Abstract

This paper is a research on the language shift pattern in the temples in Singapore. The term temple used here, is a metaphorical description to mean Buddhism on the whole in this paper. Many people had the impression that in temples, Chinese Language will be used, if not dialects. This is a stereotype that many people had held over the years. However, this is not the case. English has started to penetrate into the Buddhism domain in the recent years as observed. Furthermore, though the Speak Mandarin Campaign has been going on for the past 30 years, which supposedly should have help maintain the use of Chinese in local temples. Yet, it was not the case.

As such in this paper, we will be investigating the language shift in Buddhism domain, particularly in a case study of Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery. The questions that we will be dealing with will be: firstly, the language competition overview in Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery. Next, the language situation in different individual circumstances. Lastly, we will uncover any possible rationales for the above language pattern.

The research is conducted through surveys of Buddhists in the temple and interview of the in-charge in the Youth Ministry. From our findings and previous reviews, we can see that the language usage has changed from a Chinese and dialect environment to an English and Chinese environment. Furthermore, we discovered that the language usage in various setting in the temple are Chinese for spoken language, and English for ‘listened’ and ‘read’ language. In many individual
activities, the surveyors mainly prefer English to Chinese, except for chanting activities. The possible underlying reasons are effects resulted from Youth Ministry and Government language planning; the age, education level and Chinese literacy factors affected the language choice of an individual. Hence, these factors cause such language usage pattern in the temple, which is different from the past stereotypes.