Does Singlish Contribute to Singaporean's National Identity, and do Singaporeans Support Formal Recognition of it?

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Does Singlish Contribute to Singaporean's National Identity, and do Singaporeans Support Formal Recognition of it?

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Abstract

'Singlish' is a colloquial form of English that was influenced by other languages used in Singapore, such as Chinese Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. The creole is widely used by Singaporeans in informal contexts, but is discouraged by the government, as it is considered 'broken English', and may erode Singapore's linguistic capital. Singlish has evolved to become a source of national identity, though it remains associated with low prestige and a language spoken by the less educated. This study investigates the use of Singlish by 82 Singaporean adults in Singapore, and their general perception towards the creolized language. All participants completed a 26-item questionnaire which assessed their usage of Singlish in different situations, their general perception, and their opinions on whether Singlish should be propagated or not. The results indicated that the usage of Singlish is most prevalent in informal situations, when the social distance is narrower, and when the conversational partners are of a different race. In terms of their perception, most respondents are generally proud of the creolized language, and thought that it contributes to the national identity of Singaporeans. With regard to the issue of whether to promote or ban Singlish, most of them took a neutral stance.

Keywords: Singlish, National Identity, Diglossia, Linguistic Capital, Language Policy.

Introduction

Singapore

Singapore is a small island nation with scarce natural resources, and was a British colony for more than a hundred years until 1963. It gained independence in 1965 reluctantly after it was expelled from Malaysia due to ideological differences. Since it has limited resources in terms of land, markets, water and natural resources, Singapore has to rely on international trading, financial services and tourism as its main economy. Singapore is a multiracial and multilingual country, with roughly 74.3 percent of its 3.9 million citizens being ethnically Chinese, 13.3 percent

Malay, 9.1 percent Indian, and the rest of other ethnicity (e.g., Eurasians) (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2016).

SSE and Singlish

The Standard Singapore English – SSE (basically British English with slight variance in accent) is one of the four official languages in Singapore, and is the first language by default. Aside from being a colonial legacy (i.e., British Colony), the rationale behind privileging SSE is due to the fact that it has a high instrumental value of being used externally for international communication – a linguistic capital that is economically advantageous (Atkinson et al., 2003), and internally for inter-ethnic communication (Singapore is a multiracial, multicultural and multilingual country).

'Singlish', on the other hand, is an English-based Creole in Singapore that was influenced by other languages such as Malay, Chinese and Tamil - a 'patchwork patois of Singapore's state languages' as described by Gwee (2016). The creole is very commonly used in informal settings, but largely discouraged by the government, as it is considered a 'broken version' of the SSE.

Erosion of Linguistic Capital vs Erosion of National Identity

Singapore's participation in the global economy has guided the government to favour languages that have more economic value, and which can provide access to global trade and communication. Singlish is seen as eroding the English proficiencies of Singaporeans, which translates directly into the erosion of Singapore's linguistic capital. Due to being regarded as a language spoken by less educated people, the government openly and actively discourages the use of Singlish by frequently rolling out programmes that promote the use of 'Proper English'. Nevertheless, although there are no calls to elevate Singlish to the status of a national language, the general public mostly identify with the creole, recognizing it as something unique to Singaporeans, perhaps even a trademark for Singaporeans (Chng, 2008).

This presents a dilemma, as the SSE is a linguistic capital that cannot be corrupted, yet at the same time, Singlish has the potential of being a unifying device for the country.

The Intention and Significance of the Study

Lim (2010) views Singlish as 'an inevitable product' of Singapore's 'linguistic history', and that 'to desire its eradication is hence unrealistic and futile'. Since this is an unstoppable product of history, with a potentially unifying feature, it is imperative that we examine its prevalence in Singapore, the general attitude towards it, and gather opinions on whether to propagate or discourage the language variety. At the point of this study, there are no clear resolutions nor suggestions to resolve the dilemma, with the government strongly advocating the proper use of the English language, while its officials frequently using the creole to connect with the common people.

This study seeks to provide more information on the prevalence, and most importantly, the acceptance of the creole (i.e., Singlish), to better inform policy makers that suppression of it may really be an ineffectual attempt. To unite its citizens, this may be a potential instrument instead – though they have been using it without openly acknowledging it. The collected data will serve to inform policy makers of the diglossic situation in Singapore, the extent to which Singaporeans

think Singlish contributes to the national identity, and very importantly, an idea of what average Singaporeans think should be done to the creole.

Literature Review
Singapore's Language Policy

Chng (2008) mentioned that Singapore's language policy is guided by two main factors: the external need for global economic access, and the internal need for maintaining a racially diverse population. Hence, during the early stages of nation building in the 1970s, the newly formed Singapore government designated four languages as its official languages: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil, with English as the default 'first language' for administration, business, law and the medium of instruction in schools.

In addition, Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, made education in a second language compulsory, as he wanted Singaporeans to not only be competent in English (a world language), but also in their mother tongue (e.g., ethnic Indians learning Tamil), so that its citizens can remain true to their cultural heritage, and potentially benefiting from the countries where their forefathers migrated from (e.g., tapping on the booming economy of China) (Lee, 2012).

The Evolution of Singapore English – 'Singlish'

As a result of its bilingual language policy, most Singaporeans born after 1965 are bilingual from infancy, though with varying degrees of fluency. Even though English became the core language for education in Singapore, the combined effect of bilingualism, and the influence of other languages (especially the various varieties of Chinese and Malay dialects) have largely modified the English language used by Singaporeans (Gupta, 1994). Subsequently, a distinct variety widely known as Singlish (or Singapore Colloquial English) evolved out of the Standard British English that it was initially based on. The creolized language borrows generously from various languages and dialects for its grammatical structures, vocabulary and spoken accent, hence may sound comical, or even unintelligible to native English speakers.

Opponents of Singlish

Due to pragmatic concerns about the creole impeding the learning and usage of Standard English over time, there have been calls to purge it. From the government's perspective, there is no room for an unofficial variety like Singlish, and there is no rationale for formalizing a language variety that is incomprehensible to other native speakers of English and that will only potentially be used by its small population. In his famous speech regarding the debate on the usage of Singlish, the first Prime Minister warned that 'Singlish is a handicap we must not wish on Singaporeans' (Lee, 1999). In a news article by Au Yong (2007), it was mentioned that Singapore's current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also publicly declared that Singlish should not be considered part of Singaporean's identity:

> '…We have to have a sense of who we are, but it cannot be based on speaking Singlish. It has to be based on your pride in being a Singaporean, you grew up here…this is where you can make a difference and you fit in…'

Lee further suggests that Singaporeans should learn (proper) English (i.e., Standard English), which is the working language, as Singlish may sound unintelligible to people who do not speak the variety.

The Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) is an ongoing campaign that was launched in April 2000 by the Singapore government to 'encourage Singaporeans to speak grammatically correct English that is universally understood' (Speak Good English Movement, 2000). The campaign came as a response to the popularization of Singlish, and is an effort to prevent the erosion of the linguistic capital of Singapore, to which Chng (2008) assumes, has the 'hidden agenda' of eradicating the creolized language.

From the average Singaporean's perspective, Jenkins (2003) mentioned that some Singaporeans are worried that the use of Singlish among young children may affect their literacy level, and that they may not acquire an internationally acceptable form of English. Still, some other opponents warned Singlish supporters 'not to mistake illiteracy with identity'.

Proponents of Singlish

Chng (2008) has however argued that Singlish is invaluable 'in the local linguistic marketplace as an essential marker of Singaporean identity', suggesting that the government should not only focus on the economic value a language can bring, but also intangible benefits such as being a identity marker for Singaporeans – an important concern for a multiracial and multilingual country with a short common history of only fifty odd years. Gupta (1994) makes a similar claim that Singlish is a 'badge of identity for many Singaporeans'.

The Dilemma

Singaporeans are often confused on whether to view Singlish as a cultural treasure or a national embarrassment. Despite the negative pressure from the authorities, many Singaporeans are quietly proud of Singlish, and see it as a wish of Singaporeans desiring a distinct cultural identity for the country. Many Singlish supporters feel a sense of pride towards Singlish, though they may not openly admit it due to the government's explicit discouragement for using Singlish, and the stigmatization associated with it.

In Gwee's (2016) article, the author claims that state's efforts to 'quash it have only made it flourish', that the politicians and government officials are succumbing to its power to connect with the masses, freely using it even during election campaigns, perhaps indirectly implying that this creole is an alternative linguistic capital (albeit within the country) capable of garnering votes. Other authors have shared this dilemma, with Tan (2016) suggesting that while Singaporeans should not celebrate Singlish, 'there's no escaping how it identifies and brings Singaporeans closer together'.

Some have suggested a middle-road solution to co-exist with this cultural phenomenon, that Singaporeans can usually distinguish between formal and informal usage, and thus switch codes when communicating with others (Tan L. L., 2016). The government have been quick to rebut this idea, claiming that not all speakers have a good command of Standard English and could code-switch effortlessly, as some speakers requires extra efforts in mastering the standard form (Chang, 2016).

Method
Purpose
The purpose of this study is to investigate the usage and perception of Singlish among adults in Singapore. The study addresses the following three research questions (RQs):

RQ1.   When do Singaporeans usually speak Singlish?

RQ2.   What do Singaporeans think of Singlish?

RQ3.   What do Singaporeans think the government should do with Singlish?

Participants
A total of 82 Singaporean adults took part in the study. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 54 years, with an average age of 35.4 years. Out of the eight two respondents, 39 are males (47.5%) and 43 are females (52.5%). In terms of nationality and ethnicity, all of them are Singaporean citizens, with 60 being ethnic Chinese, 11 ethnic Malays, and 11 ethnic Indians - this incidentally roughly corresponds with the racial proportion of the Singapore population. These participants were randomly selected strangers that were approached in a public place, with most of them being working adults, and some of them current University or Polytechnic students.

Instrument
The questionnaire that addresses the three research questions consists of six parts and contains 26 multiple-choice questions.
1.   Part I requires answering questions about the individuals' background information, and also to ascertain whether they are Singaporeans - this is important as there are many permanent residents in Singapore, who are not citizens, but have lived in Singapore for many years. This group of people may not identify themselves as native Singaporeans, and may confound the results. Due to this same reason, an online survey option was also not considered, as it was difficult to determine if the online participants were real Singaporeans.
2.   (for RQ 1) Part II examines language use based on the *formality dimension*.
3.   (for RQ 1) Part III examines language use based on the *status/power dimension*.
4.   (for RQ 1) Part IV examines language use based on the *social distance dimension*.
5.   (for RQ 2) Part V assesses the participants' *attitude* towards Singlish.
6.   (for RQ 3) Part VI seeks to find out *opinions* regarding the propagation and promotion of Singlish.

The questions in Part III, Part IV and Part V attempt to uncover linguistic choices made by Singaporeans with reference to the different social dimensions mentioned by Holmes (2008). In the process of analysing the results, we will try to find out specifically when Singlish is used. These three parts consist of similar questions that are repeated to account for **racial differences** (i.e., to check if there are differences in language choice when faced with interlocutors of the same or different race).

Two adults (a working adult and a University student) were asked to complete a pilot questionnaire to check if it was clearly understood. They were then briefed about the intention of the questionnaire, and were asked for feedback. Based on their suggestions, some wordings

and sentences were rephrased for better clarity. Their responses were not included in the overall analysis.

A verbal open-ended question (i.e., "Do you have any other opinions or suggestions regarding Singlish?") was also prepared, to help uncover any additional attitudes and suggestions not covered by the structured questionnaire.

Procedure

The questionnaire surveys were conducted by two hired university undergraduates, in a crowded public residential area (known as 'town centres' in Singapore). These town centres generally consist of residential buildings, shopping malls, subway stations, and other public amenities. The main reasons for selecting the particular location was firstly because of the crowds, making it easier to find willing participants; and secondly to target as many people from diverse ages and backgrounds as possible. The hired surveyors were Singaporeans, which was essential in identifying and distinguishing between Singaporeans and non-Singaporeans respondents, while the language used for communication was Standard Singapore English.

Random strangers were approached and requested for three minutes of their time to fill up a questionnaire to 'find out about language use in Singapore'. There was no explicit mention of the questionnaire being a 'survey on Singlish', so as to avoid evoking a sudden feeling of pride and patriotism, which may influence the responses. Clarifications were also given to some of the terms in the questionnaire, for example, the word "acquaintances" were explained as "people that you know, but are not familiar with". The exercise was stopped after 3 hours, as the surveyors were only contracted for this duration.

Limitations of the Study

The sample was too small to be representative of all Singaporeans. Also, the questionnaire may be too restrictive – leaving the participants with no other choices. More open-ended interviews should be done, for both proponents and opponents of Singlish, in order to find out more information about their attitudes.

Since a substantial portion the questionnaire require that the respondents make choices based on their ability to differentiate between Standard English as compared to Singlish - this presents another problem, which perhaps is more difficult to address, in that there is not really a fine line between the creole and the standard version of the language, or is there a standard description available to the public on what really constitutes Singlish. There could be instances where participants overestimate their own language competencies, and think that they are speaking proper English when in reality they are not (e.g., by being very fluent, but not necessarily being linguistically accurate); or underestimate their own language competencies, and think that as long as they do not speak like news anchors or school teachers, that they are automatically speaking the non-standard local variety. In this case, additional items could be added to ask for the respondents' English proficiency level, for example, requiring the respondents to state their highest educational level, and also the grade for their English subject in the last formal English proficiency assessment (e.g., GCE 'O' level English subject). Conclusions could then be drawn to find out if the support for Singlish is due to a weak command of Standard English, which could be

a sign of self-protection; or whether the support for the stigmatized creole is really due to strong identification with it.

Results

RQ1: When do Singaporeans usually speak Singlish?

Parts II, III and IV serve to investigate the language choices of the participants according to: the formality dimension (Part II), status/power dimension (Part III), and the social distance dimension (Part IV).

Part II		
Language choice in different situations		
7.	What language do you speak predominantly AT HOME?	
	a) Standard English	(15, 18.3%)
	b) Singlish	(18, 21.9%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(49, 59.8%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
8.	What language do you speak predominantly AT WORK / STUDY?	
	a) Standard English	(55, 67.1%)
	b) Singlish	(15, 18.3%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(12, 14.6%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
9.	Apart from home/work/study, what language do you speak predominantly in FORMAL situations (e.g., interviews, presentations, meetings)?	
	a) Standard English	(82, 100%)
	b) Singlish	(0, 0%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(0, 0%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
10.	Apart from home/work/study, what language do you speak predominantly in INFORMAL situations (e.g., chatting with friends)?	
	a) Standard English	(5, 6%)
	b) Singlish	(66, 80.5%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(11, 13.4%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)

Table 1: Language choice in different situations

The results in Part II (see Table 1) showed that the majority of the participants communicate primarily in their second language (i.e., mother tongue) at home (59.8%), and in Standard English (SE) at work or study (67.1%). Two further questions revealed that apart from home, work or study, the participants predominantly speak SE in formal situations (100%), and Singlish during informal situations (80.5%).

Part III		
Language choice when communicating with people of different statuses		
11.	What language do you speak predominantly with CLASSMATES / COLLEAGUES of the SAME RACE?	
	a) Standard English	(14, 17.1%)
	b) Singlish	(40, 48.8%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(28, 34.1%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
12.	What language do you speak predominantly with CLASSMATES / COLLEAGUES of a DIFFERENT RACE?	
	a) Standard English	
	b) Singlish	(24, 29.3%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(58, 70.7%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
		(0, 0%)
13.	What language do you speak predominantly with TEACHERS / SUPERIORS of the SAME RACE?	
	a) Standard English	(77, 93.9%)
	b) Singlish	(5, 6.1%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(0, 0%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
14.	What language do you speak predominantly with TEACHERS / SUPERIORS of a DIFFERENT RACE?	
	a) Standard English	(77, 93.9%)
	b) Singlish	(5, 6.1%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(0, 0%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)

Table 2: Language choice when communicating with people of different statuses

The responses in Part III (see Table 2), indicated that most of the participants prefer communicating in Singlish when communicating with peers (i.e., classmates, colleagues) regardless of the race (48.8% for same race, 70.7% for different race). Nevertheless, when the conversational partners are people seemingly in authoritative positions, most participants chose SE as the language of communication, also regardless of the race (93.9% for both conversational partners of the same or different race).

Part IV		
Language choice based on social distance		
15.	What language do you speak predominantly with FRIENDS of the SAME RACE?	
	a) Standard English	(14, 17.1%)
	b) Singlish	(28, 34.1%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(40, 48.8%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
16.	What language do you speak predominantly with FRIENDS of a DIFFERENT RACE?	
	a) Standard English	(17, 20.7%)
	b) Singlish	(65, 79.3%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(0, 0%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
17.	What language do you speak predominantly with ACQUAINTANCES of the SAME RACE?	
	a) Standard English	(45, 54.9%)
	b) Singlish	(25, 30.5%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(12, 14.6%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
18.	What language do you speak predominantly with ACQUAINTANCES of a DIFFERENT RACE?	
	a) Standard English	(54, 65.9%)
	b) Singlish	(28, 34.1%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(0, 0%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
19.	What language do you speak predominantly with STRANGERS of the SAME RACE?	
	a) Standard English	(54, 65.9%)
	b) Singlish	(15, 18.3%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(13, 15.9%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
20.	What language do you speak predominantly with STRANGERS of a DIFFERENT RACE?	
	a) Standard English	(65, 79.3%)
	b) Singlish	(17, 20.7%)
	c) Second Language (Chinese, Malay, Tamil)	(0, 0%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)

Table 3: Language choice based on social distance

The last part for research question 1 is Part IV (see Table 3), with the results showing that Singlish is only predominantly used when communicating with friends of a different race (79.3%).

RQ2: What do Singaporeans think of Singlish?

Part V of the questionnaire seeks to uncover the general perception of and attitude towards Singlish among the participants, and most importantly, to find out if they thought that Singlish (despite being an officially discouraged creolized language), contributes to the national identity of Singaporeans.

Part V		
What do you think of Singlish?		
21.	Do you see Singlish more as a "Dialect of English" or more like "Broken English"?	
	a) more as a "Dialect of English"	(39, 47.6%)
	b) more like "Broken English"	(43, 52.4%)
	c) Other	(0, 0%)
22.	How do you generally feel about Singlish?	
	a) I sometimes feel ashamed when speaking Singlish.	(8, 9.8%)
	b) I am openly proud of Singlish.	(26, 34.1%)
	c) I am quietly proud of Singlish.	(48, 58.5%)
	d) Other	(0, 0%)
23.	How do you feel when a fellow Singaporean speaks with you in Singlish?	
	a) Heart-warming	(44, 53.7%)
	b) Familiar	(30, 36.6%)
	c) Indifferent	(8, 9.8%)
24.	Do you think Singlish ***contributes*** to Singaporeans' national identity? (i.e., common identity)	
	a) Yes	(68, 82.9%)
	b) No	(6, 7.3%)
	c) Not sure	(8, 9.8%)

Table 4: Perception of Singlish

The results (see Table 4) showed that the classification of Singlish by Singaporeans is rather torn between viewing it as a form of dialect (47.6%) and as a corrupted form of Standard English (52.4%). When asked about their emotional reaction to Singlish, most respondents (92.6%) were proud of Singlish, though 58.5% possibly felt embarrassed to admit this openly. The next question seeks to confirm the assumption that most Singaporeans would express positive feelings toward Singlish, with the results showing that 53.7% of the respondents selected 'heart-warming' as a reaction towards Singlish. Revisiting the issue of national identity, the responses for question 24 shows that most of the respondents feel that Singlish contributes to a common national identity (82.9%).

RQ3: What do Singaporeans think the government should do with Singlish?

	Part VI	
	Policies for Singlish	
25.	Do you think Singlish should be made an official language in Singapore? a) Yes b) No c) Not sure	 (3, 3.7%) (68, 82.9%) (11, 13.4%)
26.	What do you think the Singapore government should do with Singlish? a) Promote Singlish along with Standard English (i.e., Singlish will be standardized, with standard Singlish vocabulary, grammar, etc., and will be taught in schools). b) Promote Standard English, but also freely allow for the usage of Singlish (i.e., no standardization of Singlish, with minimal government intervention). c) Promote Standard English and ban Singlish.	 (3, 3.7%) (75, 91.5%) (4, 4.9%)

Table 5: Recommendations and suggestions for Singlish policy

The results showed that most of the participants (82.9%) do not want Singlish to be standardized. The responses to the last question indicated that the majority of the participants (91.5%) do not necessarily wish for the formalization nor the ban of Singlish.

Open-Ended Question: Do you have any other opinions or suggestions regarding Singlish?
Only two out of eight two participants stayed on after the completion of the structured questionnaire to ask about the study. In the midst of communicating about the intention of the study, they were asked the open-ended question. However, their answers merely re-iterated their stance expressed in the questionnaire:
   i.   "…Singapore government should recognize Singlish openly, because it feels like a trademark, a shared heritage and history. When you are overseas, you will recognize a fellow Singaporean immediately if you hear Singlish…"
   ii.   "…Singlish unites our different cultures; the different colours come together to create a new colour – Singlish is a 'Singapore colour'. It feels so much closer when we chat in Singlish among friends…"

Discussion
RQ1: When do Singaporeans usually speak Singlish?
Part II of the questionnaire provides evidence that the majority of the respondents communicate in Singlish informally outside work, study and home, which seems to concur with popular views that Singlish is used predominantly in informal situations. Analysis of the results showed that the majority of the participants communicate primarily in their second language (i.e., mother tongue) at home (59.8%), and in Standard English (SE) at work or study (67.1%). This

reflects the successful implementation of the Bilingual language policy of the Singapore government, which encourages Singaporeans to be proficient in Standard English (so as to be competitive globally), while retaining the ethnic and cultural roots – hence the overwhelming use of the second languages (i.e., the mother tongue languages) at home.

Analysis of the results in Part III revealed that most of the respondents communicate with their peers in Singlish, regardless of race. This suggests a manifestation of a governmental policy (i.e., the promotion of SE usage in schools and workplaces); however, with a hint of distortion in real-life implementation – that the general public do communicate in English, albeit using the vernacular variety. Nevertheless, when communicating with people in authoritative positions, most people chose SE, which concurs with the idea that when conversing with people with power in multilingual communities, they will most probably speak the official language (Holmes, 2008).
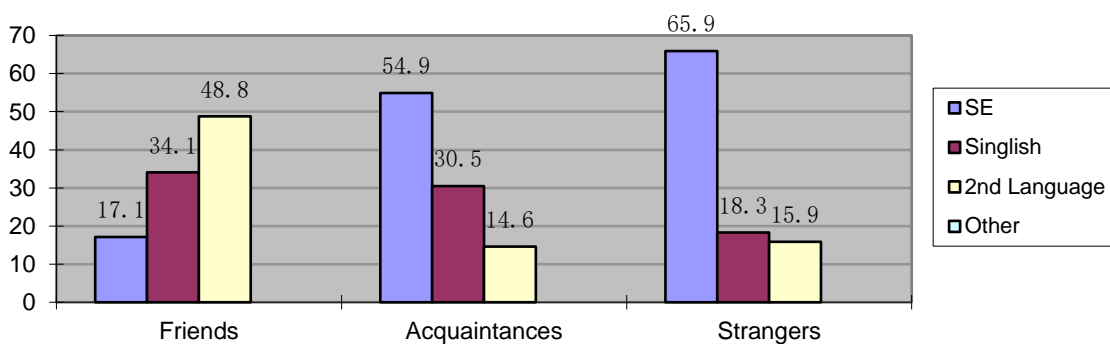

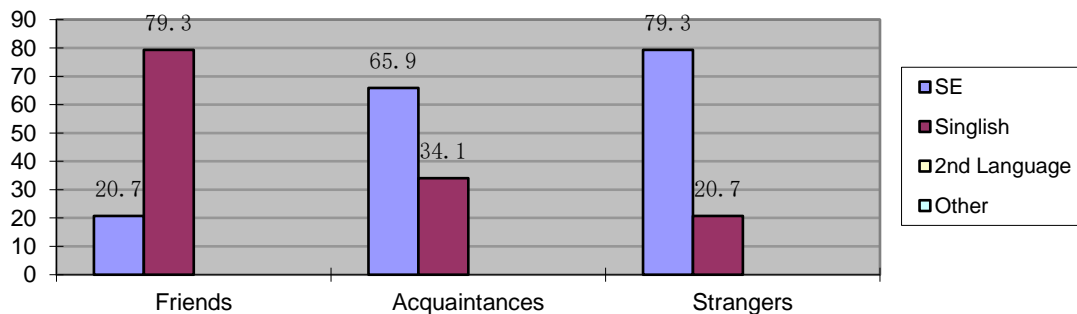Figure 1: Language choice based on social distance (same race)

Figure 2: Language choice based on social distance (different race)

The results in Part IV echoes Holmes (2008) view that 'strangers with little in common are more likely to use a lingua franca or official language for communication', which in this case shows that as the social distance widens, regardless of race, the preferred language increasingly shifts to Standard English (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Singlish, on the other hand, decreased in usage.

RQ2: What do Singaporeans think of Singlish?

The results in Part V shows that the participants find it difficult to conceptualize a category for Singlish, perhaps due to the fact that the creole has never been officially recognized or codified. Some of the negative emotional reactions towards Singlish could be due to the stigmatization of the creole. Despite the dilemma, most of the participants still identify positively with Singlish, with an overwhelming majority feeling that it contributes to the national identity. This dilemma of being proud and embarrassed at the same time is aptly described by Tan (2016) as 'a guilty pleasure', and that 'we do it as a half-proud, half-mocking signifier of how Singaporean (and special) we are'.

Though the SE was originally intended for inter-ethnic communication in Singapore, it is quite surprising to see that Singlish is more prevalent than SE. We can assume that this agrees with what Chng (2008) suggests - that Singlish is a unique identity marker among Singaporeans, and that the multilingual community is *developing its own lingua franca*.

RQ3: What do Singaporeans think the government should do with Singlish?

Most participants (see Table 5) do not want Singlish to be formalized, possibly suggesting that while Singaporeans need and want a common identity (with Singlish being a contributing factor); the economic edge of using Standard English far outweighs the need to formalize the creolized variety. Also, as there is internal variation within Singlish, this makes it hard to be standardized and codified.

The neutral stance taken by most of the participants with regard to the suggested policy for Singlish indicated that most of them seek for a coexistence posture that seeks to preserve Singlish with minimal institutional intervention, which reaffirms Chng's (2008) argument that Singlish need not be eradicated, as '*Singlish is a variety that can co-exist with Standard English, and that Singlish serves as a linguistic resource for many Singaporeans, and not only for the lower strata of Singaporean society*'.

Implications

With the prevalence of Singlish, there is a need to relook at the possible benefits of promoting it, and consider reducing the stigmatization associated with it. With reference to the three solutions as proposed by Smitherman and Cunningham (2000, cited in Atkinson et al., 2003), the Singapore government could reduce stigmatization of Singlish by:

1. openly recognizing Singlish as another variety of English, instead of labelling it as "bad English". If it is considered "different", perhaps the general public will come to appreciate it as something unique to the "Singaporean Identity", a language that has already been popularized, but yet to gain formal recognition.

2. not penalizing the use of Singlish in semi-controlled settings – Singlish is already being used in semi-formal settings (e.g., TV shows), sometimes even during formal contexts like during election campaigns (Gwee, 2016), so the government should probably openly acknowledge this, and not to penalize the use of it. Discouraging the use of it is counter-productive, since the general population will be using it anyway. Policy makers should make use of the momentum to forge better social cohesiveness and strengthen the national identity. With regard to this option, the government have already softened its

position, with the Ministry of Education allowing students to use Singlish in composition (essay) writing, though only in direct speeches (Yang, 2016).

3. learning why and how Singlish came about, as this will help Singaporeans better appreciate Singapore's multi-racial origins, about how internal tensions were reconciled, with Singlish possibly as a symbolic proof of the marriage and acceptance of the various races and cultures, with the birth of a truly unified national identity. Closer study of the political constructions of both Singlish and Standard English will tell us why Singlish cannot be used in place of SE as the national language, despite having a unifying feature.

Limitations

As the responses of the questionnaire are based primarily on self-reports, more information should be included for more accurate evaluations. For example, some participants may not be able to tell the difference between 'Standard English' and 'Singlish', especially if they have low proficiency levels.

Summary and Conclusion

The Singapore government views Singlish as being detrimental to the Singapore economy, and may jeopardize its economic edge over neighbouring Asian countries. However, the results indicated that Singlish is not only prevalent, but widely accepted by Singaporeans, and thus the government may have: (i) underestimated the prevalence of the creole, (ii) underestimated its potential unifying features, (iii) wrongly assumed that Singaporeans would speak Singlish to foreigners who do not understand the variety, and (iv) that Singaporeans cannot distinguish between Standard English and Singlish, thereby not knowing how to exercise appropriate linguistic selection in various linguistic contexts. The results do lend support to the notion that code-switching may be a feasible prospect, though it remains a question if the speakers could differentiate between the two language varieties.

Returning to the first research question (i.e., *When do Singaporeans usually speak Singlish?*), this study provided evidence that despite the government's efforts to eradicate Singlish, the use of the language variety is still very much prevalent among adults in Singapore, and that it is mostly used in informal contexts, with people of perceived equal or lower status, and especially with conversational partners of different races. The responses to the second research question (i.e., *What do Singaporeans think of Singlish?*) were generally favourable, with many participants expressing positive feelings towards Singlish, and indicating that it contributes to their sense of pride, as well as the national identity of Singaporeans. As for the third research question (i.e., *What do Singaporeans think the government should do with Singlish?*), it was discovered that most of the respondents rejected the idea of standardizing Singlish, and that the language was best left untouched.

There might be a possibility that the support for Singlish might correlate inversely with the level of Standard English proficiency. Therefore, further studies need to be done to find out the English levels, possibly through comparison of previous test scores (e.g., the GCE 'O' level English subject examination score) with the usage, perception, and recommendation of Singlish (Part II to VI of the questionnaire). The current study also needs to be replicated with larger samples, with the inclusion of more open-ended interviews.

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