

Conference on Managing Diversity in Singapore

Friday, 5 August 2016
Ballroom 2, Level 3
Orchard Hotel

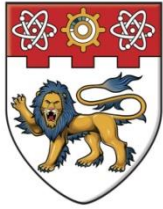
PANEL 1
Manifestations and
Management of Multicultural Singapore

PRESENTATION BY

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Managing Multilingualism

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*IPS Conference on Managing Diversity in Singapore
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The idea of “Management”

- Problems/issues that need to be fixed
- Policy-making that will offer solutions to these problems

Language Management (Spolsky 2009)

“the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims to have authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs. The most obvious form of language management is a constitution or a law established by a nation-state determining some aspect of official language use”

Why the need to manage language?

- Ethnolinguistic diversity presents a problem of language management -> which language to use?
- Management of ethnic diversity within the context of nation building
- Shared sense of community
- Reduce fragmentation along ethnic lines
- Protection of ethnic minorities
- Rights to language

Ideals of the state's management

- In multiethnic societies, the state needs to articulate a shared vision that the different ethnic groups/communities find reasonable
- Diverse communities must be able to relate to each other
- And they should be able to relate within a broader society

Singapore's Linguistic Ecology in 1957

- Population: Chinese (75%), Malay (13.6%), Indian (8.8%)
- Chinese community made up of Hokkien (39%), Teochew (23%), Cantonese (20%), Hainanese (7%).

The rest of the Chinese registered themselves as speakers of at least one of 7 other Chinese languages.

- Malay community: 85% with Malay as mother tongue.
- Indian community: Tamil (59%), Malayalam (16%), and the rest, one of at least 6 other Indian languages, eg. Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi etc.

Census data in 1960

English as mother tongue	: 1.8%
Mandarin	: 0.1%
Malay	: 11.5%
Tamil	: 5.2%

Perceived linguistic challenges facing Pre-Independence Singapore

- Diversity is a problem that has to be managed
- Lack of common language – both inter and intra-ethnically
- Lack of an internationally recognized working language
- English as a foreign language
- English in a postcolonial context

Singaporean solution to managing diversity

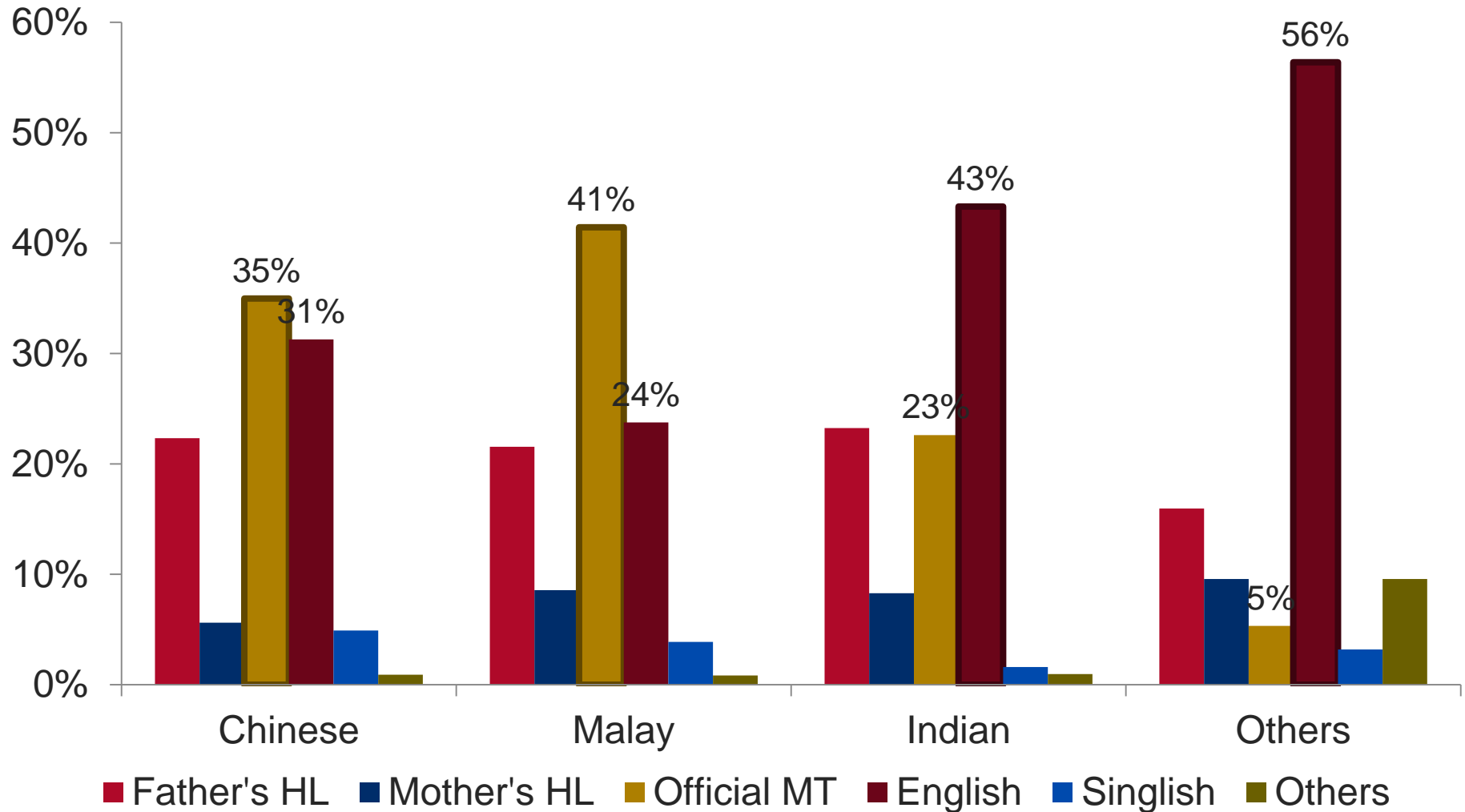
- Equality of treatment for the ethnic groups
- No special “rights” given to any ethnic group
- English as the official language
- Official Mother Tongue assigned based on father’s ethnicity
- Unification of the “Chinese” tongues (Speak Mandarin Campaign)

RESULTS OF LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT

1) Alignment of “ethnic group” to language

- Mother tongues no longer “linguistic”, but based on assignment of ethnic grouping.
- Alignment of “ethnic group” to “mother tongue”
- Creation of a community based on an ideal/abstract idea of a shared language.

Which language do you identify with most (by race)

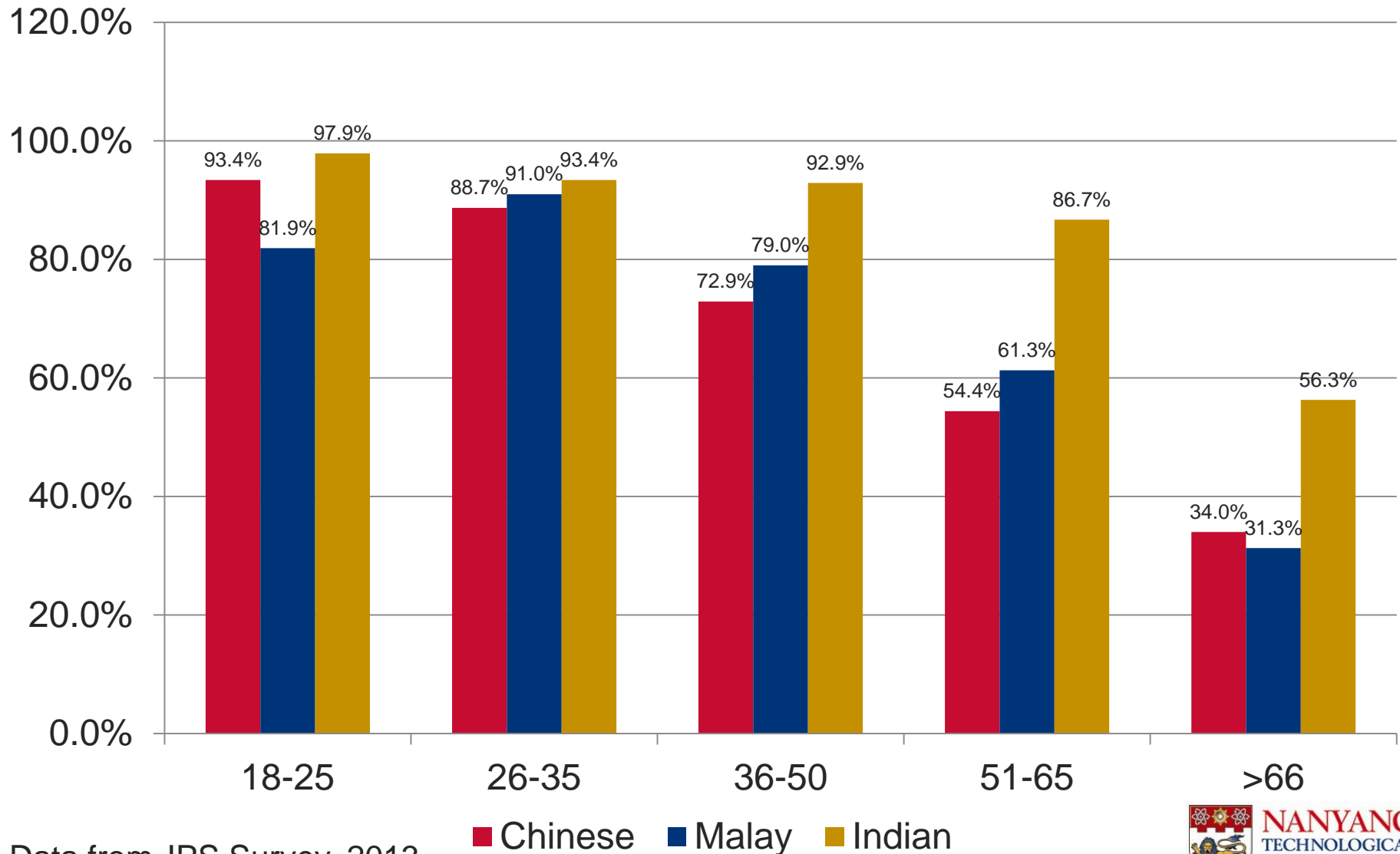


Data from IPS Survey, 2013

2) English Monolingualism

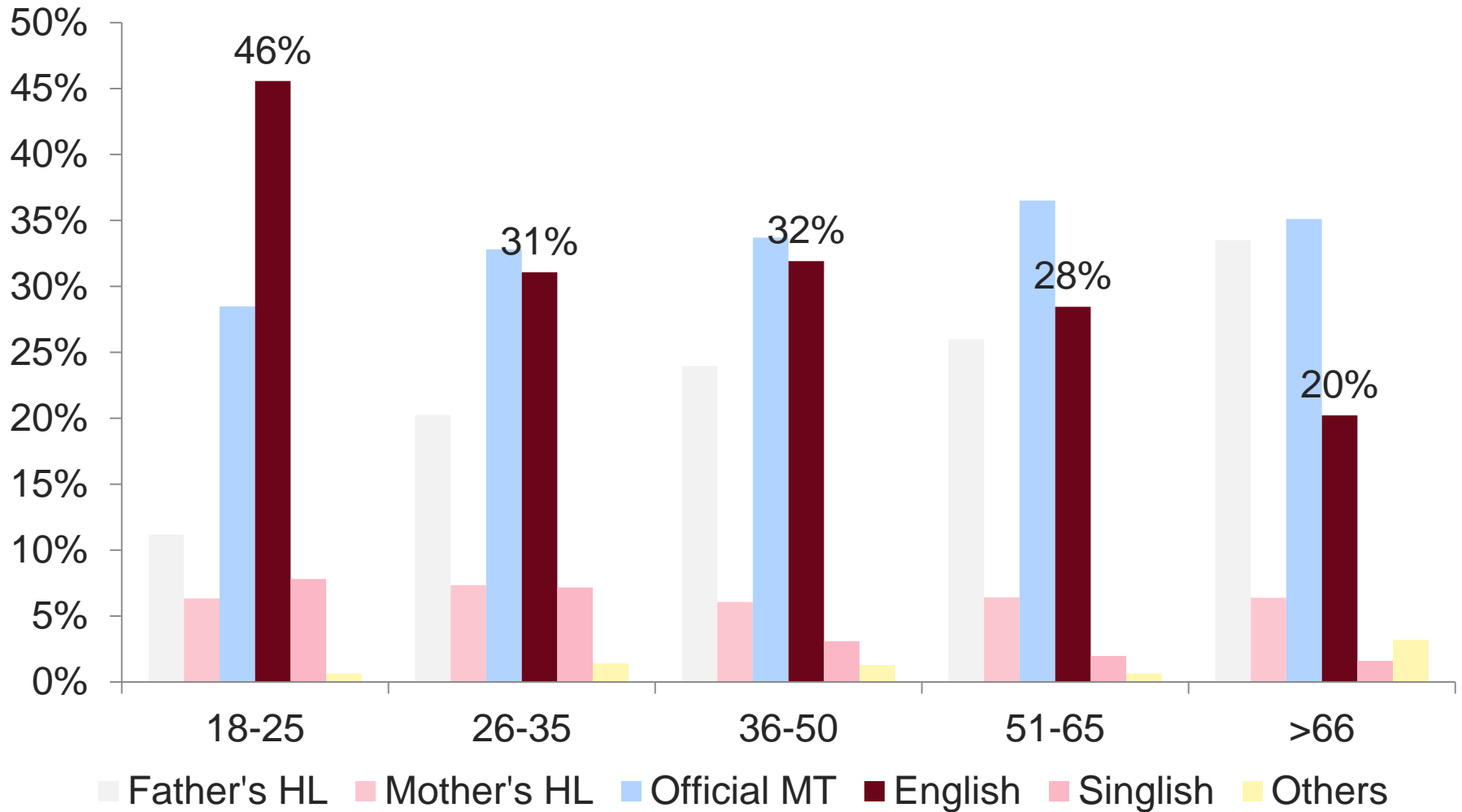
- English as the default lingua franca
- Use of English in almost every context
- Tan (2014) argues that English has permeated every aspect of Singaporean everyday life
- English as the common tongue

Proportion by Race who can speak English well or very well



Data from IPS Survey, 2013

Which language do you identify with most - English (by age)



Data from IPS Survey, 2013

3) Alteration of linguistic ecology

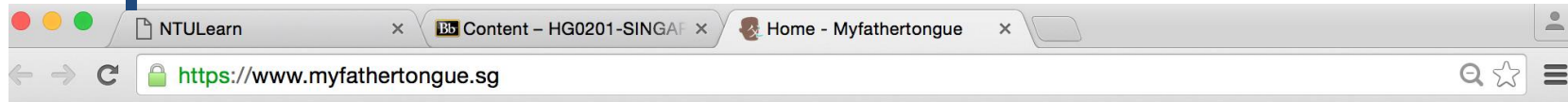
- Singaporeans are no longer as multilingual as before
- Young Singaporeans no longer have the need to learn one another's languages
- Monolingualism (in English) is not desirable, but not dire

NEW CHALLENGES AHEAD

New ecology, new questions

- New migrants, new language players
- New generation of English-dominant speakers
- Singaporean identity or ethnic identity?
- On what language should the Singaporean identity be based?
- New model of multilingualism?

Preservation and Revitalization: Implications



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Although dialect is rarely spoken by young Singaporeans, it is not a useless skill. Discover how some young Singaporeans use dialects successfully in their everyday life. With our handy Survival Kit for the different dialect groups, you can also learn more about each dialect's customs, traditions and cultures, some of which are still practised in Singapore.

HOKKIEN →
TEOCHEW →
CANTONESE →



“Dialect” classes

- Held in various clan associations
- Now also in People’s Associations

Future language management

- New ways of engaging with diversity?
- Engagement with international discourses on language rights?
- New appreciation of cultural and linguistic differences
- Allow for organic evolution in new ecology

=> to achieve a more cohesive and inclusive society

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