International Journal for Research in Education

Volume 47
Issue 2 *Vol.(47), special issue(2), July 2023*

Article 5

2023

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Recommended Citation

Lu,L. (2023). ‘I don’t speak singlish’ – linguistic chutzpah and denial in the ELT classroom. International Journal for Research in Education, 47(2) special Issue, 136-173. http://doi.org/10.36771/ijre.47.7.23-pp136-173

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IJRE

المجلة الدولية للأبحاث التربوية
International Journal for Research in Education

Vol. (47), Special Issue – July 2023 المجلد (47) عدد خاص - يوليو 2023

Manuscript No.: 2171

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"أنا لا أتحدّث السنغليزية" – الوقاحة اللغوية والإنكار في الصف الدراسي لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية

DOI : http://doi.org/10.36771/ijre.47.7.23-pp136-173

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ISSN : 2519-6146 (Print) - ISSN : 2519-6154 (Online)

'I Don't Speak Singlish' – Linguistic Chutzpah and Denial in the ELT Classroom

Abstract

In Singapore, dominant narratives of Singlish as 'bad English' and an impediment to acquiring the Standard co-exist with discourses about Singlish as a marker of Singaporean identity. One consequence of such competing discourses has been characterised as a polarity between linguistic anxiety about Singaporeans' proficiency in Standard English on the one hand, and rationalised confidence in using both registers appropriately on the other [that Wee (2014) terms 'linguistic chutzpah']. This paper examines a third phenomenon that is neither exclusively anxiety nor chutzpah in a specific site where metapragmatic evaluations of Englishes abound – the ELT classroom. Drawing on data from a bidialectal programme of Standard English and Singlish in a secondary school, I observe that while some students portrayed confidence in reasoning how Singlish might be appropriate in certain contexts, there are also instances where the same student might deny being a user of Singlish. Such denial may not be construed as anxiety, but a reflection of the unequal values of Englishes in wider society, even when bidialectalism may be promoted in the classroom.

Keywords: Singlish, Singapore, English Language Teaching, TESOL, Applied Linguistics, Sociolinguistics

Introduction

The use of English in Singapore is more accurately described as the co-existence of Standard English and its vernacular cousin, Singlish, in different domains of Singaporeans' daily lives. Standard English is recognised by all segments of society as the norm to be used in official domains. It is promoted by the state and uniformly valued by all social actors, regardless of race and class, as the pre-eminent linguistic capital to be used in official domains (Lu, 2021, p. 159).

At the same time, Singlish has developed as the lingua franca for almost everyone in Singapore, regardless of social class and educational level, cutting across ethnic boundaries (Ansaldo, 2009; Fong et al, 2002; Vaish & Roslan, 2011). Additionally, it has been described as being embedded in all informal domains of life in Singapore (Cavallaro & Ng, 2009, p. 156). Despite its prevalence, it is Singlish that generates controversy and where conflicting opinions abound. Such contested views are mostly regarding its legitimacy and desirability (Wee, 2018, p. 51). Common discourses supporting its use tend to claim it as a part of local cultural and national identity, while those against Singlish position it as ungrammatical "bad English" and as an impediment to learning the Standard (Wee, 2005, p. 56). Importantly, both sets of discourses are not mutually exclusive and may be espoused by the same individual.

Against this backdrop of conflicting ideological positions towards Singlish, Wee (2014) characterises how Singaporeans might react in an affective manner towards their own language use. He describes a polarity of 'linguistic chutzpah' on the one hand, and anxiety on the other. Thus, while some Singaporeans are notably anxious about their own English proficiency and often unsure if a certain variation in pronunciation or syntax might be

perceived as ungrammatical, there are also others expressing confidence in their linguistic abilities and able to justify their use of Singlish in appropriate contexts. However, in the course of administering a bidialectal programme in Standard English and Singlish in a local secondary school, I have come to observe student behaviours and metapragmatic utterances that appear to confound Wee's (2014) original formulation of chutzpah and anxiety.

This paper examines the case of Liz, a Secondary One student, who portrayed confidence in reasoning how Singlish might be appropriate in certain contexts, displayed remarkable proficiencies in both Standard English and Singlish in written tasks, yet denies being a fluent and frequent user of Singlish. I draw on data from a study that explored the use of Singlish and Standard English in an 8-week bidialectal programme. This was implemented in a local mainstream secondary school in July to August 2019. As a trained ELT secondary school teacher, I conducted the lessons myself, teaching two classes of Secondary One students (13 year olds) once a week, over eight weeks. Data collected included audio and video recordings of classroom discourse, interviews with students, as well as completed in-class tasks.

In what follows, I provide an overview of the varying attitudes and unequal statuses of Singlish and Standard English in Singapore, including the ELT classroom. This is linked to a deeper explication of Wee's (2014) notions of linguistic chutzpah versus anxiety. I then describe the focal participants and classroom activities from which I draw my data. I will analyse interview data from a focus group discussion, interactions from the same group while they were engaged in producing a poster advertisement, and the completed poster itself, demonstrating how some of Liz's practices reflect neither chutzpah nor anxiety. Indeed, Liz's practices and metapragmatic evaluations

of her own language use might be accounted for as an effect of Unequal Englishes – the competing and conflicting discourses surrounding Singlish in wider society, as well as the unequal values attributed to each of Singlish and Standard English reified by state language policies.

Conflicting discourses and Unequal Englishes in Singapor

Since independence in 1965, the Singapore state has implemented a bilingual policy. Every school-going child has to learn English and an official Mother Tongue associated with each of three recognised racial groupings (ie Mandarin for the Chinese, the Malay language for the Malays and Tamil or other Indian languages for the Indian community). At its core, the bilingual policy is entwined with the government's aim of being a hub in the global economy, whilst maintaining racial and linguistic equality among the three official races. Ergo, "English is to be learnt by citizens for its instrumental value so as to enable the whole of society to be competitive in a global neoliberal regime, in line with the state's branding of Singapore as a cosmopolitan multiracial nation amenable to foreign investment" (Lu, 2020, p. 152). This explains the privileging of English in all state functions, including the institutionalisation of English as the sole medium of instruction in all state-run schools. One consequence after five decades of the policy has been massive language shift towards English as a home language, especially among younger families (Bolton & Ng, 2014; Tan, 2014). Singapore is now seen as an 'English-dominant' country (Tupas, 2011), where state-sanctioned Mother Tongues play a secondary role in most aspects of life.

Another consequence of the privileging of English by the state has been an unforeseen emergence of a vernacular spoken across all races and social classes, that is Singlish (Tan, 2017). Because of the prevalence of Singlish, the government has, on occasion, employed it for public information campaigns and to stir nationalistic sentiments during National Day Parades. However, its overall stance towards Singlish has historically

been highly hostile. The state's adherence to a neoliberal economic vision has meant a consistent framing of Standard English as crucial to Singapore's development in a global economy (Lu, 2020), while Singlish is a problem that has to be resolved. According to state rhetoric, it is unintelligible to the rest of the world and hence a threat to the nation's economic progress (Wee, 2005, p. 57).

Singapore, therefore, presents a situation where Standard English is indubitably valued as a marker of socioeconomic and educational success. On the other hand, Singlish is often perceived by the younger generation as emblematic of their localised identities, and as the language of intimacy and sociability. Yet, it is also viewed as inappropriate and inadequate for formal functions and domains (Tan & Tan, 2008; Leimgruber, 2014; Cavallaro et al., 2014).

These stances towards Standard English and Singlish are similarly translated into the ELT classroom. The state often cites the interference model and its fear that Singlish-use will impede the learning of Standard English by students, or that Singlish will displace the Standard entirely among the population. Crucially, such a view remains rooted in and continues to inform current classroom practice, policy-making, and teacher and student ideology (Tupas, 2018; Fong et al., 2002). Decades of research have shown how the use of non-standard Englishes as a cultural and pedagogical resource in English language classrooms can result in improved learning of the Standard, as well as greater critical language awareness among learners (Wheeler, 2006; Fong et al., 2002; Tupas, 2018). Nonetheless, Singapore's Ministry of Education has never officially acknowledged the presence of Singlish in the classroom, much less recognise it to be of value to pedagogy (Seilhamer & Kwek, 2021).

Given the deep-rooted historicity and sociopolitical structures that constitute and sustain the unequal values and ideological biases towards

Standard English and Singlish in Singapore, Tupas (2021) rightly conceptualises English use here as *Unequal Englishes* (Tupas, 2015; Dovchin et al., 2016; Sabaté-Dalmau, 2018). It is precisely because of unequal Englishes in Singapore that leads us to consider Wee's (2014) characterisation of some affective manifestations of these overarching discourses.

Linguistic chutzpah and anxiety

In Wee's (2014) words,

> "By 'linguistic chutzpah', then, I intend to specifically refer to a speaker's confidence in his/her language choices and usage. However, linguistic chutzpah is not about making choices and usage that blatantly disregard conventions of grammar or situational appropriateness, as though these were irrelevant. Rather, it is confidence that is backed up by metalinguistic awareness and linguistic sophistication, giving the speaker the ability to articulate, where necessary, rationales for his/her language decisions."
>
> (Wee, 2014, p. 85)

As an example of linguistic chutzpah, Wee cites the Speak Good Singlish Movement (SGSM), a facebook group set up in response to the government's anti-Singlish campaign the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM). The group harnessed substantive and valid linguistic arguments to categorically refute the state's formulations through the SGEM, not just demonstrating a fair amount of bravura in opposing a government used to authoritarian measures, but importantly, also showing metalinguistic awareness and sophistication when justifying the existence and use of Singlish (Wee, 2014, pp. 90-91).

Notwithstanding this, public remonstrations like SGSM remain rare. The state's persistent fear of Singaporeans' lack of proficiency in Standard English (exemplified via the SGEM) has arguably fostered a widespread culture of insecurity among the populace regarding their competence in

English (Gupta, 2010, p. 76). At this opposite end of the spectrum, a lack of chutzpah has meant a sense of anxiety. Here, Wee refers to the case of a bureaucrat from a government agency, calling him to ask for the correct pronunciation of "Woodleigh", the name of a new train station. The caller from the agency was hoping that a linguist would be able to provide the needed authoritative backing as to which variant pronunciation was the Standard (Wee, 2014, pp. 95-97). The implication is that the hapless civil servant was uncertain of the metapragmatic considerations behind choosing one variant over the other, and was unable to justify his/her choice without deferring to some supposed higher authority.

To Wee (2014, p. 98), Singaporeans' vacillation between the polarity of linguistic chutzpah and anxiety is a reflection of English use in late modernity, when speakers have to actively negotiate, challenge, or even shape associations between language and sociocultural values. Indeed, the ELT classroom presents an ideal microcosm of how students might navigate these ideologies, and exhibit chutzpah or anxiety. I will now describe my participants before turning to the data.

Participants and Method

Data from this paper is drawn from a pioneering study to investigate the pedagogical value of Singlish in the ELT classroom (Lu, 2022), where a bidialectal programme is designed and delivered to secondary school students. It is based on Tupas' (2018, pp. 8-9) depiction of additive bidialectalism for Singapore's context, where (i) both Singlish and Standard English are seen as appropriate forms of language use for particular social situations, audiences, and purposes; and (ii) Singlish is used as a resource to facilitate the learning of Standard English. The programme was delivered in a mainstream secondary school to two Secondary One classes (13 year olds) of 40 students each. This occurred over eight weeks in July to August 2019. Specific teaching practices include methods well-established in bidialectal

education, and proposed by local linguists, such as contrastive analysis (Fong et al., 2002; Alsagoff, 2016).

The data collected throughout the eight weeks include recordings from two video cameras totalling 16 hours, audio recordings of student interactions in classroom activities totalling 112 hours, audio recordings of focus group discussions with four groups of students totalling 80 minutes, completed written tasks from classroom activities, and about 80 pages of field notes.

The data that I focus on in this paper is drawn from the activities and interactions of one particular group of three students – Liz, Bea, and May. I zoom in on portions of the data where they express metapragmatic evaluations or stances of Standard English or Singlish. This included statements made during focus group discussions or interactions within the group during classroom activities, as well as the completed written task of producing a poster advertisement. In line with the aims of the paper, I considered if there were any affective expressions that might be classed as chutzpah or anxiety. I also investigated the kinds of stances that are habitually and conventionally linked to certain subject positions, which will then allow us to conceptualise the indexical relationship between acts of stance-taking (e.g., expressing an opinion about Singlish or deploying the register in a written task) and the sociocultural field (e. g. circulating discourses about Singlish as “bad English”) (Jaffe, 2009, p. 4).

“I don’t speak Singlish often”

The metapragmatic utterances produced by students in the study with regard to Singlish and Standard English are generally in line with the findings of previous surveys (e.g., Cavallaro, et al,. 2014). Thus, students would situate Singlish as a language of friendship and informality, while Standard English is positioned as formal and of economic value. Such

discourses are exemplified in Extracts (i) and (ii) below in the focus group discussion involving all three girls. However, it is worth drawing our attention to Liz's responses. In the extracts that follow, "I" indicates a research assistant who was employed as part of the research team.

Extract (i)

1	**I:**	**So like (0.3) what are your thoughts on these two**
2		**Englishes? Like (0.2) like just generally.**
3	Liz:	I mean:: generally I don't speak Singlish often at all.
4	I:	Mmhmm
5	May:	Are you serious?
6	Liz:	No I'm serious. I really don't use it often, at home,
7		outside, anywhere.
8	Bea:	Personally, erm, like among my classmates I speak like
9		the most Singlish because it's like the only (0.2) the only
10		(0.2) comfortable language.
11	Liz:	That is true.
12	I:	Wait wait sorry what do you mean by the most?
13	Bea:	Like Singlish. We speak a lot of Singlish. We don't speak
14		much like proper, standard English.
15	I:	So, you feel that you speak more Singlish with your friends?
16	Bea:	Yeah.
17	May:	I never use standard English.
18	All:	(laughter)
19	I:	So but then you said that you (0.2) rarely use Singlish?
20	Liz:	Yeah:: I mean maybe its because the fact that my sister
21		scolds me for mispronouncing words, the fact that I just
22		don't want to use it really.
23	Bea:	Seriously?
24	I:	Oh okay, then what about your parents?
25	Liz:	My mom speaks Chinese, so not a lot of Singlish ah. My
26		dad then, he speaks Singlish more often.

Focus group discussion 13 Aug 2019

Here, Liz first suggests that she does not use Singlish often (line 3), and this claim is immediately met with some disbelief by May (line 5). May's

remark could be because Liz's claim is incompatible with what May knows about Liz's actual language use (i.e., that Liz does speak Singlish), or it might be a genuine statement of surprise. It is certainly surprising if Liz's claim were true, given that her language practices (of not using Singlish) would be in the minority compared to both May and Bea's claims of using Singlish themselves, as well as what is generally known to be the lingua franca among the wider student population. Nonetheless, in focus group discussions, it is observed that Liz does deploy Singlish features at times. For example, the use of the discourse particle 'ah' occurs in Extract (i) line 25, and in Extract (ii) line 6 below. In any case, Liz reacts to May's disbelief by doubling down and elaborating on her claim [Extract (i) line 6], and when asked by the interviewer again, explaining that this is because of her sister's strict regime in regulating her language use, and that she herself chooses not to speak it (lines 20-22).

Even as Liz claims not to use Singlish often, there is a general consensus among the group regarding the unequal statuses of both Singlish and Standard English in the subsequent part of the discussion [Extract (ii)].

Extract (ii)

1	**I:**	**But then (0.3) So between the two right, do you feel**
2		**that either one is more useful or?**
3	Liz:	Standard.
4	Bea:	I think standard is more useful cause around the globe
5		it's usually standard .
6	Liz:	Universal (0.2) then more people will understand.
7	I:	But some of you said you know that you use Singlish more.
8	Bea:	Because it's with my friends and we're in Singapore.
9	I:	But then the standard is still more useful is it?
10	Bea:	Yes.

11	I:	So the more standard is more::
12	Liz:	More formal.
13	I:	So formal is better?
14	May:	Depends on the (0.2) depends on the situation.
15	I:	What situation?
16	May:	Like oral lah.
17	Liz:	Or someone who is not from Singapore and don't speak Singlish
18	Bea:	Yeah.
19	I:	So just to make ourselves more understandable around the world?
20	Liz:	Yeah.

Focus group discussion 13 Aug 2019

It is clear from Extract (ii), that Singlish is assessed to only be appropriate among friends and within Singapore. Standard English is meant for formal settings, such as the Oral Examination (lines 12-16); and in a reproduction of state rhetoric, it is intelligible globally (lines 4-6). The implication is that Singlish is not intelligible to foreigners (line 17). Crucially, the three girls' lack of hesitancy and uncertainty in Extract (ii) can also be perceived as an instantiation of Wee's (2014) sense of linguistic chutzpah, having all portrayed "confidence backed up by metalinguistic awareness" (Wee, 2014, p. 85). In this case, they have explicitly drawn indexical links between Singlish and Standard English as discursive objects, to wider circulating discourses surrounding the values of each and appropriateness of use in various contexts.

The next extract is drawn from the same three girls' interactions as they were tasked to produce a poster advertisement for a travel agency. This classroom activity was part of the bidialectal programme that they underwent. The only instruction they were given is that they could use either or both Standard English and Singlish as resources in the poster.

Extract (iii)

1	Liz:	er Bea since you're one of the more fluent Singlish
2		speakers can you make up an introduction for
3		a (inaudible) (0.5) like hello there fellow people
4		in singapore ah er-
5	May:	-Eh ren ah:
6	Liz:	No just do it in singlish any singlish and add as
7		many singlish as you like have you ever had that
8		situa[tion]
9	Bea:	[you do know] you are asking a pinoy to say
10		singlish right?
11	Liz:	yeah I mean I don't speak fluent Singlish?
12		[long pause of 10s as Bea writes on poster]
13	Liz:	Okay think (1) yeah we [can
14	May:	[oh yeah that's smart!]
15	Liz:	Or:: then we say you (0.5) [we very cheap] one
16	Bea:	[we very (inaudible)]
17	May:	Ya we very cheap one! Confirm plus chop!
18	Liz:	All right (0.2) write that down in pencil then.

Interaction during group poster activity 20 Aug 2019

Two key observations can be made through this interaction. First, Liz asserts that she is not a fluent speaker of Singlish (line 11), rehashing her similar claim just a week before during the focus group discussion that she does not use Singlish often.

Second, and more significantly, despite her claims, Liz is the one leading the group in formulating Singlish utterances to be deployed in the poster. She initially appoints Bea, originally from the Philippines, to be the main scribe, but proceeds to provide an example of what to write (lines 1-4). May's suggestion to insert a Mandarin feature [where 'ren' (人) translates to 'people'] is refuted by Liz (lines 6-7). As Bea writes what Liz suggests, Liz continues to propose more Singlish utterances (line 15), which is then taken up by May (line 17) and authoritatively endorsed by Liz herself again (line 18).

Figure 1 below shows the finished poster completed by all three girls, where both Singlish and Standard English features have been deployed.

Figure 1
completed poster by Liz, May, and Bea.

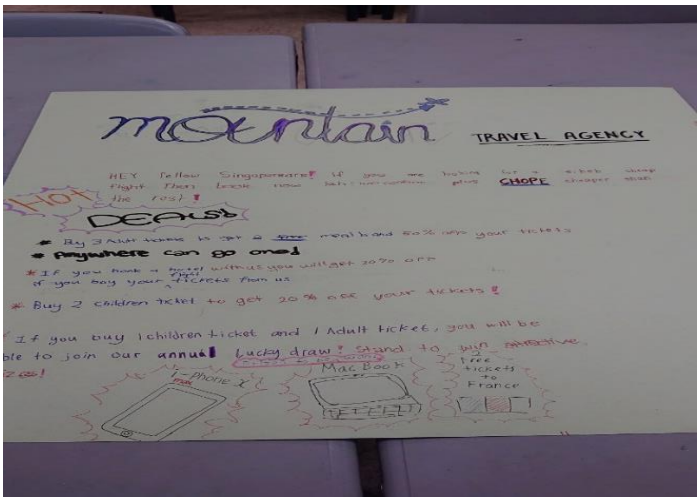
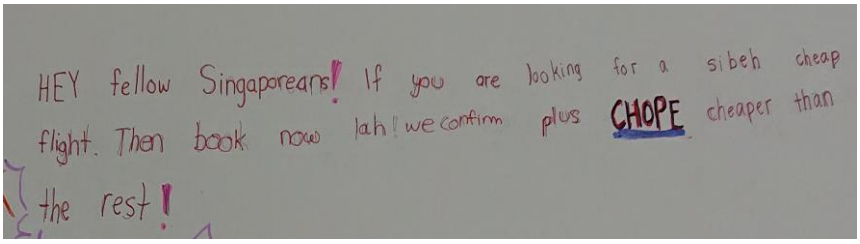


Figure 2
Tagline of poster



The interaction in Extract (iii) occurred as the three girls were crafting the words in Figure 2. The students are apparently appealing to a target audience of Singaporeans using Singlish features in “sibeh cheap flight” (a very cheap flight), “Then book now lah” (the inclusion

of discourse particle “lah” for emphatic meaning), and “confirm plus chope cheaper” (definitely cheaper). Notably, the Singlish word “chope” has been rendered incorrectly, where the right spelling ought to be “chop”. It indicates that grammaticality and proficiency in a vernacular like Singlish can be imperfect among local students. Nonetheless, the choice of Singlish in the tagline makes sense, considering that the purpose of the tagline would presumably be to capture the attention of the imagined audience and, perhaps, shorten social distance.

While the produced poster is an instantiation of stylisation practices (Spitzmuller, 2015, p. 130), it is similar in indexicality (cf Silverstein, 2003) to the metapragmatic evaluations that occurred in the focus group discussions in Extracts (i) and (ii). The choice of register and linguistic features in the poster also indirectly indexes the relationships the students were drawing between each register and the wider sociocultural field. Singlish is recognised by Liz as a typified practice linked to the Singaporean hoi polloi (a typified user of Singlish), appropriate for marketing products aimed at the masses, and useful in taglines to attract the attention of general readers. The choice of Singlish in the tagline points to Liz’s sophisticated awareness of (a) indexical links between notions of social class and branding, (b) purpose of communication, (c) audience design, (d) genres of writing, and the aptness of Singlish in relation to all of these abstract and interrelated communicative concepts.

Consequently, Liz’s role as the group’s leader – directing what to write for the poster, deciding which linguistic feature to include and exclude, and overriding other self-proclaimed frequent users of Singlish like May – is in effect a manifestation of her supreme chutzpah in Singlish use. How then can we reconcile her claims of low proficiency

in Singlish and that she does not use it frequently, with her chutzpah and indeed, sophistication, when actually deploying Singlish features in communication?

Overlapping beliefs and dissonant practices

While Wee (2014) characterises linguistic chutzpah and anxiety as a result of contested ideologies and unequal Englishes in Singapore, what we observe in Liz is markedly different. Hers is a sort of dissonant behaviour that portrays chutzpah (not anxiety) for a language, yet openly denies using it. As it happens, similar forms of dissonant behaviour have been widely observed in studies on teacher beliefs in Singapore.

When investigating teacher beliefs regarding bilingualism in Singapore, Vaish (2012) notices how some teachers expressed seemingly contradictory ideas. For example, teachers who believed that a student's non-English home language can be useful in teaching/learning English, also held beliefs that supported English-only instruction. She characterises this phenomenon as an 'overlap of beliefs' (Vaish, 2012, p. 66), which she explains as a contestation between what their own teaching experience has revealed (that using the student's L1 can help in learning English), versus what their pedagogical training has explicitly taught them (that English-only immersion is the best way to learn).

Similar overlapping beliefs and ideological contestations are also seen more recently in Tupas' (2021) study. The English teacher in question exhibits conflicting ideologies and practices about the use of Singlish in the ELT classroom. On one hand, the teacher acknowledges Singlish as a legitimate form of communication in research interviews, and actually speaks Singlish with students to build better rapport with them. On the other hand, she does not openly endorse the use of Singlish by students in the

classroom, avoiding students' questions about whether a Singlish utterance can be used. Tupas (2021, pp. 230, 234) attributes this to a highly regulated regime of teaching practice in Singapore, where teachers are expected to strictly follow pedagogical guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education, even as they navigate their own teacher belief systems and expertise. Her seeming contradictory style of teaching is therefore a culmination of: (a) overarching ideologies to do with Singlish and Standard English; (b) the need to affirm and build rapport with her students' localised identities; and (c) an awareness of the constraints and implications of violating state-sanctioned behaviours (Baildon & Sim, 2009).

In this vein, Liz's supreme chutzpah when deploying Singlish and concomitant denial of using Singlish often or fluently can also be accounted for by considering the structural conditions in Singapore society. Crucially, Liz's stance is produced in quite different circumstances from the teachers in the work of Vaish (2012) and Tupas (2021). Unlike the teachers who have more of an institutional minefield to navigate, Liz was expressing these notions when Singlish has already been permitted for use in the bidialectal programme. So, she is not denying Singlish because her language use is being presently and expressly regimented. This is unlike the typical monolingual language classroom prominently described by Heller (1996, p. 151), where students often deny using languages deemed illegitimate by the teacher and school system. Moreover, Liz is well aware of the negative peer pressure in the classroom (Nieto, 2000, p. 203) that comes with her denial of Singlish, going against the grain of her group mates who readily admit to using Singlish, as well as most of her peers. In this way, Liz's denial is also to be differentiated from the often observed phenomenon of students wanting to fit in with a more desirable social grouping around them, and consequently claiming not to speak a language that marks them to be of a different ethnicity or social class (e.g., Bashir-Ali, 2006, pp. 631-633). Significantly, her denial does not stem from linguistic anxiety in Wee's (2014) sense, since she

is apparently capable of both expressing and harnessing her metalinguistic awareness of Singlish in specific communicative tasks.

One can only reasonably surmise that it is her ideological beliefs regarding the unequal statuses of Standard English and Singlish that contribute to her simultaneous chutzpah and denial. In explicating Bourdieu's (1991) notion of the linguistic market, Park and Wee (2012) reminds us that, "All actors are simultaneously embedded in multiple markets, and because different markets are characterised by distinct norms and values, individuals are always faced with the need to reconcile the potentially conflicting demands – including demands relating to language use – which various markets may impose on them" (Stroud & Wee, 2011 in Park & Wee, 2012, p. 29). Thus, when Liz says she does not speak Singlish, she is orienting to and drawing on the dominant discourse and structural privileging of Standard English as pre-eminent linguistic capital (associated with the linguistic market of the education system and officialdom), as well as her experiences of being corrected to speak only the Standard by her older sister (itself a consequence of state-sanctioned Standard English). Yet, she has also been socialised into Singlish use through her father and friends (associated with the linguistic market of informal relations), and so has become extremely adept at manipulating Singlish features and attendant indexical qualities for her own purposes. Liz might uphold a superior valuation of Standard English that trumps her social need to openly claim Singlish as part of her identity, but she cannot escape the inevitability of having to use and understand Singlish in order to function and be accepted by the majority of her peers in informal social settings (cf Lu, 2021, pp. 160-161). Her linguistic chutzpah and denial are therefore linked to the multiple linguistic markets she inhabits, and can be perceived as a reflection and effect of Unequal Englishes in these markets.

Such dissonant behaviour ought not be seen as rare nor anomalous, and is likely exhibited by many others. In a popular online forum responding

to the question of "As a Singaporean, do you speak Singlish? Why or why not?", we see comments that portray similar claims of denial.

> "I don't speak Singlish. I never learnt this thing called Singlish. Perhaps a large proportion of Singaporeans speak this Singlish, which is a pidgin language. But you can't really say that every Singaporean speaks Singlish. I was born and raised in Singapore and I never learnt this Singlish…
> If you are a Singaporean who does not speak the pidgin language, you may face hostility from other Singaporeans who could speak it because that thing is a source of identity for them. Because it is part of their identity, they want to perserve it and it frustrates them when you are not contributing to its perservation by speaking it. I never felt the need to give any importance to such bullies and learn this Singlish to appease them. I just speak normal language. I don't speak any pidgin language."
>
> Kanmani Sabapathy, 31 January 2022 on *Quora*

Accordingly, individuals such as Liz and Kanmani are seen to tread a fine line in claiming to prefer Standard English even in informal linguistic markets, risking exclusion from localised friendship groups. They are well aware that Singlish is the valued and appropriate register among their peers, which makes their denial of Singlish all the more remarkable, though not necessarily inexplicable.

Conclusion

There is a broad consensus that characterises Singapore's educational and sociopolitical climate as one that is highly regimented, centralised, and ideologically bound to the state's vision (Ong, 2007; Chua, 2017). Indeed, the state's positioning of Standard English and Singlish has arguably given rise to chutzpah and anxiety surrounding the two registers (Wee, 2014), and perhaps dissonant behaviour where individuals can portray both chutzpah for and deny using the same language.

This poses certain implications and challenges for ELT, especially in the implementation of supposed progressive forms of bidialectal pedagogy. There is a need to be sensitive to the practices and language beliefs of students like Liz who continue to uphold the pre-existing unequal statuses of Englishes. In Liz's case, she does not resist the pedagogy itself. But what if family members and some students do resist? Does the teacher persuade them of the merits and ultimately insist on bidialectal practices in the classroom? Can students opt out? These are important questions for researchers and teachers alike to consider in a place such as Singapore, where the stigma of Singlish the vernacular remains strong, and where we are only beginning to experiment with and explore bidialectal programmes.

Funding

This study (with ethical approval number IRB-2018-05-045) was funded by the MOE AcRF Tier 1 Grant. Much appreciation also goes to the teachers and students who accommodated the research project in their school. Any errors contained herein are mine alone.