

‘Must speak like ang moh? Wah lau!’: Linguistic Imperialism and Singapore’s Speak Good English Movement

Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching — Course Assignment

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Language is a highly political issue in Singapore, partly due to its’ multilingual history. In 2000, the Singapore Government launched the Speak Good English Movement, with the tagline ‘Speak Well. Be Understood.’; its’ aim being to remove some of the characteristic features of Singapore Colloquial English (or Singlish) from common parlance, instead replacing them with ‘good’ English which appears to be close to Standard British English in form. This can be viewed as a kind of linguistic imperialism in which British English is considered superior to the local variety. In this paper, some of the background to the current situation will be reviewed. A small study was conducted on Singaporean students studying in the UK to determine whether they were acting as ‘linguistic imperialists’, bringing British English influences back to Singapore with them. It was found that although this happened to some extent, the majority took a less determined view, although not as in favour of saving Singlish as much of the current literature in this area.

Ever since its’ growth and expansion as an international trading post, Singapore has been a multiracial and multilingual nation. Broadly speaking, there are several major ethnic groups in Singapore today: the majority Chinese, Malays, and Indians. As a result of this diversity it has always been necessary to have some kind of common language to communicate between ethnic groups.

Since independence from Britain in 1965, and especially in the last 20 years, Singapore has seen a huge expansion in the use of English in daily life, to the extent that many Singaporeans now consider English to be their native language.

This has not always been the case. Although British colonialism and international trade has ensured that English speakers have been present on the island for some time, Bokhorst-Heng (1998) describes a situation imposed by the colonial rule as one that was designed specifically to prevent ‘overeducating the natives’; by creating an exclusive system where only the most privileged were permitted to undertake their education in English, and all funding di-

rected to the same English-language schools. The majority of people spoke Bazaar Malay as lingua franca, a Malay-based pidgin with Hokkien Chinese influences (Gupta (1998) suggests that many of the non-English words in Colloquial Singapore English derive from this contact language). However, they maintained their own ‘ethnic’ language in the home and within their community.

Especially from the 1950s onwards, Singapore’s English language education system became more accessible to people of other backgrounds than the traditional expatriates. As education became more universal, with the generations English became a language spoken in the home, leading to the situation where children already have some command of English before they start English-language education. Since 1987, all government controlled schools use English as the language of instruction, except for classes where the students’ ‘ethnic’ language is taught, namely the officially allocated dialect group based on the fathers’ ancestry: Mandarin for Chinese, Malay for Malays, and Tamil for Tamils. Gupta (1998) points out that this does not necessarily correspond to either the language used in the home or the ancestral language; particularly in the Chinese case, where Mandarin was not largely spoken until the 1970s — the outcome of another government language planning movement to excise Chinese dialects such as Hokkien and Cantonese in favour of Mandarin.

Today we are reaching the situation where many students entering tertiary education consider English to be their native language (as it is spoken at home), and have better proficiency in English than either their ‘ethnic’ or ancestral language. Alongside this there are also many students who speak another language at home, but have gained proficiency in English and use it daily (in some cases becoming their main language). It is worth noting at this stage that there is a social differential in the use of English in the home; the more privileged the background, the more likely English is to be used (cf. Lau, 1993).

There is a certain amount of stylistic variation in Singapore English. The variety which is best known is Colloquial Singapore English, or ‘Singlish’ as it is popularly known. Its’ features have been studied fairly extensively in the literature (eg. Platt & Weber, 1980; Ho & Platt, 1993). Singlish appears to have developed as a result of its’ role in society: as a lingua franca alongside speakers’ native and ‘ethnic’ languages. As a result, it contains many features inherited from its’ predecessor, Bazaar Malay (which in turn has many features from Chinese), as well as Chinese dialects (Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese). Ho and Platt (1993) states that the Malay influence on Singlish is indirect as a development of the Malay pidgins which Singlish has largely

taken the place of, and not as a result of contact with ethnic Malay speakers. Additionally, Indian languages are described to have ‘an influence’ on the syntax of Singlish, but not on its’ lexicon. Regardless, Singaporean varieties of English are markedly different in features than Hong Kong English, which shares many of the same ethnic and linguistic origins, suggesting contact with more than just Chinese languages.

Alongside Singlish, Standard Singapore English is also used. It appears closer to Standard British English in form, and omits many of the characteristics of Singlish, such as the pragmatic particle *lah* (Kwan-Terry, 1978) and repeating verbs for emphasis (eg. *He talk-talk-talk so much*). In the literature, there are varying ways in which these varieties are compared; most do not view the features of Singapore English as ‘errors’, but instead in a diglossia approach (with Singlish as the Low variety and Standard Singapore English as the High variety). In reality, the situation is more complicated, Holmes (2001) describes this as polyglossic; for there are high and low varieties of Chinese (Mandarin, and dialect eg. Hokkien), the choice of language depends not only on formality and social standing, but also ethnicity and judgements about the hearers’ age and education. The Standard–Colloquial division has also been described in the lectal continuum model (Platt, 1975), although this has largely been superseded by the di/polyglossic view in the literature.

However, this is not the view taken by the Singapore government. Instead, Singlish is ‘stigmatized and actively discouraged by the government, the media, and the English-medium school system’ (Bao, 2003). The multilingual nature of Singapore, combined with its’ international awareness, means that language issues have always been highly political. Rather than an autonomous language planning unit, policy decisions on language are taken at the top level of government with (now Senior Minister) Lee Kuan Yew taking an active role in policy development and implementation. The government has frequently made it explicit that Singlish is unacceptable; describing it as ‘English corrupted by Singaporeans’, and ‘broken, ungrammatical English’ (Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, 29 August 1999). What is interesting to note is that none of the official government policies take account of the diglossic capacities mentioned earlier; they appear simply to eradicate the low form completely. The official rationale behind this is that Singaporeans should speak a form of English which is internationally comprehensible, in order that Singapore might have the edge over its’ regional competitors in the global economy. Rubdy (2001) describes this as ‘pragmatic multilingualism’. In order to enact this view, the Singapore government launched the Speak

Good English Movement (SGEM) campaign¹ in 2000. The immediate question arises: what is defined as ‘good English’? ‘Speaking good English means using grammatically correct English during conversations’ (SGEM website, <http://www.sgem.org.sg/about.htm>) The words ‘good’ and ‘correct’ are frequently used in government guidelines (Bokhorst-Heng, 1998 describes a similar incident in 1993), but it is not made explicit where the superstrate language lies.

However, some of the substance behind the SGEM consists of a number of telephone lessons (produced by the British Council) together with questionnaires in the press. These lessons systematically highlight features and lexical items of Singlish as ‘common mistakes and problems’, giving ‘improved’ replacements. Oddly, some of the lessons contain British expressions, such as ‘Monday week’, things which might appear unusual to an American or Australian English speaker. So it seems that a Standard British English is being taught, which seems to circumvent the goal of being internationally comprehensible.

Against this drive to excise Singlish from the population, there has been a growth in Singlish as a symbol of identity. Rubdy (2001) sees it as a ‘symbolic function of solidarity, identity and pride’, and to an extent this has been shown in the language used in the local media such as the successful movie ‘Chicken Rice Wars’. However, the state-controlled media has taken steps to remove Singlish from television, in 1993 as reported by Bokhorst-Heng (1998), and again in 2000 to coincide with the launch of the SGEM. As one participant in our study put it, ‘Singlish is a ‘true’ language of Singapore, unique to its location and culture.’

Why then should it be that this uniquely Singaporean cultural product should be replaced by imported dry Standard British English? In part, this may be due to the Government’s intended use of English in Singapore. Pennycook (1994) sees it as ‘a neutral, pragmatic language, essential for Singapore’s development, but on the other it is a language tied to forms of Western culture and knowledge which threaten Asian cultural identities.’ Hence the need for ‘ethnic’ language to solidify traditional cultures (cf. Bokhorst-Heng, 1998, p. 290), and English language without English culture. What culture then does Singlish provide? One that is Singaporean and not imported; so it seems odd to dismiss such a culture which effectively was inevitable given the previous language planning movements by the government. One participant described it as: ‘to encourage people to see Singlish as an inferior form of

¹Government campaigns are frequently launched to shape Singaporean citizens in line with policy; recent examples include to ‘be more romantic’ and ‘have more spontaneous fun’.

English [...] is a bit of an affront to the national ego.’

This apparent inferiority of Singlish as compared to Standard British English and the close involvement of the British Council lead to the conclusion that linguistic imperialism (as defined in Philipson, 1992) is at work. Within this framework, consider the role that Singaporean students studying in the UK contribute: they are exposed to the ‘superior’ form of English, and this combined with their high social standing (educational achievers from a well-endowed background) are surely in the best position to bring the ‘correct’ language back to Singapore with them.

Therefore, we seek to test some of the ideas presented so far; whether Singlish contributes to a sense of identity, whether Singlish inhibits economic success (as stated by proponents of the SGEM), whether their British linguistic experience contributes anything to their ‘good English’, and whether the SGEM is a worthwhile exercise (the academic literature disagrees, cf. Rubdy, 2001; Bao, 2003).

Method Singaporean students ($N = 44$) who were currently studying in the UK (or had done within the past five years) were asked to submit their responses to a questionnaire mounted on the World Wide Web (a copy is provided as an appendix). The call for subjects was circulated by electronic mail through Singapore Students’ Societies in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Heriot-Watt, Newcastle, and St. Andrews Universities. Additionally, subjects were asked to circulate a copy of the electronic mail message to other qualifying students in order to expand the sample size.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions presented on a weighted 4-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree). The format of the survey was externally checked for ambiguities before being released. Subjects were also invited to submit any general comments they had with submission of their results.

It is worth pointing out that none of the questions explicitly mention diglossic context, in line with the SGEM’s omission of context in their prescription. In part, this leads to less numerically significant results if context is taken into the subjects’ interpretation of the question. However, this elicited a large number of comments from participants indicating their awareness of the high and low diglossia (cf. Appendix C). This agrees with findings reported by Bokhorst-Heng (1998, p. 304); that ‘Singaporean speakers of English move at will between Standard English and [Singlish]’ (Gupta, 1998, p. 122) and are fully aware of this. This is borne out by the comments given by the subjects in Appendix C.

Scoring The questions and scaling was intended to fall into a normal (bell-shaped) distribution and our initially sampled frequencies bore this out. In order to determine the level of deviation from the normal distribution, we use a scoring system given by the following equation (SD= strongly disagree, D= disagree, A= agree, SA= strongly agree):

$$SC_A = 2n(\text{SA}) + n(\text{A})$$

$$SC_D = 2n(\text{SD}) + n(\text{D})$$

$$SC_u = SC_A - SC_D$$

If the distribution is symmetrical, $SC_u = 0$ (null hypothesis). Otherwise, it will be increasingly negative if the sample disagrees, or positive if the sample agrees. Therefore, the domain of SC_u is given as $[-2(N), 2(N)]$, where N is the size of the sample (in our case, 44). In order to give a regular domain for varying sizes of N , SC_u is linearly scaled into SC_w giving us the domain $[-1, 1]$.

$$SC_w = SC_u / (2N)$$

Results The results were collated and input into SPSS statistical software. The raw frequency counts for all responses are given in Appendix B. This output was used to calculate $\{SC_D, SC_A, SC_u, SC_w\}$, and these results are given by question in Table 1 for the entire sample. Note that the order of question presentation was randomised for the subjects, to avoid bias by grouping like measurements together. The question number indicates the order of presentation that the subjects saw.

In order to tease apart trends based upon subjects' attitudes to the SGEM, SC was recalculated for subsets of the sample given different values of Question 15. As there was only one response where Question 15 was 'strongly disagree', we discarded this result. The rest are given in Table 2.

Discussion The immediately most striking result was for Question 15: whether the *Speak Good English Movement* was beneficial. 84% of all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that this was the case.

However, when we look at the actions of the SGEM, we get a different view of peoples' opinions. One factor which was very publicly mentioned in government speeches leading up to the launch of the SGEM was the proliferation of Singlish on television, in particular the programme *Phua Chu Kang* (Rubdy, 2001). This resulted in the use of Singlish publicly being toned down in order

Question	SC_D	SC_A	SC_u	SC_w
Singlish as identity				
2. Speaking Singlish makes me feel Singaporean.	14	40	26	0.295
13. I feel more comfortable when people around me are speaking Singlish.	26	26	0	0.000
Economic values				
1. In Singapore, if I speak English instead of Singlish, I will appear more professional to others.	16	43	27	0.307
14. In the UK, if I speak English instead of Singlish, I will appear more professional to others.	15	42	27	0.307
Speak Good English Movement				
15. I think that the <i>Speak Good English Movement</i> is a beneficial project for the people of Singapore.	8	49	41	0.466
7. I agree that Singlish is ‘a broken dialect of English that has been corrupted by Singaporeans’ (PM Goh Chok Tong, 29 Aug 1999).	21	32	11	0.125
10. People should not be allowed to use Singlish on television or in newspapers.	30	24	-6	-0.068
Diglossic awareness				
3. The eradication of Singlish in Singapore is essential to make it a successful country in the world economy.	41	10	-31	-0.352
9. It’s fashionable to speak Singlish.	40	15	-25	-0.284
11. Someone who speaks Singlish appears to have had a poor education.	40	12	-28	-0.318
Linguistic Imperialism				
12. My English has improved since I came to the UK.	27	27	0	0.000
5. My English has changed since I came to the UK.	22	31	9	0.102
6. British English is irrelevant to my life in Singapore.	43	12	-31	-0.352
4. I can use British English to set an example to other Singaporeans back home as to how they should speak.	36	12	-24	-0.273
8. Because Singlish is different from British English, the world sees it as a language with less value.	43	12	-31	-0.352

Table 1: Scores by question for entire sample ($N = 44$). $SC_w \rightarrow +1$ indicates agreement, $SC_w \rightarrow -1$ indicates disagreement.

Question	SC_w values for Q15 =	D	A	SA
Singlish as identity				
2. Speaking Singlish makes me feel Singaporean.		0.500	0.360	0.042
13. I feel more comfortable when people around me are speaking Singlish.		0.167	0.040	-0.208
Economic values				
1. In Singapore, if I speak English instead of Singlish, I will appear more professional to others.		0.167	0.300	0.375
14. In the UK, if I speak English instead of Singlish, I will appear more professional to others.		-0.083	0.300	0.500
Speak Good English Movement				
7. I agree that Singlish is ‘a broken dialect of English that has been corrupted by Singaporeans’ (PM Goh Chok Tong, 29 Aug 1999).		-0.333	0.180	0.417
10. People should not be allowed to use Singlish on television or in newspapers.		-0.667	0.020	0.083
Diglossic awareness				
3. The eradication of Singlish in Singapore is essential to make it a successful country in the world economy.		-0.417	-0.420	-0.125
9. It’s fashionable to speak Singlish.		-0.333	-0.240	-0.417
11. Someone who speaks Singlish appears to have had a poor education.		-0.333	-0.240	-0.458
Linguistic Imperialism				
12. My English has improved since I came to the UK.		-0.750	0.060	0.333
5. My English has changed since I came to the UK.		-0.167	0.180	0.167
6. British English is irrelevant to my life in Singapore.		-0.167	-0.420	-0.417
4. I can use British English to set an example to other Singaporeans back home as to how they should speak.		-0.583	-0.280	-0.083
8. Because Singlish is different from British English, the world sees it as a language with less value.		-0.250	-0.080	0.042

Table 2: Scores by question for subsets of sample, where Q15=‘disagree’ ($N = 6$), ‘agree’ ($N = 25$), and ‘strongly agree’ ($N = 12$). One result was discarded. $SC_w \rightarrow +1$ indicates agreement, $SC_w \rightarrow -1$ indicates disagreement.

to fit within issued guidelines, and was widely reported in the media at the time.

However, our combined results show a slight majority in favour of Singlish in the media (Question 10), which seems to disagree with our overwhelming support in Question 15. Additionally, Question 3 shows a fairly clear overall disagreement, that Singlish should not need be eradicated for economic success, yet this is a stated long-term goal of the SGEM. Although this is possibly due to awareness of the diglossic situation by our subjects, it again appears to contradict support for the SGEM.

Are the subjects in this study then lending their support a government campaign without being fully aware of its' motives? Or is it down to government being 'honourable men' who 'have the trust and respect of the population' (Ho & Alsagoff, 1998, p. 211), or possibly more likely, that many young Singaporeans are disinterested in politics and political discussion in the media? It is difficult to tell what is the underlying factor looking at our combined data, and $SC_w \approx 0$ results suggest more complex patterns than an overall summary can reveal.

If we consider the dissected results in Table 2, there are clearer trends at work. For example, Questions 7 and 12 show a clear correlation between support for the SGEM and its' goal of 'improved' and not 'broken' English. In fact, all of the questions except 9 and 11 (which have no clear trend) correlate to an extent with official policy on English language change; disconnecting Singlish from identity (although even the 'strongly agree' group have a slightly positive score for Question 2), the importance English has on economic success, and notably favouring our linguistic imperialism tests of reapplying 'improved' British English to 'correct' the English spoken in Singapore.

Conclusion These results therefore suggest that there is a distinct group of students in our study acting as 'linguistic imperialists', favouring the Speak Good English Movement and its' aim of replacing Singaporean English with British English. However, when taking the entire sample, there appears to be a fair amount of division, with the majority taking a slightly pro-SGEM view (although it may be that the majority are actually indifferent; due to the small sample size we chose not to have a 'neutral' response in the Likert scale for fear of statistical insignificance). It is surprising how comparatively few agree with the theoretical findings in the literature, that the Singapore Government are engaging in linguistic imperialism, attempting to remove a language which many of the same participants in this study identify as a

symbol of national identity.

Is it likely that the Singapore Government will succeed in their aim of removing this language? Although past language planning movements have been relatively successful, taking the Singlish out of Singapore leaves a gap at the Low end of the diglossia. It may be that Mandarin would replace Singlish for informal use, and English reserved for official and formal communications, thus creating an racial divide which Singlish aptly filled. It seems that such a move is only backward in progress, and unfortunate that a government wishes to prescribe language change in this way.

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A Questionnaire

B Frequency test for combined results

```
*** See alert re Toolmaster/Uniras on holyrood
*** See alert re NAG Libraries and documentation
*** See alert re transfer of staff email accounts
```

```
Type 'alert' for system alerts and information.
The systems alerts were last updated on Feb 28 09:47
```

```
meng@holyrood:/disk/home/eucsup/meng% spss -m
```

```
For Solaris University of Edinburgh SPSS ID 61258
```

```
SPSS> get file='allt.sav'.
SPSS> set length=none.
SPSS> frequencies variables=all.
```

```
Q1 In Singapore, if I speak English instead of Singlish, I will
appear more professional to others.
```

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	4	9.1	9.1	9.1
Disagree	2	8	18.2	18.2	27.3
Agree	3	21	47.7	47.7	75.0
Strongly Agree	4	11	25.0	25.0	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

```
Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0
```

Q2 Speaking Singlish makes me feel Singaporean.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	2	4.5	4.5	4.5
Disagree	2	10	22.7	22.7	27.3
Agree	3	24	54.5	54.5	81.8
Strongly Agree	4	8	18.2	18.2	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q3 The eradication of Singlish in Singapore is essential to make it a successful country in the world economy.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	5	11.4	11.4	11.4
Disagree	2	31	70.5	70.5	81.8
Agree	3	6	13.6	13.6	95.5
Strongly Agree	4	2	4.5	4.5	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q4 I can use British English to set an example to other Singaporeans back home as to how they should speak.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	3	6.8	6.8	6.8
Disagree	2	30	68.2	68.2	75.0
Agree	3	10	22.7	22.7	97.7
Strongly Agree	4	1	2.3	2.3	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q5 Since I came to the UK, the way I speak has changed.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	5	11.4	11.4	11.4
Disagree	2	12	27.3	27.3	38.6
Agree	3	23	52.3	52.3	90.9
Strongly Agree	4	4	9.1	9.1	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q6 British English is irrelevant to my life in Singapore.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	9	20.5	20.5	20.5
Disagree	2	25	56.8	56.8	77.3
Agree	3	8	18.2	18.2	95.5
Strongly Agree	4	2	4.5	4.5	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q7 I agree that Singlish is a ‘‘broken dialect of English that has been corrupted by Singaporeans’’ (PM Goh Chok Tong, 29 Aug 1999).

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	6	13.6	13.6	13.6
Disagree	2	9	20.5	20.5	34.1
Agree	3	26	59.1	59.1	93.2
Strongly Agree	4	3	6.8	6.8	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q8 Because Singlish is different from British or American English, the world sees it as a language with less value.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	4	9.1	9.3	9.3
Disagree	2	20	45.5	46.5	55.8
Agree	3	15	34.1	34.9	90.7
Strongly Agree	4	4	9.1	9.3	100.0
	.	1	2.3	Missing	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 43 Missing cases 1

Q9 It's fashionable to speak Singlish.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	10	22.7	23.3	23.3
Disagree	2	20	45.5	46.5	69.8
Agree	3	11	25.0	25.6	95.3
Strongly Agree	4	2	4.5	4.7	100.0
	.	1	2.3	Missing	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 43 Missing cases 1

Q10 People should not be allowed to use Singlish on television or in newspapers.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	4	9.1	9.1	9.1
Disagree	2	22	50.0	50.0	59.1
Agree	3	12	27.3	27.3	86.4
Strongly Agree	4	6	13.6	13.6	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q11 Someone who speaks Singlish appears to have had a poor education.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	6	13.6	13.6	13.6
Disagree	2	28	63.6	63.6	77.3
Agree	3	8	18.2	18.2	95.5
Strongly Agree	4	2	4.5	4.5	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q12 My English has improved since I came to the UK.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	4	9.1	9.1	9.1
Disagree	2	19	43.2	43.2	52.3
Agree	3	15	34.1	34.1	86.4
Strongly Agree	4	6	13.6	13.6	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q13 I feel more comfortable when people around me are speaking Singlish.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	4	9.1	9.1	9.1
Disagree	2	18	40.9	40.9	50.0
Agree	3	18	40.9	40.9	90.9
Strongly Agree	4	4	9.1	9.1	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q14 In the UK, if I speak English instead of Singlish, I will appear more professional to others.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Disagree	2	15	34.1	34.1	34.1
Agree	3	16	36.4	36.4	70.5
Strongly Agree	4	13	29.5	29.5	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

Q15 I think the Speak Good English Movement is a beneficial project for the people of Singapore.

Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1	2.3	2.3	2.3
Disagree	2	6	13.6	13.6	15.9
Agree	3	25	56.8	56.8	72.7
Strongly Agree	4	12	27.3	27.3	100.0
		-----	-----	-----	
	Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Valid cases 44 Missing cases 0

SPSS> finish.

End of job: 5 command lines 0 errors 1 warnings 0 CPU seconds

meng@holyrood:/disk/home/eucsup/meng%

C Comments elicited from survey form

The following comments were voluntarily provided by participants on the World Wide Web form shown in Appendix A. They are provided here for completeness and in the hope that they will illuminate some of the thinking behind the statistics. It is interesting to note the highly contrasting views, and the common awareness of the high and low diglossic varieties in use.

PARTICIPANT 5

I feel Singlish is a 'true' language of Singapore, unique to its location and culture. For people who think Singlish is broken English, be warned: it is harder to master than you think - try asking a native English speaker to imitate the Singlish accents and language structure (i.e. I not stupid) - he/she will take a whole lifetime to master it.

PARTICIPANT 7

i think the PM is half right - singlish IS a dialect, and is arguably part of the national identity. it is misguided to think that English people speak 'proper english'; i mean, "see yous tomorrow", "and such like", "go down the pub" ??? to encourage people to see singlish as an inferior form of english to, say, geordie or glaswegian or "norff" london is a bit of an affront to the national ego.

PARTICIPANT 8

In my opinion, Singlish cannot be considered as a language. It is rather informal and trying to communicate in singlish to people of other nationalities tends to confuse them (Based on observing uk singaporeans communications). We cannot say we should practise speaking British English at home since it also has its flaws and people tend to use words very differently in uk. It really depends on who we are trying to communicate with in Singlish. It's alright to use it in informal conversations but not at meetings, interviews etc. Some people in Singapore are more concerned with having a fake British or American accent rather than to try and speak proper english. The whole idea of Speak Good English Movement is to encourage people to speak proper English rather than to try and speak english as it is spoken in other countries.

PARTICIPANT 11

it's a matter of being comfortable speaking the right medium with the right company. proper english is a must when it comes to professionalism.

PARTICIPANT 14

I don't think singlish is as horrible as some would put it. I was able to switch between speaking either Singlish or proper English, even before I started my studies in Scotland.

Question 5: Some improvement, no drastic change in accent or tone.

Question 7: Agreed, but it's not necessarily a bad thing. "Corrupted" is too strong a term. It's been "mutated" perhaps, changed to better serve our purposes. Don't you know, the Eskimos have more than 200 different words for "snow".

Question 9: ... with singaporeans.

Question 10: Local shows would be less "Singaporean". Is it so wrong to identify ourselves with being "singaporean" through the use of Singlish? The Scottish are not so ashamed with their dialect (although personally, I would prefer if more of them were able to speak proper English instead of mumbling incoherently)

Question 11: Depends on who you're conversing with actually. A lot of educated professionals speak Singlish with their Singaporean friends, and it doesn't reflect poorly on them (IMHO). However, there are many who are not as familiar with our slang...

Being able to speak proper English and use it in the appropriate setting (presentations, speaking with non-singaporeans etc) is adequate. The goal of eradicating of Singlish is "overkill". Studying in Scotland and trying to converse with the people here make me realise how important speaking proper english is, but please! Not at the expense of giving up Singlish totally!

PARTICIPANT 20

Singlish is only used in Singapore and nowhere else simply because it is not a homogeneous country. I thought this makes Singapore rather special. However, this does not mean that proper English education should be ignored. In fact, most of us speak and write proper English when at work or business. Singlish is commonly used among friends only.

PARTICIPANT 22

Basically, i see Singlish as part of Singaporean culture. I think it is a unique Singaporean slang. Its just like the Australian who say G'Day mates and the Scottish ask if your room wants a Hoover.

PARTICIPANT 25

So what if i talk singlish. It is definately not an indication of how well my command of English is! I strongly felt that language is just a means of communication, and attempts to correct Singlish should not be discouraged as it is important that people should recognise that they are, in my humble opinion, two different languages! Take Scottish or Liverpool accents for example, it is so different from the normal English that even I have difficulties at times comprehending them! However, did Scotland or Liverpool ever felt ashamed of their slang? No! Becoz it strongly identifies them and gave them the feeling of 'home' ! That is my feelings to Singlish too! I mean, what else can I identify with? The feeling is different when I'm talking to the locals (by locals, I mean any English speaking people NOT talking Singlish) and when I'm talking to Singaporeans. It is definately nice and comfy when I use words like "wah lao, why like that,.etc" and feels like, well, home! Any way, to sum it up, I would use English, Cantonese, Singlish, whatever, depending on which crowd I am with. Each is different, have its own merits, mastering all of them would be an advantage. Mixing them up, however, should not be encouraged. Cheerios and I must add, I am proud to be a Singaporean!!!

PARTICIPANT 26

Well, Lets put it this way, if singlish is spoken here in the UK to the Brits, they wouldn't understand us anyway. Its a different culture here, besides most brits who come to singapore would have difficulty understand us initally anyway. Thats why I left qn8 blank.

PARTICIPANT 31

I think people tend to confuse speaking 'Singlish' with speaking English in a Singaporean accent (which, unlike Singlish, is perfectly acceptable and easily understood by any English/American/Aussie/etc)

Singlish is pretty much part of Singaporean culture though...

PARTICIPANT 41

Although some Singaporeans perceive Singlish as something negative, this is not necessarily true. All my foreign friends find Singlish interesting!

I find a closeness to speak Singlish with Singaporeans and I am not in any way ashamed of doing it. In fact, I enjoy it!

Speaking Good English Movement is a good idea to increase the awareness of speaking good english. However it shouldn't be a movement to make Singaporeans stop using Singlish. It is an awareness, that's all.

PARTICIPANT 42

Only from my point of view, Singlish is a way of speech(or slang if you like to call it) that defines what is call a Singaporean. You have British, Americans, Japanese and etc speakiing their own slang, but does that post a problem? At least not to my notice.

Not saying that I am encouraging it but it represents a form of identity. You'll feel relax, free and casual when communicating with your friends or family.

Important point is that to know when to use appropriate English. As

long that someone of the other party knows what you are talking, and gets the message across with no attenuation/lost of information that's fine. It is useless to speak perfect English at all times, might as well we speak like the days of Shakespear. Classier don't you think?

Again I stress- Know when to use English and when to use Singlish.

PARTICIPANT 43

I think that speaking Singlish allows Singaporeans to maintain an identity, much akin to being able to identify Irish from the Scottish from the Welsh etc. I also believe that context has to be given to the language spoken. Therefore, one cannot assume relevance/irrelevance of British English (sometimes wrongly perceived to be THE correct form of the English language) in Singapore.

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