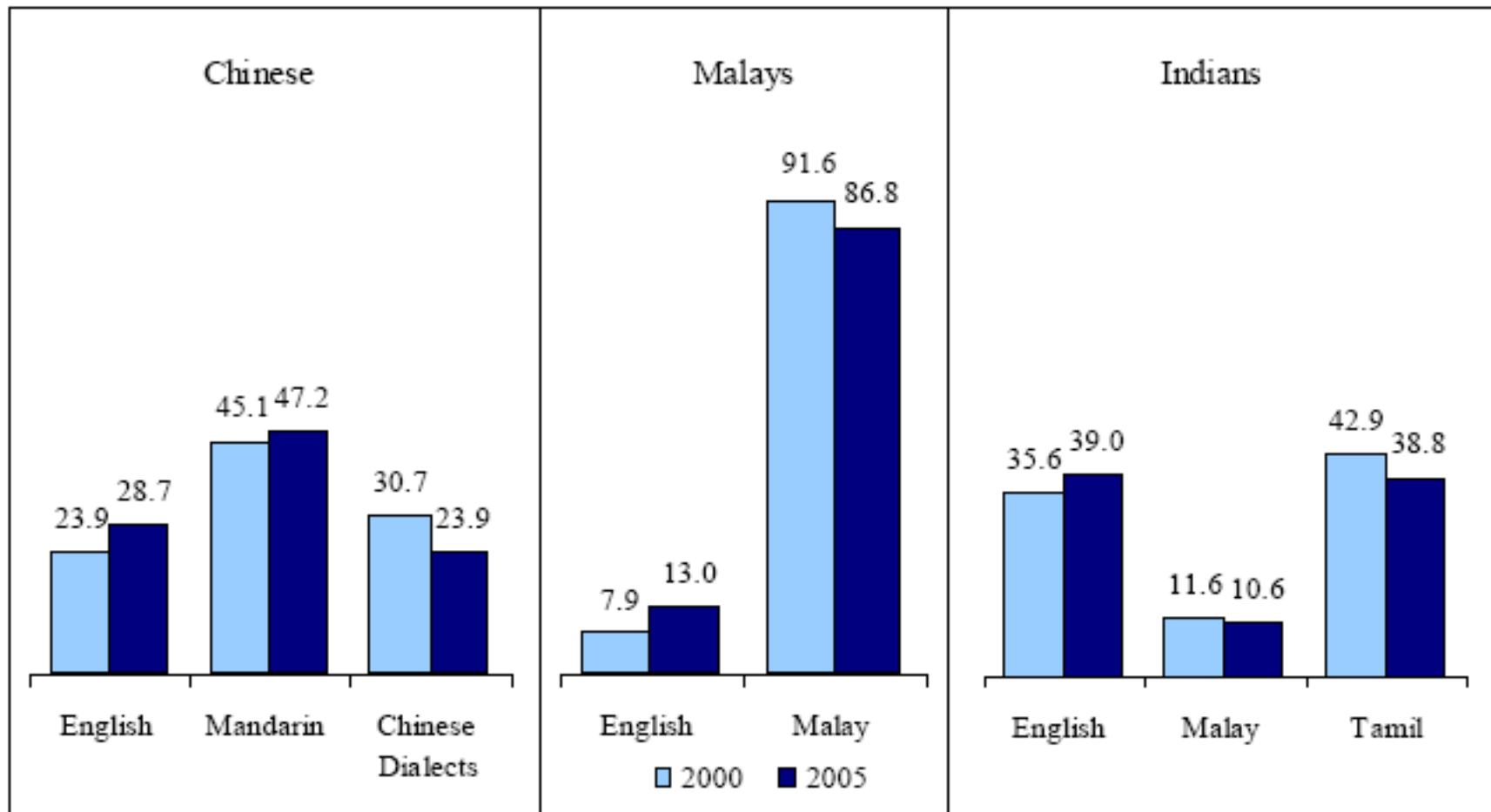
Q 3: Will English-knowing bilingualism become a core competence in the 21st century?

ENGLISH-KNOWING BILINGUALISM IN SINGAPORE: STRIKING A BALANCE

1. Introduction
2. Language shifts
3. Striking a balance: language as a resource and an instrument of national cohesion
4. Striking a balance: management of English
5. Issues:
 - ❖ Identity and transmission of values
 - ❖ Language maintenance and shift
 - ❖ Equity and meritocracy
 - ❖ Linguistic norms
6. English-knowing bilingualism as a core competence
7. Conclusion

Chart A2
Resident Population Aged 5 Years and Over
by Language Most Frequently Spoken at Home and Ethnic Group

Per Cent



Source: Singapore Department of Statistics, General Household Survey 2005, published June 2006

ENGLISH-KNOWING BILINGUALISM IN SINGAPORE: STRIKING A BALANCE

Use of Language as a Resource

Use of Language as an Instrument of National
Cohesion

STRIKING A BALANCE

“Our biggest challenge is to keep our identity and our national spirit in a very globalised world – speak English, sing English songs, browse the internet, travel the world, but home is Singapore. That’s something we have to do a lot of work to maintain and that’s one of the reasons why we celebrate National Day the way we do.”

-- Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

[ST 13 Aug 2007]

“Showing you care for Singapore goes beyond the nationalistic pomp and pageantry of National Day. It is also about recognizing that modernization inevitably costs us important parts of our heritage.”

--Tessa Wong, Journalist

[ST 13 Aug 2007]

STRIKING A BALANCE

We are in danger if we go along with the tide because year by year, every five years, every ten years, the Chinese tide rises....My advice is to stay on course. China may be the greatest power in the world. The Chinese language may be one of the world's leading languages. We stay where we are – bilingual, working language English, everybody level playing field. Or be prepared for big trouble. See where we have got, see the stability, the tolerance, the way you are able to retain your identity as a Chinese, but as a Singapore Chinese, or a Chinese Singaporean. ... Our circumstances do not allow us to let one language or culture assume an advantage over the others.

--Lee Kuan Yew in the Straits Times, 1 January 1997

*STRIKING A BALANCE:
ENGLISH-KNOWING BILINGUALISM IN SINGAPORE*

1. What more can be done to facilitate higher achievements in English-knowing bilingualism and bi-literacy?
2. With English as the main medium of instruction, can it still be considered a neutral language, or does it benefit particular ethno- and linguistic groups or socio-economic groups?
3. What language policy best fulfills the need for inter-ethnic communication?

*ENGLISH-KNOWING BILINGUALISM IN
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Language Maintenance and Shift
Identity and the Transmission of Values
Equity and Meritocracy
Linguistic Norms

CONCLUSION

- Language management in Singapore has been highly successful though questions remain
- An ascendant English-knowing bilingual community has emerged in Singapore
- What this ascendant English-knowing bilingual community does with its languages, with whom, and in what languages will determine Singapore's future survival
- English-knowing bilingualism: a core competency for the 21st century?