

LANGUAGE POLICY IN SINGAPORE

R. Dilanka Kamali, A. S. Hettihewa & I. R. Senarathna¹

Language is not merely a tool for human communication where it also plays an important role in the development of social identity. Therefore it is important to have a well-planned language policy in a country and it is becoming more and more essential in an increasingly multilingual society. As a multinational country Singapore has a diverse population and it includes Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasians, Caucasians and Asians of different origins. As a result of that Singapore has become a multilingual nation. However, the Singapore government recognises four official languages: English, Malay, Chinese, Tamil. Their decision to adopt English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil as their official languages came early in their nationhood. And also Bilingualism is a fundamental aspect of their education system while English is the medium of instruction in schools, students are required to learn their mother tongues as well. This has ensured that they are able to engage fellow Singaporeans of different races, access the global economy and at the same time remain connected to their cultural roots. This study attempts to describe how the language is being planned by the Singapore government and the present condition of their language policy. Data for the research are collected by using official documents of Singapore Government, newspaper articles and from recordings of informal conversations with a group of native speakers. These informal conversations are used to identify the bilingual habits of Singapore citizens. What we learned from the study is that in Singapore all four official languages were accorded parity of recognition, a clear message that all Singaporeans are equal partners in a single nation, regardless of race or language.

Key Words: Language Policy, multilingual, official languages, Bilingualism

¹ Department of Linguistics