

Cool Speak on Sunday

Cool Speaking actress

Up-and-coming MediaCorp actress Felicia Chin used to speak mostly English. The 21-year-old, who has starred in such Mandarin TV serials as Portrait Of Home and The Champions, tells JEAN LOO how she became a confident Mandarin speaker

You were a student at Tanjong Katong Girls' Secondary and Victoria Junior College. What kind of grades did you get for Chinese?

When I was young, I spoke both English and Mandarin at home. But my English was definitely better because my parents weren't good at Chinese.

Grades-wise, I did fairly well. But all I did was memorise, which isn't too good because I totally forgot everything once the examinations were over.

Things got a little better when I went to Tanjong Katong Girls' Secondary. For example, no one was allowed to speak a single word of English during Chinese classes.

classes. If we did, we'd be fined \$1.

My teacher also encouraged more conversations and recommended books that immersed us in the culture.

With my friends around me speaking more Mandarin, I made use of the chance to speak more. So I became more fluent quite naturally.

Do you feel more confident about your command of the language now that you have acted in a few Chinese drama serials on television?

Yes, I definitely feel more at ease speaking Mandarin, especially in public and with strangers. Even when hosting shows, I feel more comfortable conversing with the audience in Mandarin.

My scripts are all in Mandarin and everyone at work speaks it. I have realised that after acting in the Chinese dramas, I speak proper Mandarin more, rather than Singlish or a mix of English and Mandarin.

It just proves that with practice, one can get more comfortable with the language.

Would you consider yourself effectively bilingual now?

I think I am bilingual to a certain extent, but it's definitely nowhere near perfect. There's a lot of room for improvement.

For example, I can't easily translate an English essay into Chinese.

But it will all come with practice.

Why is it important for you to be bilingual?

A very big motivating factor is my career. Being bilingual certainly helps during occasions and events, when you can make full use of both languages.

Also, my job enables me to meet many people from different walks of life. It feels good when I can successfully converse with them.

I will be very happy and will feel accomplished if I can master both languages some day.

Any tips for people who want to improve their Mandarin?

Use it every day. You must not be afraid of speaking out and making mistakes.

I once watched a variety show hosted by a Thai emcee. His Mandarin wasn't perfect but he spoke with so much confidence that it was just a joy watching him.

Also, I try not to use English words when speaking in Mandarin. I think that mixing both languages is really a bad habit and definitely not the right way to master either.

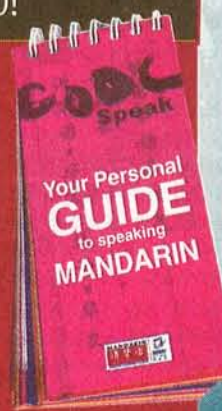
And of course, learn more Chinese words and idioms by reading Cool Speak.

I actually read it every week. The column is very interesting because it has words that we all use but they are translated into Chinese.

COOL SPEAK

GET YOUR POCKET GUIDE FOR JUST \$4.90!

More Chinese words used in everyday conversation can be found in the Cool Speak pocket guide, published by The Straits Times. The 172-page guide, which comes in four vibrant colours, is on sale now at \$4.90 at all 45 Popular bookstores in Singapore.



back to school

学期 xuéqī	What it means: Semester 学 short for 学校 school 期 term	学生理事会 xuéshēng lǐshìhuì	What it means: Student council 学生 student 理事会 council
全日制 quánrìzhì	What it means: Full-day school 全 full, 日 day 制 system	纠察员 jiūcháyuán	What it means: Prefect 纠察 maintain order 员 person engaged in some field of activity
单班制 dānbānzhì	What it means: Single session 单 single, 班 class 制 system	班主任 bān zhǔrèn	What it means: Form teacher 主任 head
周会 zhōuhuì	What it means: Weekly assembly 周 weekly, 会 meeting	浸濡计划 jìn rú jì huà	What it means: Immersion Both 浸 and 濡 mean immerse, 计划 programme
迎新会 yíngxīnhuì	What it means: Orientation 迎 welcome 新 new	寄宿学校 jìsù xuéxiào	What it means: Boarding school 寄宿 lodging

陈太: 新的学期在上个星期开始了, chéntài: xīn de xuéqī zài shàng ge xīngqī kāishǐ le, 有些家长表现得比他们的孩子还紧张。 yǒuxiē jiāzhǎng biǎoxiǎn de bǐ tāmen de hái zi hái jǐnzhāng.

Mrs Tan: Some parents were more jittery than their kids when the new semester began last week.

李太: 怎么说呢?

lǐtài: zěnme shuō ne?

Mrs Lee: How was it so?

陈太: 我曾经目睹一位母亲, 在老师吩咐学生们拿出作业簿时, 竟然闯进课室帮她的儿子。

náchū zuòyèbù shí, jǐngrán chuǎngjìn kèshì bāng tā de érzi.

Mrs Tan: I once saw an anxious mother running to help her son when the teacher asked the students to take out their exercise books.

李太: 我也是。我曾经见过学生们排队上两会

lǐtài: wǒ yě shì. wǒ céngjīng jiànguò xuéshēngmen páiduì shàng zhōuhuì

或回到课室时, 父母们为了占据最佳的位置来给孩子拍照而争先恐后。

ér zhēngxiān kǒnghòu.

Mrs Lee: Me too. I have seen parents jostling for good positions to take photos of their kids when they were queuing at the assembly or returning to the classrooms.

陈太: 怪不得一些小学为了制止这类事情发生, chéntài: guàibude yīxiē xiǎoxué wèi le zhìzhǐ zhèlèi shìqing fāshēng, 而决定禁止父母进入学校某些范围。

ér juéding jìnzhǐ fùmǔ jìnrù xuéxiào mǒuxiē fànweí.

Mrs Tan: No wonder some primary schools are cordoning off certain areas to keep the parents away.

李太: 其实, 他们应该静静地从远处做观察, lǐtài: qíshí, tāmen yīnggāi jìngjìng de cóng yuǎnchù zuò guānchá, 并给孩子多一些时间适应新环境。

bìng gěi hái zi duō yīxiē shíjiān shìyìng xīn huánjìng.

Mrs Lee: Actually the parents can watch their children quietly from a distance and give them time to adjust to a new environment.

WIN
Eason Chan's
陈奕迅
new album
怎么样 How?



Just answer ALL five weekly questions. The first one was published on Jan 1. This is the third question.

How many awards did Eason Chan win at the Hong Kong Commercial Radio Music Awards 2005?

3A. Two 3B. Four 3C. Six 3D. Eight

Send your answers together with your name, NRIC no., address and contact no. to Universal Music Pte. Ltd., 118 Lorong 23 Geylang #03-01/04, SCN Industrial Building, Singapore 388402. Closing date: Feb 4. Five winners will be picked and notified by phone.