

ENGLISH EDITORIAL

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SINGAPORE



PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN

MS SHALINI SAMUEL, 29

WHO: A professional English and Mandarin interpreter/translator.
LANGUAGES SPOKEN: English, Mandarin and some German.

MS SAMUEL, an Indian Singaporean from a mostly English-speaking family, surprises people with her fluent Mandarin.

Based in Melbourne, she interprets court hearings and hospital procedures. She also translates patent applications and business proposals into Chinese.

Her Mandarin was honed by her parents, and by watching Mandarin movies.

She was inspired by actress Audrey Hepburn's role as an interpreter in the Hollywood classic *Charade* to become one herself.

More sign up to learn Mandarin

Working adults brushing up on the language to use at work and for doing business in China

KENNY CHEE

HUAYU (Mandarin) is becoming cool among working adults in Singapore.

Language schools and organisations here that offer Mandarin classes for adults are enrolling more students, many of whom are professionals and executives keen to brush up on the language for use at work.

Many of them work in the finance, information technology, marketing and services sectors.

Mr Chew Kheng Fui, senior manager for sales and marketing at the Singapore Chinese Chamber Institute of Business, said that more companies and working adults are beginning to

appreciate the value of effective **bilingualism**.

"With China rising as a global power, and many businesses here involved with the Chinese market, companies want their key employees to be able to communicate effectively with either their Chinese partners or clients," he said.

Ms Suzlina Rahman, business-development manager for Cambridge Institute, added that companies planning to post their employees to China also send them for Mandarin classes.

Mr Chew said that the increase in enrolment at his institute could also be due partly to the introduction of a government grant in January that subsidises its Mandarin course fees by over 90 per cent for Singapo-

reans and permanent residents.

The institute saw 50 per cent more professionals and executives, mostly Singaporeans and permanent residents, applying for its business Mandarin courses in the first half of this year, compared to the same period last year.

Despite not having grant schemes, the Cambridge Institute saw 20 per cent more professionals and executives, mainly Singaporeans, taking up Mandarin classes in the same period.

Other schools noted that most of their growth in student numbers came from **expatriates**.

In the first half of the year, Inlingua School of Languages has seen an 80 to 90 per cent jump in the number of expatriates enrolling for its Mandarin courses, while Hua Language Centre reported a rise of nearly 14 per cent.

Singaporean engineer Chen Yanshi, 26, took an **intermediate** Mandarin course at the Singa-

pore Chinese Chamber Institute of Business to prepare for a China business trip next month.

"I realised there were a lot of business terms in Mandarin that I didn't understand," he said. He is close to completing his almost-four-month-long course.

"What I've learnt will definitely help me communicate better when doing business with Chinese companies," he said.

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HELPDESK 我的字典

Enrolling: 招收 zhāo shōu

Bilingualism: 双语能力 shuāng yǔ néng lì

Expatriates: 移居国外的人 yí jū guó wài de rén

Intermediate: 中级的 zhōng jí de

MS CHEW WEI YIN, 26

WHO: An investment executive
LANGUAGES SPOKEN: English, Mandarin, French, Spanish, Italian, and some Russian and Japanese.

FRENCH saved the day for Ms Chew about three years ago when her French-speaking African client fell ill during a business trip here.

She was able to interpret her client's description of his symptoms from French to English, helping the doctor diagnose his illness.

Ms Chew has a love for languages because she grew up in a multilingual environment.

Her father speaks English and Malay, while her mother is conversant in Mandarin and its dialects.

She picked up Japanese in secondary school and majored in French at a United States university.

And now, the *my paper* Executive Look 2009 finalist hopes to pick up other Asian languages like Korean because her job requires her to work with clients from the region.

"Mandarin has definitely come in handy," she said. "I've met clients from China who are more comfortable conversing in Mandarin, and doing so allows me to discuss business more easily."



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