English in Singapore: History and current debates

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LING 541
December 7, 2009

1 Introduction

Singapore is an incredibly diverse nation. Located in Southeast Asia between Malaysia and Indonesia, Singapore—roughly three times the size of Washington DC—holds 4.7 million people of a variety of backgrounds. A history of trade and immigration has shaped Singapore's population into what it is today. The acronym CMIO, standing for **C**hinese (76.8% of the population), **M**alay (13.9%), **I**ndian (7.9%), and **O**ther (1.4%), sums up the four officially recognized ethnic groups. Singapore has four official languages, three of which correspond to the CMI ethnic groups: Mandarin, Malay (the national language for a number of political and historical reasons, cf. Alsagoff 2008), Tamil, and English (the language of business, schooling, and administration). Besides these four languages, a number of others are spoken in Singapore, including a handful of Chinese dialects. (*The World Factbook 2009*, Census of Population 2000)

The situation of English in Singapore is the focus of this paper. Language itself is a hotly contested issue in Singapore; Singaporeans are often regarded to be politically apathetic, but any

mention of language immediately incites a strong debate (cf. Fernandez 2004, George 2000). English holds a particularly important role—the very founding of Singapore by the British in 1819 planted the seed of an English stronghold; since then, English has been intertwined with the growth and development of Singapore as a nation, as well as with the history of its people. Moreover, English holds a dual function as both a gateway to international commerce as well as, increasingly, a medium for discourse of national identity.

1.1 World Englishes

> Whatever the concern of the purists, it seems to me there is much to celebrate in the spread of English as a world language. Where over 650 artificial languages have failed, English has succeeded; where many other natural languages with political and economic power to back them up have failed, English has succeeded. One reason for this dominance of English is its propensity for acquiring new identities, its power of assimilation, its adaptability to 'decolonization' as a language, its manifestation in a range of varieties, and above all its suitability as a flexible medium for literary and other types of creativity across languages and cultures.

> (B. Kachru 1988: 8)

English's position in the world today is unprecedented. In the past, a number of other languages have come to dominate large geographical areas (e.g. Sanskrit in South and Southeast Asia), but none of them has had as global an influence as English, nor have any of them had as many speakers as English now claims today. The term "world Englishes," then, refers to English in all its forms— standard, vernacular, business, academic, media, etc.—as it is used throughout the world today; this term contrasts with terms such as international English, which refers to a form of Standard English/business English used worldwide, and global English, a term used primarily in economic discussions (McArthur 2002: 2).

The current understanding and organization of world Englishes is largely based off of the Kachruvian three-circle model. In this model, B. Kachru organizes all the forms of English in the world into three circles: The "Inner Circle", the "Outer Circle", and the "Expanding Circle" (cf. Kachru 1988). The countries that belong to the Inner Circle—the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—provide norms. The Outer Circle comprises of a number of post-colonial countries where English has become a second language and is developing a localized set of norms; this is the circle into which Singapore is classified. The Expanding Circle, meanwhile, consists of the countries in which English is a foreign language, and is characterized as being "norm-dependent". (Mesthrie 2009: 304–306)

2 Arrival and development of English in Singapore

Only a few scant sources—notes from Chinese travelers, Portuguese historians, and early Malay accounts of events in the region—exist that document the history of pre-colonial Singapore, and they provide a fragmentary history at best. These sources paint then-uninfluential Singapore as a resource-poor island with a small population that depended on fishing, trade, and piracy for survival. (Lim 1991: 3–4)

The rise and development of modern Singapore is largely attributed to the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles in February of 1819. Raffles, recognizing Singapore's prime location within the region, quickly secured a British presence in Singapore and established there a free trading port (Chew 1991: 36). Although the residents of Singapore had had previous contact with English from English-speaking traders passing through the region, this contact was brief and fleeting

compared to the strong establishment of a British presence as instated by Raffles and Major William Farquhar in 1819 (Gupta 1998: 106).

With the establishment of a new center of commerce came the promise of employment, which attracted masses of immigrants from a number of different regions; in less than twenty years since the establishment of the trading port, Singapore's population had grown to nearly 30,000 inhabitants, most of whom were Chinese (Platt & Weber 1980: 3). No pidgin forms of English developed despite the multiethnic nature of Singapore because a lingua franca—Bazaar Malay (Bahasa Pasar), a pidginized form of Malay—already existed for interethnic communication (Platt & Weber 1980: 7).

Platt and Weber (1980: 27) outline six main factors that contributed to the spread of English during this time period: (1) the increase of government administration; (2) the development of infrastructure and communication; (3) the expansion of commerce; (4) an increasing population of a local English-educated elite; (5) English-language films; and (6) increased access to education. The strong demand for English that arose reinforced the English's prestige position: During this early period in Singapore's history, it became very apparent that one would have to learn English in order to negotiate with the higher powers of society—namely, the government and judiciary system, as well as commercial forces. Further, successful media outlets operated predominantly in English (Platt & Weber 1980: 6), thus heightening the visibility of English.

2.1 English-medium schooling

A body of literature attributes the development of Singapore English (both standard and colloquial forms) to English-medium schooling (Platt & Weber 1980, Gupta 1998, Foley 2001).

English-medium schooling proved to be very popular, both because of the high demand for the English language and because of the limited number of opportunities provided by vernacular schools, which provided less education (often only the primary level), fewer post-graduation options, and limited ability to transfer to an English-language secondary school (Platt & Weber 1980: 32–35).

A common assumption regarding English-medium schooling at this time is that English was taught by people who spoke Standard British English with an RP accent. However, this assumption is mostly false: the teachers at this time were an incredibly diverse group; moreover, the term "European" was used simply to mean "white". These European teachers, then, could be British or American, and those from England did not necessarily speak in an RP accent, as there were a number of people from Ireland and Scotland (Gupta 1998: 107). Further, the RP pronunciation was not as prominent at this time and developed only in the latter portion of the nineteenth century (Gupta 1998: 107); therefore, it would be unlikely that the majority of the European teachers were teaching with RP pronunciations. In fact, European teachers were the minority at these schools (Gupta 1998: 110–111). The teachers who were not European were likely from Eurasian (of mixed European and Asian ancestry) or Indian background (Gupta 1998: 108), and these groups added their own brands of English into the mix. Thus, because of both the diverse roots of the teachers and the students, who learned English as a second language alongside the language(s) they already knew, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where a certain feature of Singapore English is derived from, and a comparison of Singapore Standard English and RP British Standard English may not be entirely parallel (Gupta 1998: 124–126).

The teachers, though influential, were not the only ones developing Singapore English. The students also developed and reinforced norms, making adjustments and accommodations in their

language according to the group they were in. The children who attended the schools were also of diverse backgrounds and included the Straits Chinese, who spoke their own pidginized form of Malay called Baba Malay. English, then, served as an equalizer in these diverse communities and proved to be incredibly useful for interethnic communication, replacing the previous role that Bahasa Pasar had occupied (Platt & Weber 1980: 20); the British, wanting to ensure the stability of Singapore by downplaying the differences between various ethnic groups, promoted this use of English and further supported English-medium instruction (Platt & Weber 1980: 39).

The two forms of contact Malay—Bahasa Pasar and Baba Malay—were highly influential in the early development of Singapore English. These contact varieties of Malay provided a source for many of the salient lexical features of current Singapore English, such as the discourse particles *lah* and *ah* (Gupta 1998: 112–113); a number of Hokkien items also worked their way into the development of Singapore English through Baba Malay. Gupta (1998), however, diverges from the one-phase model of Colloquial Singapore English development as proposed by Platt & Weber (1980) and instead shows two distinct phases in the development of Colloquial Singapore English: In her analysis, the main foundations of CSE were laid down by children in English-medium schools from English- and Malay-speaking backgrounds; the sudden rise of Chinese-speaking children in the twentieth century initiated a second phase of development (Gupta 1998: 114).

The Japanese occupation of Singapore briefly interrupted English-medium schooling in Singapore during the mid-1940s. During this time, the Japanese permitted both the use of Malay and Tamil in order to gain solidarity with both communities. As for English and Mandarin, however, Japanese administration attempted to replace both languages with Japanese.

This effort had limited success and, after the end of the occupation, both languages once again thrived (Platt & Weber 1980: 36).

After Singapore broke away from Malaysia in 1965 after a two-year merger, English came to have even more of a prominent position as the Singaporean education system favored English as the predominant language of education, whereas Malaysia incorporated English as a second language (Platt & Weber 1980: 43). Originally in Singapore, there had been education streams in each of the four official languages; however, over time, enrollment in these streams dwindled to almost nothing. In 1981, Nanyang University, the sole Chinese-medium university, merged with University of Singapore to create the National University of Singapore; from that point on, all Singaporean universities taught solely in English. (Deterding 2007: 86–87) In 1987, the government officiated English as the predominant language of instruction in schools. Today, there are very few options for non-English-medium schooling.

3 English in Singapore today

3.1 Terminology

A number of different terms are used interchangeably to describe the varieties of English that are spoken in Singapore; however, these terms are rarely formally defined in the contexts in which they are used. These terms are listed below.

(a) *Standard English* – Standard English is not tied to a specific geographical region; rather, it is a form of English that tends to be minimally marked with any regional idiosyncrasies, and is understood across a wide range of English-speaking speech

communities. Standard English is the variety of English used for business and international communication and can be spoken with a number of different accents.

(b) *Singapore Standard English (SSE)* – Singapore Standard English is considered by some to be an Inner Circle variety of English (cf. Gupta 1994, cited in Bao & Hong 2006: 105) and does not differ significantly from Standard English (Bao & Hong 2006). It has its own systematic phonology as well as some morphological and discourse differences (cf. Deterding 2007); these differences do not detract majorly from communication with other speakers of English. SSE is the formal variety of English in Singapore.

(c) *Colloquial Singapore English (CSE)* – May also be referred to as Singapore Colloquial English (SCE). Colloquial Singapore English is the informal variety of English in Singapore; the term is often used interchangeably with Singlish. CSE has undergone heavy substrate influence from Malay and southern varieties of Chinese, such as Hokkien, and therefore features a number of syntactic and lexical differences from SSE. The term "CSE", however, is not as heavily laden with political baggage and negative connotations (or positive connotations, depending on the viewpoint of the speaker) as the term "Singlish" is.

(d) *Singlish* – The term "Singlish" is used to refer to the same variety of English that CSE covers; however, its definition encompasses much more than just the language variety. In her 2005 article "Debating Singlish", Wendy Bokhorst-Heng addresses the extremely fluid nature of the term "Singlish":

> [C]entral to the Singlish debate are confusing definitions and applications of
> the term 'Singlish' itself . . . Some see Singlish broadly as the local brand of
> English (e. g. Brown 1999: v). Others see Singlish as a deviation from 'good

> English' (SGEM 2000). And still others see Singlish as part of the variety of
> English used in Singapore (Platt and Weber 1980; Gupta 1989, 1991; Pakir
> 1995). Various participants manipulate the definition of Singlish to support
> their particular position in the debate, making the term itself a discursive
> construction.
>
> (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 190)

Bokhorst-Heng continues on to argue that the political motivations of the speaker heavily influences their attitude towards the term "Singlish" and their beliefs regarding the position of Singlish in Singaporean society. "Singlish", then, is *not* a neutral term and is heavily tied to a number of sociopolitical issues, including questions of class and national identity; moreover, "Singlish" connotes the arena in which specific political issues are debated—and not necessarily the language itself. The term "Singlish", then, is extremely chameleonic, and its ambiguous nature reflects the complexity of various ideologies of what the Singaporean identity should be. (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 192)

In the following sections, I will use the term Colloquial Singapore English in the context of linguistic discussions and the term Singlish in the context of governmental policies, politics, and popular opinions towards the variety. In popular discourse, the language variety is referred to as Singlish.

3.2 The relationship between SSE and CSE

The relationship between SSE and CSE is debated. Earlier research on Singapore English— both the standard and colloquial varieties—placed the relationship between the two varieties in the context of a lectal continuum, emphasizing the non-native nature of Singapore English and describing different positions on the continuum as being representative of different levels of

proficiency in English (Alsagoff & Ho 1998: 130, 132; cf. Platt & Weber 1980). SSE is the acrolect, and CSE is the mesolect/basilect. Despite the difference in demographics between current-day Singapore and the Singapore from which data used in lectal-approach analyses was drawn, the lectal approach is still popular today, particularly in language teaching contexts (Alsagoff & Ho 1998: 131).

However, other researchers contest the view of English being a non-native language in Singapore (cf. Gupta 1994). The number of native speakers (itself a difficult term because of the varying uses and contexts of English in Singapore) of English in Singapore continues to rise, and a number of researchers (cf. Gupta 1994) have refuted the notion of CSE as an interlanguage, instead describing it as a viable variety of Singapore English that is independent from Standard English (Alsagoff & Ho 1998: 131–132). Thus, a speaker is able to decide to use CSE in a different context than he or she may use SSE. Findings from a quantitative study by Bao & Hong (2006), comparing the use of *already* and *also* in SSE and CSE (lexical items which have a different syntactic placement and different semantic meaning in CSE, as opposed to SSE) confirm the diglossic nature of the division between SSE and CSE and further confirm that SSE differs minimally from British Standard English (Bao & Hong 2006: 112). However, whether the variation between the two is explained by register variation or not is difficult to determine because of the semi-genetic relationship between SSE and CSE (Bao & Hong 112), as CSE has a number of non-genetic features drawn from a Malay/Hokkien substrate that complicate the relationship between the two varieties.

Additionally, perceptions of SSE and CSE differ widely. SSE is considered the prestige variety and is promoted as "good English" by the Singaporean government (cf. the Speak Good English Movement); it is the variety that connects Singapore to the outside world and carries

overt prestige. CSE, meanwhile, is often understood as the variety that promotes solidarity and the variety that holds covert prestige (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 195). A quantitative analysis by Cavallero & Chin (2009) examined this perception of CSE as carrying covert prestige. Using a matched guise test, Cavallero & Chin found, surprisingly, that there was no strong, positive rating for the CSE sample for traits related to covert prestige (friendliness, kindness, likeability, etc.) (Cavallero & Chin 2009: 150–151). However, these results are difficult to interpret and generalize, as a matched guise test may actually measure overt prestige, rather than covert prestige (Cavallero & Chin 2009: 155); additionally, the sample size of the study was relatively small. Actual attitudes towards CSE, then, are difficult to assess and show a good amount of ambivalence, perhaps partially due to the government's strong attempts to discredit CSE and stigmatize it.

3.3 Government attitudes and policies

Before engaging in a discussion of the Singaporean government's attitudes towards Singlish, it is important to understand the nature of the government itself. The Singaporean government has been described with the labels of "authoritarian democracy" and "benevolent dictatorship" (George 2000: 15); power is heavily centralized, but, at the same time, there is still much economic freedom. Cherian George (2000) rejects those terms and instead describes Singapore as "The Air-Conditioned Nation": "a society with a unique blend of comfort and central control, where people have mastered their environment, but at the cost of individual autonomy, and at the risk of unsustainability." (George 2000: 15) This metaphor draws upon the collective obsession with air conditioning (often clipped to just "air-con") in Singapore, sparked by Lee

Kuan Yew himself's obsession with the invention, claiming that it aided concentration in hot and humid environments and allowed for greater efficiency and productivity (George 2000: 14). Unlike states that can be described as "civil associations", where there is a code of conduct for citizens but not necessarily a concrete common purpose, Singapore is an "enterprise association", where citizens are "bound to a common undertaking"—in this case, the economic development of Singapore and the promotion of the Singaporean economy as competitive, first-world, and cutting-edge; the government, then, is given strong control, and citizens are willing to give up some civil liberties for social stability and order (George 2000: 19, 21).

This heavy stress on economic competitive is key to understanding Singapore's existence and numerous governmental policies, including the governmental view of language. In Singapore, then, language is commodified (cf. Wee 2008). English is packaged as Singapore's key to the global economy and as the tool that allows for economic growth. However, English is simultaneously marked as Western and conducive to the loss of a distinct, Asian identity. The government, then, institutionalizes the learning and value of "mother tongues". The government's definition of a "mother tongue", however, is strict and oversimplified—people's "mother tongue", which they are to study in school, is the language that correlates with their ethnicity (and, if they are of mixed ethnicities, then, in most cases, the language that correlates with the ethnicity of their father). Thus, the Chinese in Singapore must learn Mandarin in school; Malays, Malay; and Indians, Tamil. These mother tongues are packaged as holding cultural value and act as a counter to Westernization, although Mandarin is, with the rise of China's economic power, increasingly viewed as well in terms of linguistic instrumentalism (cf. Wee 2008).

3.3.1 The crisis model of management

Figure 1 shows Bokhorst-Heng's delineation of the crisis model of management. The Singaporean government has applied this model to a number of different situations it faces, painting different issues with alarmist strokes. Race relations are often described in the context of this model; the delicate balance and peace between ethnic groups is emphasized, and the Singaporean government makes clear that clear steps must be taken to prevent anything catastrophic, such as race riots, from happening. During my visit to Singapore in the summer of 2009, the Community Engagement Programme (CEP) handed out a small booklet outlining the rationale behind its existence, exemplifying in the text the alarmist and crisis overtones that motivate numerous governmental policies, programs, and attitudes:

> The challenges facing our society today, such as terrorism and religious extremism, will not go away in the near future. If there is a crisis in Singapore, we need to remain calm and avoid knee-jerk reactions. This is why we need to build strong networks of trust within our multi-ethnic, multi-religious society, and be prepared so that we know what to do in a crisis.
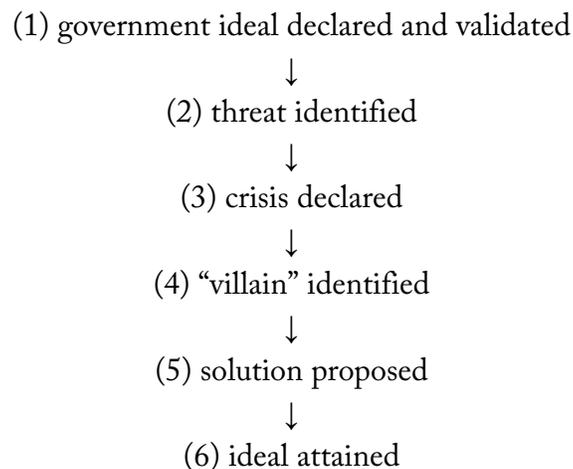
> (Singapore United 2009: 1)

(1) government ideal declared and validated
↓
(2) threat identified
↓
(3) crisis declared
↓
(4) "villain" identified
↓
(5) solution proposed
↓
(6) ideal attained

Figure 1: Singapore government crisis model (adapted from Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 196–197)

It is no surprise, then, that this model has also been applied to the language situation in Singapore. The English language holds a critical position in Singapore for two purposes: (1) It provides an equalizing bridge between the various ethnic groups, and (2) it is perceived as being key to the economic development of Singapore—the English language is packaged and commodified, advertised as having high economic value: a view known as linguistic instrumentalism (cf. Wee 2008).

It is the second point that provides the impetus for the presentation of the English situation within the mold of the crisis model: The Singaporean government holds the idealized image of Singapore as a global economic competitor; in order to attain this ideal, Singaporeans must have a strong command of an intelligible form of Standard English. Singlish, then, is presumed to threaten this ideal image for a number of reasons: (1) Because Singlish is seen as a "broken" form of English, it is assumed to be damaging to Singapore's reputation and (2) The presence of Singlish is assumed to hinder the learning of Standard English and therefore hinder economic development and progress (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 198). A crisis emerges: The presence of Singlish is seen to undermine Singapore's viability as an economic stronghold; the solution is to reduce—if not eliminate entirely—the existence and usage of Singlish; then, Singapore will be able to make strong progress towards this ideal. The coexistence of Singlish and Standard Singapore English in a diglossic situation is not an option (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 204); there is little, if any, room for compromise.

3.3.2 The Speak Good English Movement (SGEM)

In March 2000, the Singaporean government launched the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) (Chng 2008: 60). The movement puts on a number of skits and publishes columns and books on the proper use of English; one of these book series, for instance, is titled *English as It is Broken*. Although materials on the SGEM website state that the intent is to promote the use of Standard English, many (cf. Bokhorst-Heng 2005, Rubdy 2001) have interpreted the campaign as an attempt to eradicate the use of CSE.

The success of the movement is unclear. In a small survey conducted by Chng in 2005, 9 of the 40 respondents were not even aware of the movement's existence; 21 of the 40 respondents evaluated the movement as having little success, and 32 of the respondents doubted that SSE would eventually replace the use of CSE; at the same time, 36 of the respondents felt that it was important to be able to properly use SSE (Chng 2008: 61–62). It may be possible, though, that the movement has had some success in stigmatizing CSE and the use of CSE—Young (2004, cited in Chng 2008: 62) found that 23% of undergraduates agreed with the statement "English is a handicap we must not wish on Singaporeans", a quote from a speech given by the then-Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew; Cavallero & Chin (2009: 155) also point to the SGEM as a possible explanation as to why their matched guise test showed the anomalous result of SSE being rated on all counts—traits associated with both overt and covert prestige—as higher than CSE.

Bokhorst-Heng (2005) compares the SGEM with the Speak Mandarin Campaign (SMC), which has been highly successful in reducing the use of Chinese dialects in Singaporean homes. Both campaigns—although the government has been careful to call the SGEM a *movement* and not a *campaign*, citing their reason being the desire for it to be more of a grassroots movement, fostered by the people, and with a much lighter mood (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 204)—follow

similar discursive strategies. Bokhorst-Heng (2005: 197) identifies seven of these strategies: (a) reductive logic, which places SSE and CSE, or Mandarin and other dialects, in an inverse relationship with one another; (b) dichotomies, which validate one form of the language and invalidate the others; (c) absolutes; (d) the "moral tone", which places a judgement call on the value of the language; (e) the use of metaphor; (f) the use of the "expert voice", i.e. supporting claims with academic research; and (g) the importance of homogeneity. It has yet to be seen whether the SGEM will parallel the success of the SMC.

3.4 The Singlish debate: Internationalism vs. identity—a nation in flux

Debates on the position of Singlish in Singapore are divided on the line of internationalism vs. identity. Those who take the international view of English in Singapore (e.g. the government) emphasize the importance of learning and commanding Standard English in order to have a global voice and a hand in international economics; Singlish is vilified and rejected as holding back this economic progress, and all efforts are made to discourage its use. Prescriptivist viewpoints and understandings of language dominate this discourse; a number of language myths—e.g. that there is only one "correct" form of English—are also prominent. On the other hand, those who take a localized view of English in Singapore see Singlish as a vital marker of Singaporean identity and advocate for a diglossic relationship between SSE and Singlish. Appeals to Singapore's history and the need for a Singaporean identity are prominent. Figure 2 sums up the main points from the arguments on both sides of the debate.

As mentioned before, fallacies about the "correctness" of language dominate the internationalist argument. Singlish's validity as a language system is rejected despite the body of

academic literature examining the complex grammar that underlines Singlish (cf. Alsagoff & Ho 1998, Deterding 2007, Platt & Weber 1980). Singlish is labeled as being "broken" and, therefore, un worthy of being a part of the construction of Singapore's identity (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 202–203). Singlish is placed in opposition to Standard English; government officials argue that research has shown that most people can only master one language and therefore argue that an inverse relationship exists between Singlish and Standard English—the prominence of one, therefore, necessarily requires the submission of another. "[T]o speak Singlish when you are capable of speaking Standard English is not to celebrate national identity and patriotism, but to do the nation a 'disservice' (Goh 2000, cited in Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 200)." This discourse is strict, inflexible, and leaves no room, in theory, for the possibility of a diglossic situation such as those that exist in other nations. Moreover, the Singaporean government does not consider the use of Singlish to teach Standard English despite research that indicates that the use of the vernacular to teach the standard form of a dialect often has a positive outcome (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 200).

Those who advocate in favor of Singlish appeal to Singlish's ability to act as a bridge across ethnic groups, classes, age groups, and other demographic factors to unite Singaporeans in the construction of a Singaporean identity derived from a common past. Hwee Hwee Tan conjures up these exact images in the TIMES article "A war of words over 'Singlish'":

> Singlish is crude precisely because it's rooted in Singapore's unglamorous past. This is a nation built from the sweat of uncultured immigrants who arrived 100 years ago to bust their asses in the boisterous port. Our language grew out of the hardships of these ancestors. And Singlish is a key ingredient in the unique melting pot that is Singapore. This is a city where skyscraping banks tower over junk boats; a city where vendors hawk steaming pig intestines next to bistros that serve haute cuisine. The SGEM's brand of good English is as bland as

boiled potatoes. If the government has its way, Singapore will become a dish devoid of flavor. And I'm not talking cock [nonsense].

(Tan 2002)

Internationalism	Identity
intelligibility – In order to have a global edge, SSE must be internationally intelligible; Singlish, however, has limited intelligibility outside Singapore.	*national identity* – Singlish is viewed as the "heart" of Singapore and reflective of the nation's collective experience.
reputation – Singlish, as "broken English", harms Singapore's reputation and makes Singaporeans look unintelligent and incompetent.	*national unity* – English unifies the different ethnic groups in Singapore; Singlish, then, provides a familiar, local flavor, as opposed to the implanted feel of Standard English.
education – Singlish and Standard English exist in an inverse relationship; Singlish thus hinders the learning of SSE and is therefore a threat to the state's economic progress.	*diglossia* – SSE and Singlish can coexist and do not need to damage one another; advocation of code-switching based on the situation.
pragmatic/economic rationality – Standard English is necessary to communicate in the global economy and help Singapore gain a competitive edge.	*linguistic legitimacy* – Singlish is its own valid variety of English with a distinct system of rules governing its use; Singlish has a grammar.
meritocracy – Standard English is the key to advancement in society, and Singlish holds back that advancement.	*relationship between language and social class* – Conspicuously absent from this side of the debate.

Figure 2: Key points from the internationalism vs. identity debate; adapted from Bokhorst-Heng 2005.

However, just as the government relies on certain fallacies regarding language to perpetuate its campaign, advocates of Singlish on the appeal to identity also face certain problematic issues in their arguments. The primary issue that brings into contention the identity argument is the conspicuous lack of discussion regarding social class. Although Singlish may be common to all social classes, the fact remains that command of Standard English is heavily correlated with occupational mobility and with family income (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 201). Moreover, a large

portion of those who advocate for Singlish are people who have the ability to code-switch between SSE and Singlish; those who are only able to speak Singlish are largely unrepresented in the debate. Proponents of Singlish, then, have been accused of "cultural slumming" (*Straits Times* September 13, 1999, quoted in Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 202) and of allowing for restriction on occupational mobility by promoting and perpetuating Singlish.

The Singlish debate is unlikely to die down anytime soon. Bokhorst-Heng argues that the very debate over Singlish characterizes Singapore and has become part of the Singaporean identity—the arena of the debate over Singlish allows both the Singaporean government and people to play out sociopolitical issues related to the construction and imagination of a nation, and the framing of the debate within the crisis model is also typical of Singaporean government and politics. (Bokhorst-Heng 2005: 205–206) As long as Singapore continues to struggle with building an identity for itself, the Singlish debate will continue.

4 Conclusion

The situation of English in Singapore is complex and, since the introduction of the language to the region by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819, has been deeply rooted within the changing political and social scene of the nation. English is not only a means of communication between people but also a symbol, carrying heavy baggage along with it; it is the language delegated with the responsibility of maintaining racial harmony and pushing economic progress. The position of Singlish in Singapore is equally as complex, representing an arena where tensions of Singaporean identity play out, and where the forces of internationalization and the creation of a uniquely Singaporean identity come into conflict. Given the current demographic trends, the use of English within Singaporean homes is likely to continue increasing as Singapore continues to

make a name for itself in the global market and as Singapore English moves more and more

towards settling as an Inner Circle variety of English.

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