# English in Singapore
## MODERNITY AND MANAGEMENT

EDITED BY LISA LIM, ANNE PAKIR AND LIONEL WEE

香港大學出版社
HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

**Hong Kong University Press**
14/F Hing Wai Centre
7 Tin Wan Praya Road
Aberdeen
Hong Kong



*Hardback* 978-988-8028-42-9
*Paperback* 978-988-8028-43-6



Secure On-line Ordering
http://www.hkupress.org

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound by Condor Production Ltd., Hong Kong, China

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# *Contributors*

**Lubna Alsagoff** is Associate Professor and Head of the English Language and Literature Department at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her research interests include the socio-cultural grammar of English as an international language, and the teaching and development of pedagogical grammars of English.

**Wendy D. Bokhorst-Heng** has held appointments as Assistant Professor in the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the National Institute of Education, Singapore, and in the Sociology Department of American University, Washington, DC. Her research interests include literacy, language policy and ideology, multilingualism and multiculturalism, and comparative education.

**Paul Bruthiaux** has a PhD in linguistics from the University of Southern California. He has worked in California, Texas, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Thailand. His research interests are English as a global language, the place of language education in economic development, and language variation across social settings.

**Anthea Fraser Gupta** is Senior Lecturer in the School of English at the University of Leeds, England. Her main area of research is in English as a world language, and on the language situation in Singapore.

**David Hogan** is Professor and Dean of the Office of Education Research at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

**Trivina Kang** is Assistant Professor in the Policy and Management Studies Academic Group at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and is presently seconded to the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP) there.

**Lisa Lim** is in the School of English at the University of Hong Kong, where she directs the Language and Communication Programme, and teaches in that and the English Studies Programme. Her current research areas include New Englishes, especially Asian, postcolonial varieties, with particular interest in contact dynamics in the ecology metaphor, as well as identity, endangerment, shift and revitalization in multilingual minority communities.

**Ee-Ling Low** is Associate Professor in the English Language and Literature Academic Group, and Associate Dean for Programme and Student Development at the National Institute of Education, Singapore. Her current research interests include the linguistic features of world Englishes, language education, and research into initial teacher preparation and teacher professional development.

**Sandra Lee McKay** is currently Visiting Professor at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa. Her most current works include a text on the social context of English as an international language, as well as a text on L2 classroom research. Presently she is editing a reader on sociolinguistics and language teaching.

**Anne Pakir** is Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests lie in language policy and planning, world Englishes and English in Southeast Asia.

**Rani Rubdy** is Associate Professor in the English Language and Literature Academic Group at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her research interests include English as a world language, language planning and policy, teacher education and the management of educational innovation.

**Christopher Stroud** is Professor and Head of the Department of Linguistics at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, and Affiliated Professor of Bilingual Research in the Centre for Research on Bilingualism at Stockholm University. His research includes multilingualism, language and education, socio-ethnographies of literacies, and language ideological discourses.

**Teck Kiang Tan** is Research Associate in the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research interests include school effects, multi-level modelling, and longitudinal data analysis.

**Viniti Vaish** has a PhD in educational linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania. She is Assistant Professor at Singapore's National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University. She teaches in the English Language and Literature Academic Group and does research for the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice.

**Lionel Wee** is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore. His research interests include the relationship between metaphor and discourse, new varieties of English, language policy, and general issues in pragmatics and sociolinguistics.

# 1

# *English in Singapore: Policies and prospects*

Lisa Lim, Anne Pakir and Lionel Wee

The Republic of Singapore, independent since 1965, makes an interesting case study for various issues in sociolinguistics, not least because it is an ethnically and linguistically diverse society with a strong history of attempts at social engineering by the state. Language policies instituted by the state, follow-up language campaigns aimed at ensuring conformity to these policies, the ongoing tensions between what the state envisions for the general population and their actual language practices are just some of the phenomena that provide the grounding for a host of analyses.

A common thread throughout these phenomena concerns the role of English. As a former British colony, Singapore's leaders inherited not only a system of government that relied heavily on the use of English, but also a population already given to viewing the language as an important resource for socio-economic mobility. So, rather than dispense with English, Singapore's leaders decided to retain it as an official language. This is characteristic of the state's 'pragmatic' approach to government, where social and economic policies have been formulated with the intention of keeping Singaporean society open to global and regional forces, whilst retaining a sense of stability and connection to a historic past, however imagined. In this context, the status of the English language is an important barometer of how successful Singapore is in its attempt to stay relevant to, and engaged with, the world 'outside', even as it insists on portraying itself in terms of a resolutely Asian identity. It is therefore no exaggeration to suggest that English is implicated everywhere in Singaporean society, as much by its varied manifestations as by its absence.

What we intend to do in this brief introduction, then, is to spell out a number of the issues that are implicated by the place of English in Singapore. To do this, we first provide an overview of Singapore's language policy. We then discuss some relevant lines of investigation before closing with an outline of the various chapters that comprise the present volume.

## Language policy in Singapore

In order to make more manageable Singapore's ethnolinguistic diversity, the state divides the population into four ethnically based categories: Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others. The state takes it as self-evident that the major ethnic categories (Chinese, Malay, Indian) and their relevant members can be unproblematically identified using a mix of historical language affiliation, cultural practices and racial characteristics. In the case of individuals with mixed heritage, the state's response is to classify them according to the ethnic membership of the father. These moves are motivated partly on historical grounds (see also Lim's chapter in this volume), partly on the basis of ideological assumptions, and partly as a matter of administrative expedience. The result is that Singapore's population of approximately 3.2 million is categorized as 76.8% Chinese, 13.9% Malays, 7.9% Indians, and 1.4% Others (Census of Population 2000).

Singapore recognizes the Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians as the 'founding races' that have contributed significantly to its independence (Hill and Lian 1995). The decision to maintain this ethnic heterogeneity rather than pursue a strong policy of assimilation was (and still is) motivated by the belief that ethnic distinctiveness is a primordial fact. Consequently, any attempt to quash this distinctiveness can only lead to unnecessary social tensions. We see this explained in the following statement by Singapore's first prime minister and current minister mentor, Lee Kuan Yew (cited in Han, Fernandez and Tan 1998: 163–5):

> The Indians have their own method. So do the Malays. The Malays: Islam and also the kinship ties … I don't think you can erase all that. That's for hundreds of years, or thousands of years. You can't erase it. Because I recognised it, I decided you cannot change it. Or if you tried to change it, you'd change it for the worse … In every culture, there is a desire to preserve your distinctiveness. And I think if you go against that, you will create unnecessary problems, whether it is with the Indians and their caste or with the Chinese and their clans.

Despite this desire to recognize the sanctity of ethnic distinctiveness, however, only the first three founding races are considered numerically significant enough to be consistently accorded recognition as ethnic communities in their own right. The Eurasians are sometimes absorbed under the Others category because the state views their number as too small to warrant a distinct category.[1] This is especially clear with regard to Singapore's language policy, which insists that Singaporeans be bilingual in English and their official mother tongue. The official mother tongue is the language assigned by the state to an ethnic community as representative

of that community's identity and ethnocultural heritage. It is presented in official discourses as a crucial cultural anchor that connects an ethnic community to its ancestral repository of traditional values.

With the exception of the Eurasians, the other three ethnic groups each have their own official mother tongue: Mandarin for the Chinese, Malay — the national language — for the Malays, and Tamil for the Indians. The Eurasians have no official mother tongue because the most likely candidate would have to be English. The relatively small size of the Eurasian community notwithstanding, English is not acceptable by the state as an official mother tongue on the grounds that it needs to remain ethnically neutral for a number of reasons.

First, English is the major language of socio-economic mobility. The state actively encourages proficiency in English by instituting it as the medium of instruction in the education system. However, it also insists on positioning the language as ethnically neutral so that the distribution of economic advantages is not seen as being unduly associated with a specific ethnic group, which would otherwise raise the danger of interethnic tension. But even as English is successfully seen as being ethnically neutral by most Singaporeans, it is becoming clear that it is not at all socially neutral. Speakers of 'good', 'standard' or 'proper' English are more likely to have come from more affluent homes, have better educational qualifications, and have access to better jobs. As a result, one might reasonably explore the implications for Singapore of a class divide between the English 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

Second, English also serves as an interethnic lingua franca. This is needed in order to ensure that cross-ethnic communication is facilitated, so that the different ethnic groups do not become segregated from each other. Ethnic segregation would have highly negative consequences for attempts at cultivating a sense of national unity. However, actual cross-ethnic communication sometimes makes use of languages that carry little or no state approval. For example, military service (National Service) is obligatory for Singaporean males. Life in the army brings together young men of varied ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and usefully creates opportunities for them to (learn to) interact with each other. These men quickly become sensitized to class differences, and, in order to neutralize rather than exacerbate such differences, 'standard' or 'proper' English is eschewed in favour of Singapore English or Singlish, the colloquial variety of English that is denigrated by the state, or one of the Chinese dialects such as Hokkien, which, unlike Mandarin, has no official standing (Stroud and Wee 2007). What this means is quite simply this: the state correctly realizes that language can serve as a key social lubricant; but there is perhaps an unbridgeable gap between the language that the state would prefer and the language that can most effectively do the job.

Third, English is treated as a language that essentially marks a non-Asian 'other', and therefore cannot be bestowed the status of official mother tongue. This goes to the crux of why Singapore's language policy is an aggressively bilingual one. Singapore cannot do without English; attempting this would mean disengaging itself from the global economy, with predictably disastrous consequences. At the same time, it cannot do with only English; attempting this would mean compromising Singapore's 'Asianness' by allowing a Western language to play a constitutive role in local identity politics, a role that is reserved for the mother tongues. As a result, the language policy treats both English and the mother tongues as equally important, though for different reasons. This situation nicely illustrates the highly politicized status of English. A specific ethnic group is denied the possibility of claiming English as its mother tongue, because the language must serve the entire country. As an official language, English is valuable because it provides access to technological and scientific knowledge, and helps maintain economic competitiveness in an increasingly globalized world. English can of course serve as a lingua franca, but Singaporeans are not generally expected to develop a sense of identification with the language. At both the national and communal levels, then, tensions exist in the functions that English fulfils, and in how these are managed.

The foregoing description of Singapore's language policy suggests rich possibilities for investigations along various lines, and it is to these that we now turn.

## From past to present

Though the practice does little harm if we are careful to bear in mind the inevitable oversimplifications, it is clear that it is not enough to merely speak of 'English' as being present at different times in Singapore's history, up to and including the present. The recurrent use of this label in different contexts can in fact obscure significant changes and variations in actual language use, since what counts as 'English' — that is, what kinds of usage activities are considered to merit being categorized as 'English' — is itself ultimately a matter of social and political negotiation.

The names that we give to languages reflect invented understandings of language (Makoni and Pennycook 2007: 2), as the following brief example illustrates. As Makoni and Pennycook (2007: 9) point out, Sir George Abraham Grierson's linguistic *Survey of India*, which was completed in 1928, had to face the problem of deciding on the boundaries between languages and dialects. To do this, Grierson openly admitted the need to invent language names while ignoring the complexity of actual language use (1907: 350, quoted in Makoni and Pennycook 2007: 10):

> … nearly all the language-names have had to be invented by Europeans. Some of them, such as Bengali, Assamese, and the like, are founded on words which have received English citizenship, and are not real Indian words at all, while others, like 'Hindostani', 'Bihari', and so forth, are based on already existing Indian names of countries and nationalities.

The significance of this, as Makoni and Pennycook (2007: 10) observe, is that 'these were not just new names for existing objects … but rather the invention and naming of new objects. The naming performatively called the languages into being'.

Returning to the case of English in Singapore, we therefore have to be careful that we do not get too carried away with labels such as 'English', 'Singlish' or even 'Singapore English'.[2] The linguistic diversity of Singapore means that English inevitably comes into contact with other languages present in the sociolinguistic environment such as the different varieties of Malay, Chinese and (to a lesser extent) the Indian languages. This clearly points to the possibility of structural changes in the language, which tend to occur in concert with developments in the socio-political arena (see Schneider 2007). Given the significantly growing presence of English in the lives of many Singaporeans, two important questions then need to be asked. Firstly, how are the various structural features of English related to its presence in the changing landscape of Singapore's sociolinguistic history? Secondly, does English have the potential to displace other languages (such as the official mother tongues), and would such displacement (where it is perceived to occur) be uniformly distributed across the society or skewed along specific ethnic identities or cultural activities?

## Revisiting key assumptions and concepts

Discussions about English, implicitly or otherwise, typically draw on various assumptions that are all too often taken for granted in public discourses. Such assumptions include the questions of ownership and standardization, and the relationship between language and culture.

The question of language ownership (Widdowson 1994; Jenkins 2000) is especially relevant for a global language such as English, whose spread across the globe has led to the rise of different varieties — 'New Englishes' — as well as an increase in the number of non-traditional native speakers. In the light of such developments, it has become necessary to consider the extent to which non-traditional native speakers of English should feel that they too have a legitimate say in what counts as grammatical or appropriate.

Related to this is the question of standardization. Here, it is not so much standardization as the process of trying to eliminate variation (Milroy

and Milroy 1999) that is at stake, but rather, the more commonplace notion of what sorts of standards non-traditional native speakers ought to have in mind. For many ordinary Singaporeans as well as the state, there is often some ambivalence in this matter, whether the choice is exonormatively towards an American or British standard, or endonormatively towards the variety associated with the local elite.

Finally, while many Singaporeans seem to be quite convinced that English is essentially a Western language that serves as a vehicle for Western values, and that they ought instead to be fluent speakers of their own mother tongues, this remains a desideratum rather than a sociolinguistic reality. In fact, the state's promotion of English can itself be credited with contributing to massive language shift over a period of thirty years (Li, Saravanan and Ng 1997: 368; Stroud and Wee 2007). While the rise of English is most pronounced in Chinese and Indian homes, Malay homes too show a similar shift, albeit less pronounced, possibly due to the close affiliation between the Malay language and the religion of Islam (Pakir 1993: 75; Kwan-Terry and Luke 1997: 296).

This leads to the question of whether or not it makes sociolinguistic sense to continue positioning English as a language of the non-Singaporean 'Other' rather than as a language that belongs to Singaporeans themselves. This question, of course, intersects with heated debates over what it means to be a native speaker of English, whether ownership of the language can only ever reside with 'traditional native speakers', and whether accepting English as a Singaporean language compromises Singapore's claim towards an Asian identity. All of these developments make it imperative that Singaporeans open up a dialogue on the ideologically loaded question of whether English is intrinsically a Western language.

## The gap between policy and practice

Consider the observation in the preceding section that English is increasingly becoming the home language for many Singaporeans. Such a development is perhaps not surprising since the language is the medium of instruction in schools, which makes knowledge of English particularly critical in considerations of socio-economic mobility. The status of English as a home language is perhaps most clearly the case among Chinese Singaporeans, where English has overtaken Mandarin as 'the primary language used in homes of Primary 1 Chinese pupils' (Ministry of Education [MOE] 2004a). This has forced the state to acknowledge that a significant number of Chinese Singaporeans actually have great difficulty coping with Mandarin, despite the fact that it is supposed to be their official mother tongue. Consequently, in early 2004, the Ministry of Education (2004a)

announced a number of changes to the mother tongue policy. Especially interesting was the introduction of a 'B' syllabus for the Chinese language, to cater to students with learning difficulties.

These changes indicate that, contrary to its earlier expectations, the state no longer believes that the majority of Chinese Singaporeans are likely to be highly proficient in Mandarin. It is only a minority, an elite estimated at about 10% of the student population (*The Straits Times,* 26 November 2004), who are expected to be fully bilingual in English and the mother tongue. As a result, in a subsequent press release in September (MOE 2004b), the Ministry of Education announced the start of a Chinese Bicultural Studies Programme, aimed at the minority of students who are able to cope with both English and Mandarin at a high level of competence. And at the end of that same year, the government announced that it would undertake a review of the Malay and Tamil language curricula to see if measures similar to those taken for Mandarin are indeed called for (MOE 2004c).

At the same time that the increased use of English has impacted the state's general expectations regarding the bilingual capacity of the population, it has also led to growing fears that a local variety, known as Singlish (and in scholarship usually referred to as colloquial Singapore English), is gaining popularity and legitimacy, and that this might jeopardize Singaporeans' ability to improve their command of standard English. Such fears were the main motivations behind the initiation of the Speak Good English Movement, making English the only other language (in addition to the promotion of Mandarin in the Speak Mandarin Campaign) to have been the object of a national language campaign. In rationalizing this campaign, the state has often made the argument that it is not possible to 'go global' with Singlish. A choice, it argues, has to be made between the 'ghettoization' (Freeland and Patrick 2004: 17) that supposedly accompanies Singlish and the economic prosperity that comes from speaking 'good' English. However, supporters of Singlish, such as writer Hwee Hwee Tan, have responded by arguing — on the public stage that is *Time* — that it is an authentic reflection of a national identity (Tan 2002). To this, the Speak Good English Movement has suggested that a more appropriate linguistic expression would be 'a standard Singaporean English', even though it is unclear what such an endogenous standard would or should look like.

In many ways, Singlish is an inevitable development. As a population becomes more proficient and more comfortable with using English, it will necessarily make the language its own. And this of course means that a nativized, restructured variety will emerge, reflecting the population's greater ease with and wider use of the language in the naturalistic environments of home and informal peer interactions. But it is an unfortunate fact that new varieties such as Singlish are all too often viewed

as a corrupt version of standardized ones. There is also some irony in all this. Recall that the state has long promoted English as an interethnic lingua franca. It might therefore seem that with the emergence of Singlish, the role of English in cutting across Singapore's ethnic mix has come to fruition. But unfortunately, Singlish has been often disparaged by Singapore's leaders — to quote the then prime minister in his National Day Rally Speech — as a 'type of pidgin English' (Goh 1999).

Public discourses surrounding Singlish are therefore highly contested (Fong, Lim and Wee 2002; Lim 2009). Supporters of Singlish claim it to be a colloquial variety used mainly to reflect and build up social solidarity. Opponents of Singlish, including the state, prefer to see it as clear evidence of a drop in standards of usage. And in fact, the state's concerns about Singaporeans' ability to speak and write standard English have prompted the Ministry of Education to announce a slew of educational initiatives, including greater emphasis on oral communication skills, continued attention to grammar throughout the educational stream, and the introduction of linguistics as a pre-university subject, among others. In making these announcements, the ministry's decision to employ foreign language experts has raised concerns that this represents another indicator of the state's inability to free itself of the hegemony of the native speaker ideology. A more useful approach would be to find ways of helping students learn the standard variety whilst not forcing them to disavow whatever knowledge of English they already possess — even if this knowledge consists of a variety that is stigmatized. Any exploration of this particular avenue, however, would first require putting aside deeply ingrained language prejudices, and it is unclear at present whether the political will exists for such an initiative.

## Contributions in this volume

The issues raised in this sketch of the English language situation in Singapore are explored in detail by the contributors to this edited volume.

### *The ecology of English in Singapore*

This volume starts with a section which sets the stage by outlining the ecology in which English exists, providing valuable socio-political and historical overviews, and considering some of the more crucial factors whereby English has evolved to reach the state it is in Singapore today. This first and current chapter has already provided a sketch of Singapore's language policies and related issues and implications.

Complementing this is Lim's consideration of 'Migrants and "mother tongues"', which examines the linguistic ecology of Singapore, focusing on two external factors of migration and language policies over different eras, and demonstrates the significance of these for a better understanding of the development of a contact language such as Singlish (Singapore English, SE), and the implications these hold for policy and education. In the different eras distinguished by differing migration patterns and language policies, different sets of languages can be seen to be dominant. In the era dating from pre-colonial times through to early post-independence years, characterized by natural immigration and vernacular maintenance, two main original immigrant languages, Bazaar Malay and Hokkien, are dominant. During early independence where there was controlled immigration and new language and educational policies instituted, the official languages, in particular Mandarin, gain prominence. In the era of late modernity, with foreign manpower and a relaxation with regard to non-official languages, global-media languages such as Cantonese see a rise in prominence. An examination of structural features of SE does indeed show the influence of these various languages at different stages of SE's evolution. Lim also examines the current era, which is replete with new practices in immigration and language policies, and identifies other languages which she predicts may soon play a significant role in Singapore's ecology. Combining a sensitivity to historical eras with an examination of linguistic features in SE and those of the various contact substrate languages, Lim suggests, allows the sources of various linguistic features of SE to be discerned with greater precision. This then contributes to the establishment of the more likely substrate sources, and in turn a better appreciation, not only for the structure of SE, but also for the social forces that have shaped it.

## *Reconceptualizing English*

Given that English in Singapore has evolved over the decades, the next section of chapters considers what English has become — in a process of reconceptualization which involves reviewing fundamental notions which are usually taken as given, such as 'standard English' and 'good English', as well re-evaluating what 'Singapore English' itself entails — and the implications this holds for policy and pedagogy.

Gupta's contribution, 'Singapore Standard English revisited', takes as a starting point her early discussion in the 1980s with Mary Tay of the possibility of a Singapore Standard English. At the time, arguments for an endonormative standard for Singapore English were seen as revolutionary. In the thirty years since, however, it has become widely accepted that local words and local accents are necessarily part of standard English.

The concept of a local standard grammar, though, remains problematic. In her latest thinking on the matter, Gupta suggests that it is no longer appropriate to predetermine what is and is not standard by the methods adopted in the 1980s. The chapter therefore considers the meaning of standard English for Singapore in the twenty-first century, and develops the concept of International Englishes, arguing that the main variety of International English is ordinary standard English, which is one dialect of English with minor regional differences (mostly in lexis). While all English-using communities participate in the maintenance of International English, they also usually have local non-standard dialects of English, which are used in specific contexts, especially informal speech, literature, and humour, and Singlish fills this slot in Singapore. In an analysis of the way in which Singaporeans use English in formal and informal written material, and the language advice given online and in *The Straits Times* in connection with the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM), Gupta suggests that Singaporeans participate in the same uncertainty about standard English as users of English from other English-using nations.

The SGEM, which has figured so prominently in recent public discussions of English, is also the focus of Bruthiaux's chapter 'The Speak Good English Movement: A web-user's perspective', which examines the campaign's claim to be based on sociolinguistic scholarship, its policy goals, and its principal activities. Bruthiaux makes a number of key observations. First, the campaign suggests a conflict within Singapore government policies in that this top-down approach to language management cannot be easily reconciled with the simultaneous encouragement of critical skills and informed choice, especially in education. Second, far from equipping the nation with the linguistic tools it needs to flourish in the twenty-first century, the campaign is an outdated attempt to perpetuate increasingly irrelevant postcolonial preoccupations with exogenous standards, suggesting a lingering lack of self-confidence among the Singapore leadership. Third, the publicly unchallenged claim that both international and internal communication can only be effectively transacted through standard English (however defined) is manifestly false given current self-reports of actual usage. Fourth, despite the apparent academic backing the campaign enjoys, it betrays a profound misunderstanding of the nature of language variation and of the dynamics of language in use across a range of social settings. Bruthiaux then argues that an appropriate policy response should abandon the misconceived and ineffectual effort to campaign Singlish out of existence. Instead, public resources should be devoted to helping all Singaporeans become comfortable along the entire continuum of English (from the colloquial to the standard) through a sustained educational effort while letting the Singlish end to look after itself.

In 'Hybridity in ways of speaking', Alsagoff's target of reconceptualization is Singlish itself. From the context of recent discussions of English in Singapore being pulled in two opposing global-local directions, she offers a model of variation of English in indigenized contexts. Originally conceived as the Cultural Orientation Model (COM), which explains variation in relation to the global-local contrast of the cultural orientations of speakers, Alsagoff develops this further in relation to the concept of 'glocalization', which emphasizes the simultaneity of the global and the local in the process of globalization. In this light, she suggests that, given the co-presence of features of both local and global in the speech of Singaporeans, a change in the approach to describing language variation in Singapore is required. Glocalization, which presents language and identity as intertwined and fluid, offers a more dynamic orientation for understanding the ways in which people appropriate English for their own purposes, but who are at the same time constrained by institutional discourses and policies favouring standardization and conformity. Singlish is thus seen more as a range of lingua-cultural resources that speakers use in order to identify or mark a change in cultural orientation or style.

### *Ethnicity and ownership*

On the basis of the previous section, involving a recognition and acceptance that English needs to be reconceptualized, in terms of what it is and how it is used in multilingual societies such as Singapore, this section takes up the question of where the ownership of such new varieties of English lies. The chapters here also explore the ideologies and claims that underlie current policies, as well as the disjuncture between this and Singaporean sociolinguistic reality, reflecting on the potential repercussions of policy for the status of (the varieties of) English as forms of linguistic capital.

The first chapter in this section, by Bokhorst-Heng, Rubdy, McKay and Alsagoff, takes us straight into the debate, asking 'Whose English?' in considering language ownership in Singapore's English language debates. It addresses the idealization of the so-called native speaker found within the native-speaker (NS)/non-native-speaker (NNS) dichotomy, as well as the unwillingness to recognize the different varieties of world Englishes as legitimate languages. Within Singapore's English language debates, this NS/NNS dichotomy and ownership discourse is evident particularly in the government's steadfast denial of allowing Singaporeans native speaker membership, even though more and more Singaporeans do in fact regard English as their first language and the primary or only language of the home. Instead, the officially preferred model is British RP, and the Inner Circle speakers of English continue to be regarded as the true

owners of English. However, by comparing the findings of two recent studies conducted by the authors, the chapter aims at a model of language ownership that moves away from the limitations of NS/NNS discourses, and focuses instead on speakers' orientations towards English norms to foreground speakers' degree of ownership of the English they speak.

The chapter 'Language and social capital in Singapore' by Vaish, Tan, Bokhorst-Heng, Hogan and Kang focuses on language maintenance as an outcome of social capital within particular ethnic groups. Starting with the All Party Report on Chinese Education of 1956, language planning in Singapore has managed to maintain 'mother tongues' in the nation's linguistic ecology against the onslaught of global English. However, these gains are not evenly spread across social groups. The authors therefore ponder the following questions: What are the differences in language use on the basis of ethnicity? How are these differences materialized in the various socio-spatial domains? The authors hypothesize that some ethnic groups are able to retain their mother tongue languages through social ties, which can be conceptualized as social capital created within the group by strengthening common cultural values and beliefs to achieve resource sharing. The analysis is based on the ongoing Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore (SSS 2006), which surveys one thousand children stratified by race and class, linked to twenty-four qualitative follow-up case studies, and documents patterns of language use in the domains of school, family and friends, religion, public space and media, and asks questions about attitudes and ideology based on such language use.

In the final chapter of the section, Stroud and Wee evaluate 'Language policy and planning in Singaporean late modernity'. They note that Singapore's language policy attempts to manage the tension between modernity (construed as a global orientation achieved through the medium of English) and tradition, where each mother tongue is supposedly the cultural repository of values for its associated ethnic group. They then go on to argue that a sociolinguistic ordering around notions of ethnicity and nation does not fit easily with the multilingual dynamics of late modern societies. Societal development in late modernity is generating linguistic hierarchies of value that are reconfiguring issues of language and ethnicity into questions of language and class. Despite this, Singapore's language policy continues to be firmly shaped by (conventional) ethnolinguistic frameworks. The chapter thus argues that Singapore's language policy needs to appreciate that patterns of multilingualism are increasingly constructed around the dynamics of language choice and change in terms of a logic of lifestyle consumption. Specifically, the sociolinguistics of multilingualism needs to recognize the consumer as a specific type of (linguistic) identity. Their proposal, which gives greater prominence to autonomy, choice, and reflexivity — notions that seldom figure in conventional language policies

— is thus for a reconceptualization of the notion of language in terms of sociolinguistic consumption, an understanding of identity as involving not only processes of recognition but also of (re)distribution, and the deconstruction of the category of mother tongue in discourses of language planning.

### *English in education*

Continuing the thrust of reconceptualizing English in Singapore, the final section focuses on the domain of education, where English often faces the most controversy. The contributions here provide an examination of the potential for innovative methods in English language education, and also consider the model of lingua franca, and the tension between exonormative and endonormative practices in teaching.

The point of departure for Rubdy's 'Problematizing the implementation of innovation in English language education in Singapore' is the intensely proactive management of educational policies and the decisiveness and expedience with which these policies are generally implemented. Most studies of Singapore's English language policies have, however, focused on the 'what' (i.e., the goals and content-based changes) rather than the 'why' (i.e., the pedagogical assumptions and beliefs or ideological rationales underlying them) or the 'how' (i.e., the means employed and the general approach adopted in their implementation) of these reform initiatives. Given this current state of affairs, Rubdy's chapter provides a much-needed critical review of the structures and practices involved in the English language syllabus over the years, identifying the distinct stages — the curriculum having been revised approximately every decade — in its evolution. In so doing, she deconstructs how the assumptions and ideological beliefs underlying them have helped create, on the one hand, the prevailing educational culture and, on the other, a docile workforce that serves the country's economic targets but lacks the creativity and critical mindset integral to the New World Order.

Low then focuses on a specific area of pronunciation in her chapter 'Sounding local and going global'. She provides an overview of research in the phonetics, phonology and prosody of Singapore English, and highlights the principle of intelligibility, following Jenkins (2000) in identifying a core for the teaching of pronunciation. Stressing the importance of preserving both global and local orientations in pronunciation, she then proposes a number of principles and practices that may be adopted in developing a pronunciation syllabus for English in Singapore.

Rounding up this section and the volume, Pakir's 'English as a Lingua Franca: Negotiating Singapore's English language education' reflects on

English language education in the twenty-first century, drawing on current discussions within the paradigms of world Englishes, originating first in the US and gaining currency in Kachru's Outer and Expanding Circles of English, and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), originating in Europe, which have developed distinct theoretical models of 'lingua franca'. Pakir then looks at how 'lingua franca' as a theoretical concept may help us understand the range of interpretations of English in localized contexts, including the possibility of experimentation that can and must go on as English transplants itself into different soils. The mobility and portability of English and its changing functions, values and meanings in localized contexts create hybrids and mixed varieties, some desired and some less so. These pose challenges to applied linguistics, English language education and pedagogy, and the discussion of identity for English-knowing bilinguals.

### *Research bibliography*

Obviously no single volume can encompass all the interests and angles of research on a particular intellectual or geographical area. The current volume takes as its angle an exploration of the implications which have arisen as a result primarily of the language policies that have been instituted in Singapore over the decades, and thus provides a very focused and coherent collection of the most current thinking and research on issues in this regard.[3] For those whose interests are piqued, there is a wealth of work that has been conducted on other areas of research on English in Singapore, and the closing chapter of this volume provides a valuable resource for readers in this respect, comprising a selective bibliography of such research.

## Prospects

The next few decades in this era of modernity will see Singapore facing various challenges. Among them are the following: pursuing foreign talent and encouraging such talent to take up Singaporean citizenship, retaining ties with those Singaporeans who have migrated overseas by cultivating a sense of a Singaporean 'diaspora', and narrowing a potentially devastating class divide between relatively well-off Singaporeans and their less affluent counterparts. In trying to manage these challenges and others, it is clear that discussions over the role of English in Singapore and for Singaporeans will continue to be relevant. In this regard, we are optimistic that the chapters in this volume have a significant contribution to make to these discussions.

## Notes

1. There are occasions when the Eurasians are acknowledged as an ethnic group in its own right (Rappa and Wee 2006). For example, the Eurasian Association is treated as one of four ethnically based self-help groups, alongside the Chinese Development Assistance Council, Mendaki (for the Malays), and the Singapore Indian Development Association. These groups are all Institutions of Public Character (IPC) and each receives dollar-for-dollar matching from the government for funds that are raised.
2. This is not the same as saying that such labels should be ignored. They reflect metalinguistic assumptions about how language practices cluster together, as well as how such practices index particular in-group and out-group identities. See also Fong, Lim and Wee (2002).
3. We would in any case like to place on record our regret that we were unable in particular to include a section on English in Singapore literature, including Singapore films. Scheduling conflicts and prior commitments made it difficult, if not downright impossible, for the potential contributors who had been invited to complete their manuscripts on time.

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