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In the Singlish–'Good' English debate, the use of Singlish (SCE) is viewed as an obstacle to the development of students' literacy skills in standard English (SSE) and so the practice of classroom codeswitching between the two varieties is strongly discouraged. Yet the presence of the vernacular in the classroom continues to be robust. This paper examines whether and to what extent the use of Singlish, the homegrown colloquial variety of Singapore English, may be said to adversely affect students' literacy practices and, more importantly, what students and teachers themselves believe. The paper is in three parts. Part 1 reports the collective findings of a group of teachers who were involved in investigating this thorny issue through a small-scale survey carried out as part of their course work during their BA study programme at the National Institute of English (NIE) in Singapore. Part 2 reports the findings of a related project, conducted with the same primary school students, which involved a comparison of the incidence of features of Singlish in student talk, recorded during completion of an oral group task, with that found in their written compositions. Part 3 explores the possibility of considering the use of Singlish as a pedagogical resource rather than an impediment.

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Introduction

The informal use of Singlish in Singapore's schools is strongly discouraged due to concerns that it will impede the acquisition of 'good English', the effective development of students' literacy skills and the quality of their overall education. Many members of the public share this view of Singlish as a corrupted and degenerate form and express strong disapproval of teachers using this variety. However, despite this disparaging view of Singlish as a stigmatised variety and explicit official disapproval, the presence of the vernacular in the classroom continues to be robust. This trend prevails even though a national campaign, known as the *Speak Good English Movement (SGEM)*, was launched in 2000 to promote the use of standard English and stem the spread of Singlish among Singaporeans (Rubdy, 2001).

The official stance is that Singlish is a threat to the nation's competitive advantage in the global marketplace. Educators, parents and the lay public often echo similar views in the media, namely, that Singlish is a problem, a handicap, a blot. Singlish is thus constructed as a less prestigious dialect associated with low social status. However, few studies have attempted to find

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out whether the students and teachers themselves view the classroom use of Singlish as problematic. Neither is there any discussion about the possibilities of using the vernacular as a means for teaching the standard, although the positive role of vernaculars in cultivating standard language pedagogy has been well documented.

The paper therefore focuses attention on the following questions as a basis for a better understanding of this thorny issue. What are the students' and teachers' views regarding the use of Singlish in the classroom? Do they see the apparent widespread use of Singlish as a cause for concern? Do they see their own codeswitching practices between Standard (Singapore) English (SSE) and Singlish (or Singapore Colloquial English, SCE) as being detrimental to the learning of the standard? Does Singlish really adversely affect students' literacy practices? And is it true that young Singaporeans are growing up with a substandard variety of English that they could not care less about?

The paper reports the collective findings of a group of 19 primary school teachers, who were involved in investigating this issue through two small-scale projects carried out as part of their coursework on a third-year BA module in *World Englishes* at NIE. The first project required the teachers to elicit the beliefs and attitudes of their students towards Singlish using a survey questionnaire and interview data from three students (representing the top, average and weaker bands) and three of their colleagues. In all, the questionnaire responses were drawn from a total of 690 students (523 Chinese, 121 Malay and 56 Indian) from 19 primary level classes, while the interviews involved 57 students and 57 teachers. For the second project the teachers had to identify features of Singlish in student talk recorded during completion of an oral task during an English lesson and compare their incidence with the incidence of Singlish usage in the students' written composition of a comparable length. The aim was to assess whether and to what extent Singlish features are transferred to writing and whether they are indeed an impediment to the acquisition of standard literacy practices. If the influence of the vernacular proved to be innocuous, then obviously the views of many of the officials and educators would be invalidated. On the other hand, if the evidence showed transference from the vernacular to students' literacy practices, this would have to be acknowledged and appropriately dealt with.

The students, all from neighbourhood schools, ranged from Primary 3 to Primary 6 (10–12 years old) and represented a good racial mix between the Chinese, Malay and Indians. Only a handful of them spoke standard English at home; those claiming to speak English as their home language very likely being fluent in the Singlish variety. In most cases, the home language reported was an associated ethnic language (Malay, Tamil, Mandarin or a Chinese dialect) termed 'mother tongue' in Singapore's official parlance. Codeswitching is a common feature of these classes. Pupils codeswitch between English and Singlish, just as they do between English and Mandarin or Malay at various times. The incidence of codeswitching tends to be higher in content subject classes like maths and science than in the English class, which is the focus of study here.

The paper is in three parts. Part 1 presents the findings of the questionnaire survey and interviews as a basis for determining whether Singlish is in fact an impediment to the acquisition of standard English from the point of view of students and teachers. Part 2 summarises findings as to whether the use of Singlish in the classroom adversely affects students' literacy practices based on the teachers' analysis and comparison of the spoken and written usage of students. Together they form the basis for exploring how classroom codeswitching might more effectively be exploited as a communicative and pedagogic resource in English language instruction in Part 3.

Students' and Teachers' Perceptions Towards the Use of Singlish

The questionnaire eliciting students' responses towards the use of Singlish in the classroom contained 10 questions. Questions 1 and 2 refer to patterns of language use in the home and school. Questions 3–5 and 8 and 10 focus on the students' perceptions and attitudes towards their own use of Singlish, while Question 6 is on the teachers' use of Singlish. Questions 7 and 9 deal with students' views on the SGEM and standard English.

The student interview questions probed further into responses derived from the questionnaire, while the teacher interviews touched on some of these issues, formulated from the teacher's point of view. Teachers' and students' responses are discussed together for ease of comparison.

It would be helpful to start with Question 10, which asks students to describe what Singlish means to them. The responses reveal the ambivalent feelings of the students, ranging as they do from fairly neutral to those that are generally positive to those showing outright disapproval:

Neutral

'A language that uses ''lah'', ''leh'', ''hor'' and ''meh'''
'A ''short-cut'' language'
'Local communication'
'Converted by Singaporeans with other words added'

Positive

'It is my language'
'A cool language'
'A funny language'
'A relaxed language'
'Makes me more confident'
'Without Singlish, life will be pretty boring'
'Senior citizens will be confused without Singlish'

Negative

'Broken English'/'Bad English'
'A noisy language'/'Disgraceful language'
'Addictive'/'Like a friend teaching me the wrong things'

'Singlish is nonsense'/'A 'rojak' (mixed) language'
'Singlish is a language that kills good English'
'A tradition I want to keep, yet a pest I want to destroy'

These responses reflect the conflict (both intraspeaker as well as interspeaker) that Singaporeans often experience between the need to use language for expressing the internal culture of the people in their the local environment and international intelligibility thought to be crucial for Singapore's economic survival in a globalised world.

Questions 1 and 2 relate to the patterns of language use in the home and in school, respectively. The data showed that nearly 40% of the students, of whom the Chinese form a majority, ranked English and 37% indicated Mandarin as the language most frequently spoken in the home. Malay was ranked first mostly by ethnic Malays. 'Others', which included mainly the Chinese dialects, such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, was ranked first (and even second) only by a handful, reflecting the gradual displacement of these dialects by Mandarin within the Chinese community. Thus the figures in Table 1 are indicative of the increasing dominance of Mandarin and English in Singapore homes, largely confirming patterns of language usage in the 2000 Census of Population Report.

When it comes to the language most frequently spoken in school, there is a sharp rise for English (82%), which is ranked number one, and a corresponding decline (16%) for Mandarin as number two. The average ranking for the other languages such as Malay, Tamil and 'Other' dip to insignificant levels. This is not surprising, given that English is after all the medium of instruction and has an L1 status in Singapore schools while all children study their ethnic 'mother tongue' as their L2. It is possible, however, that as the question did not identify specific domains within the school context, some of the respondents may have interpreted it as referring only to the classroom.

Question 3 asks the students to rate their agreement with a number of statements on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'agree very strongly' to 'disagree very strongly'. These have been merged in the table below. The responses demonstrate that students seem to have an idea of domain separation for Singlish and SSE.

Table 1 Patterns of language use in the home

Language	*Ranked first*	*Ranked second*	*Ranked third*
English	275 (39.8%)	216 (31.3%)	153 (22%)
Mandarin	256 (36.8%)	238 (34.5%)	79 (11.4%)
Malay	104 (15%)	34 (5%)	13 (1.8%)
Tamil	30 (4.4%)	37 (5.3%)	6 (0.8%)
Others	27 (3.9%)	29 (4.2%)	36 (5.2%)
Total	690		

Table 2 Patterns of language use in the school

Language	*Ranked first*	*Ranked second*	*Ranked third*
English	563 (81.6%)	44 (6.3%)	83 (12%)
Mandarin	108 (15.6%)	379 (54.9%)	46 (6.6%)
Malay	14 (2%)	107 (15.5%)	11 (1.5%)
Tamil	–	42 (6%)	14 (2%)
Others	5 (0.7%)	38 (5.5%)	28 (4%)
Total	690		

Table 3 Student patterns of use and beliefs about the use of Singlish

No.	*Statements*	*SA & A (%)*	*SD & D (%)*
1.	I use Singlish with my classmates during class discussions.	55	45
2.	I use Singlish when I speak to my classmates during recess.	83	17
3.	I use Singlish to get my ideas across clearly.	31	69
4.	I feel comfortable when I speak to my friends in Singlish.	65	35
5.	It is easier to communicate with my friends in Singlish.	71	29
6.	My parents speak Singlish.	29	61
7.	My brothers and sisters speak Singlish.	52	48
8.	It is cool to speak Singlish.	17	93
9.	My friends laugh at me when I speak good English.	5	95
10.	I would like to learn to speak good English.	92	8

55% of the respondents in Table 3 indicate that they agree or strongly agree to using Singlish with their classmates in class discussions (S1), while 83% report its use with friends during recess (S2). This, combined with the findings that show 65% of respondents feel comfortable (S4), and 71% feel that it is easier to communicate with their friends in Singlish (S5), suggest that young Singaporeans are indeed using Singlish in certain classroom domains. Yet an overwhelming 83% students state that they do not find it is 'cool' (S8) to do so although admitted using it to communicate with siblings (S7). Likewise, 69% feel that it is not necessary to use Singlish to put across their ideas clearly, in contrast to some of the teachers in the interview data, who say they *do* use Singlish to convey ideas more clearly. It appears that students, in general, do

not attach a positive value to Singlish as an educational tool. A few revealed that they speak Singlish not so much because they think it 'cool', but because they cannot help it.

In contrast, the positive connotations standard English holds for them come through very definitively, with 95% rejecting the idea that their friends would laugh at them for speaking the standard (S9), and 90% acknowledging that it is important for them to speak good English (S10). The students in the interviews also tended to affirm its importance in achieving academic excellence and communicating effectively with the outside world, reflecting an awareness of its power as an instrument of international communication and an exponent of their linguistic and academic abilities.

In response to Question 4, a significant 84% strongly disapproved of the teachers' use of Singlish in class, the interview data further reiterating their view that by speaking Singlish students would not be helped to speak Standard English. In their view, instead of being a good role model, the teacher would be setting a bad example, thus endorsing the use of Singlish and, consequently, affecting their performance in the examinations.

For those few approving the teachers' use of Singlish, the most common reasons given were that it helps infuse a sense of light-heartedness and humour, and made the lessons more enjoyable. Only a small number noted its usefulness in making the course content more accessible to weaker students.

In general, students of weak and average ability were more accepting of Singlish, due mainly to their close familiarity with the Singlish language environment, and perhaps, because it provides a sort of *comfort zone* for them.

Teachers' reasons for when and why they use Singlish in class

While the teachers were careful to claim that they do not overtly *promote* the use of Singlish, almost all of them remarked that they use it occasionally under specific conditions, providing legitimate reasons for doing so. The excerpts below from the interview data shed light on when and why teachers in Singapore resort to Singlish:

(1) *To explain difficult content, especially to students at low English proficiency levels*
'I use it only if I feel the need to reach out to their level of understanding.' (TR5)

This is in line with the research literature, which suggests that classroom codeswitching seems to arise naturally, perhaps inevitably, as a pragmatic response to the difficulties of teaching content in a language medium over which pupils have imperfect control.

(2) *To build rapport with the students, especially when interacting with younger children.*

'I tailor the language at the children's level of understanding to help them learn rather than confuse them, *or to gain a sense of closeness*.' (TR13)
'I feel that pupils will be more open and learning can take place.' (TR4)

(3) *To inject some fun and humour into the lesson.*
'Once in a while I break into Singlish just to make the lesson more light-hearted. The children actually ''wake up'' for a bit and pay more attention.' (TR7)

(4) *When they wish to concentrate on the message that is to be conveyed*
'There are times when a teacher must concentrate on content and not form. When teachers sometimes switch to Singlish, it is because they are concentrating on the message itself.' (TR12)

The reasoning provided by this teacher resonates with Gupta's argument conceding the limited use of the vernacular on such occasions: 'there is a danger that too close a concentration on form leads to a situation where the imperative to communicate is missing' (Gupta, 1994: 136).

(5) *Because it is more time-cost effective than using SSE*
Some teachers believe that using Singlish is time-cost effective, as in the case of this teacher who said she uses Singlish 'for the sake of convenience', and 'to get the message across faster'. (TR9)

(6) *As a springboard or a stepping stone to speaking the standard*
'The reason is that being a neighbourhood school, the mother tongue seems to be the language of choice for our pupils. Thus maybe speaking Singlish is a step towards speaking good English.' (TR18)

This rather unusual response came from an HOD who is simply content that pupils are speaking English at all, even if it is the Singlish variety.

The general attitude of the teachers was summed up as follows by one of them:

> I believe that students' use of SCE can be utilised to benefit them. As teachers when we use SSE, we model the language behaviour so to speak, that the students should be exhibiting. However speaking SCE sometimes helps us as educators to be in sync with our charges, to get through to them and not be seen as being ceremonial and prudish. (TR17)

When teachers resort to Singlish it is usually because they believe circumstances (student's low ability, to aid comprehension, to explain difficult points, to establish rapport or inject humour, etc.) call for it, even though the practice runs counter to the official mandate. This seems to indicate that the teachers' codeswitching behaviour, whether subconsciously motivated or based on thoughtful deliberation, follows certain patterns and principles that reflect both their beliefs and their response to the demands of their teaching context.

Only a handful of the teachers believed that Singlish should not be tolerated at any cost, even with the weaker students, and that their role as models of Standard English renders them duty-bound to use it at all times. A majority of them, however, openly acknowledged its usefulness in making the lesson seem friendlier, building rapport and solidarity and providing a sense of inclusiveness. Hence Singlish obviously has a positive valuation as well as purpose in their perceptions.

Question 5 was meant to examine the claim that the spoken vernacular influences their literacy skills, their writing in particular. As this issue forms the main focus of Part 2, a detailed discussion follows in that section. Suffice it to say here that whereas the students were pretty vehement about their written work being relatively free from transference of Singlish, the teachers, on the contrary, held mixed views. A large proportion of the students (93%) disagreed that they write in Singlish even though they speak it, suggesting a domain-specific awareness of its usage. Some of the teachers though, interpreted this to mean that students were either unable to distinguish between SSE and SCE or simply considered their deviations from the standard as developmental errors of language proficiency.

Students' generally positive responses to Question 6, on the *Speak Good English Movement*, suggest that the rationalisations underlying the SGEM have percolated deeply enough to impinge upon even primary level students. Most teachers, however, held mixed views, tending to believe that the movement was 'not well publicised', and that the measures taken were 'unimpactful', having had limited success in changing the way Singaporeans speak – views compatible with those expressed in recent studies on the impact of the SGEM (e.g. Randall & Teo, 2004).

Student responses to Question 7, eliciting views on the consequences of adopting Singlish as a lingua franca in Singapore, are quite illuminating:

- 'It will hamper the use of good English'
- 'It will affect Singapore's image'
- 'Can't find jobs overseas easily'
- 'We will lose business'
- 'Singaporean children will fail exams'
- 'Singaporeans would feel inferior to others'
- 'People from other countries/tourists will not be able to understand us'
- 'The proper English that we know will disappear and it will be very bad for Singapore'
- 'We will be looked down upon by other countries'
- 'Singapore will lose its reputation as a world class city'
- 'We would be ridiculed'
- 'Foreign investors will shy away from us if they do not understand us'
- 'The outcome will be more rude Singaporeans, annoying situation and ''no fun'''

Illuminating, in that the negative effects listed above seem to echo much of the official rhetoric that underlies the launching of the SGEM; one that links language primarily to pragmatic notions of economic utility and holds the Singlish language environment as the principal hindrance to learning 'good'/ 'proper' English.

Question 9 elicits students' reactions towards the use of standard English in specific situations, as indicated in Table 4.

As against their negative valuation of Singlish in Question 7, student reactions towards the standard in Question 9 were strongly approving for the vast majority of them. The only areas of disagreement are 'when speaking with

Table 4 Student reactions towards the use of standard English

No.	*Statements*	*SA (%)*	*A (%)*	*D (%)*	*SD (%)*
1.	With your classmates during class discussions	23	52	25	0
2.	When speaking to your classmates during recess	17	20	55	8
3.	When speaking to your friends	15	32	43	10
4.	When speaking to your parents	22	48	25	5
5.	When speaking to your brothers and sisters	13	30	50	8
6.	When speaking to other Singaporeans outside your home and school	38	27	26	9

classmates during recess' and 'when speaking with friends', which reflect an understanding of appropriate code selection in specific situational interaction. These primary school students have already internalised the separate domains of use for SSE and SCE in Singapore society, wherein their functional knowledge of language use tells them that Singlish is the most natural and spontaneous choice for informal talk among family and friends while SSE is reserved for educational, professional and formal contexts.

Interview data further reveal students' positive valuation of the standard in comments such as: 'Adopting standard English will improve Singapore's image' and 'we would be seen as a respectable, ''well-educated'' nation'. An obvious concern is presenting a good image of Singapore to the rest of the world and being internationally understood is a high priority. The preservation of 'face' and how important it is for Singaporeans to be seen in a good light by the outside world is a recurrent strand. As one teacher remarked, 'Clearly, even 10–12 year olds seem to recognise the benefits of being internationally intelligible' (TR 15).

In concluding this project many teachers asserted, echoing Gupta's (1998) description of Singapore as a diglossic society, that the school can be a place where SSE is learnt alongside SCE:

> With proper guidance, children can grow up to be proficient in the language and capable of switching between SCE, which is fun, distinctive, and gives us a unique Singaporean identity and SSE, that is proper, formal and internationally intelligible. (TR19)

Comparing Students' Use of Singlish in Speech and Writing

This section discusses the results of the second project the 19 primary school teachers conducted to obtain a clearer picture of their students' language use, and more specifically, to ascertain the extent to which features of Singlish that appeared in their speech interfered with their writing. The students' oral work

involved brainstorming, constructing concept maps and creating stories based on picture stimuli, while their written compositions mainly comprised narratives.

The method the teachers used was simply to count instances of SSE and SCE features in the students' spoken transcripts and written scripts and then compute the proportions of each variety in relation to the total number of words in these texts to come up with rough percentages for both. Due to space constraints, my discussion in this section will focus on the more qualitative and descriptive aspects of their analysis, with only a selective sampling illustrating their mixed code usage.

Linguistic features marking speech as Singlish

There was a range of grammatical, prosodic and segmental features that differentiated students' Singlish usage from the standard variety. Sometimes it was signalled by the omission of copulas, auxiliaries, articles, possessive and plural markers, third person singular present tense markers, past tense markers and the auxiliary 'do' in questions. The most obvious characteristic of vernacular usage in their speech comprised the use of the pragmatic particles, 'Ah', 'lah', 'leh', 'lor', 'meh' and 'what'. In addition to the lack of subject–verb agreement, it also involved the use of verb groups without subjects (PRO-drop), the subject-less use of 'can or not', the use of 'got' for 'have', of 'already' to express perfective aspect, the use of 'also', the use of 'one' in sentence final position and generalised tags. Prosodically, the vernacular was generally characterised by the stressing of every syllable, with no apparent nucleus and distinctive intonation. In terms of consonantal features, the simplification of consonant clusters was extremely common, particularly at the end of words, as was the omission of the final consonant or its substitution by a glottal stop. The presence of lexical variation was evident in the form of reduplication, the use of loan words from the ethnic languages and the widespread use of acronyms and 'clippings'.

Overall, although several of the SCE features that occurred in their speech were also present in students' compositions, what is notable is that their range was much narrower. These include subjectless clauses (PRO-drop), copula deletion, 'do' deletion, the use of 'already' as aspectual marker, the use of 'got' and 'cannot', and the invariant tag. The following extracts, all from students' speech, show how common these usages are in classroom talk.

1. Subjectless clauses (oral task 43%, writing 6%)
S1: This Tuesday, after school, **go where**?
S2: Where? Where?
S1: Sembawang Park.
S2: Ok, lah. Go Sembawang Park.

2. Subject deletion with the use of 'can'/'cannot' (oral task 51%, writing 3%)
Xue Ying: Not enough paper, write behind **can?**

Jia Min: Cannot.
Xue Ying: Like this **can or not**?
Jia Min: Cannot, leh.

3. The use of 'got' for 'have' (oral task 39.5%, writing 4%)
S1: Ms Sualasini, I **got** a lot of animals. Dog, mousedeer, . . .
TR: Mousedeer? Interesting!
S2: I **got** crocodile.
S1: I **got** a lot **leh**! **Got** a lot! Pikachu and crocodile and bulldog and ant. So many.

Secondly, the ever conspicuous pragmatic particles, evident also in the extracts above, were found to be almost non-existent in the written work of these children. The teachers claimed no traces of them whatsoever.

The following is further illustration of SCE features commonly found in student speech but rarely in their written work.

4. Copula deletion (oral task 44%, writing 2.5%)
(i) Where Ø the paper?
(ii) I Ø very blur.
(iii) Your handwriting Ø neat.
(iv) Nicholas Ø still learning ABC eh?

5. 'Do' deletion (oral task 37%, writing 5%)
(v) Why Ø you count the characters?
(vi) Spiderman and batman do what?
(vii) You want to be kitten or cat?

6. The aspectual use of 'already' (oral task 11%, writing 3.5%)
(viii) No, don't buy this one. This one next year **don't have already.**
(ix) Goutham do wrongly **already.**

7. The use of clause-final 'one' (oral task 9%, writing 2%)
(x) Madam Fairus give us so cheem **one.**
(xi) My older sister so lazy **one.**
(xii) Elderly people very sick sometimes **one.**

However, the omission of plural and possessive markers, articles, prepositions, conjunctions, present-tense and past-tense markers and problems with subject–verb agreement are found to persist in their writing. To examine just one of these features:

8. Absence of past tense marking (oral task 34%, writing 23%)
(xiii) He **pushØ** my table so hard my pencil **dropØ.**
(xiv) He is **frightenØ** because the lion **askØ** him to follow him to his house.

Examples like these, containing the absence of past-tense markers (as also of third person singular present tense, e.g. 'He walkØ', ?instead of 'He walks')

tend to occur in both students' speech and their writing (e.g. 'Suping and her sister were very sad. So her mother **promiseØ** to buy her a new bird.'). It is often difficult to ascertain from the data whether the absence of tense marking is an index of deficient grammar or merely a consonant cluster simplification, i.e. the reproduction of pronunciation patterns of SCE transferred on to their writing. The teachers themselves are not always aware of this complexity.

On the other hand, instances of reduplication, (e.g. 'Always **sleep, sleep, sleep.**', **'**Hurry up lah. Don't **talk talk**', 'Now how to write **neat neat** here?') are usually not found in students' written composition. Similarly, many of the local expressions that form part of everyday informal oral communication (e.g. 'shiok', 'rojak', 'cheem', 'salah', 'kena', 'alamak', 'aiyah') rarely occur in their writing.

The stark reduction of SCE features in their writing suggests that students seem more aware of the need not to use Singlish when it comes to written as opposed to oral communication. Clearly, the use of SSE is closely linked with education in the students' minds. The overall conclusion drawn by most teachers was that the predominant use of SSE in their students' writing actually seems to demonstrate an understanding of the formal demands of academic writing. Fifteen out of 19 teachers concluded that the students do not write as they speak; that subconsciously they do make a distinction between the spoken and written forms, displaying domain-specific awareness as to when to use SCE features and when not to, and ascribing it to the influence of the education imparted in the school.

Indeed, a large proportion of the students in the interviews also claimed that they do not write in Singlish even though they might speak it, indicating an awareness of its potential to jeopardise the development of their proficiency in writing. The reasons they gave: (a) the vernacular is incomprehensible and does not constitute the kind of writing that would help them express their ideas and thoughts well, and importantly (b) incorporating Singlish in their writing would affect their grades.

In summing up the findings of the above two projects, it is necessary to consider the validity of such student and teacher appraisals for the issue of Singlish. Most Singaporean children come to school already fluent in Singlish. SSE is usually acquired only after they enter primary school, at age six. Therefore SCE *will* emerge in the classroom and *how* teachers respond to it can crucially affect how well their students master SSE. As several scholars have argued, ignoring or condemning the vernacular may not be a particularly successful strategy and will not help curtail the use of Singlish. Taking account of it and exploring ways to deal with it could. It is therefore important to examine to what extent the teachers' and students' views with regard to Singlish in this study are relevant in the light of scholarly research, and it is to this issue we now turn our attention.

Implications of Considering Singlish as a Resource

The assumption underlying the SGEM is that keeping Singlish out of the classroom prevents interference while tolerance towards it is detrimental to the acquisition of the standard. The theoretical underpinning for this lies in

the behaviourist position, where using Singlish in the classroom is seen as subverting the acquisition process by denying learners valuable input in the standard. However, as Siegel's (1999: 704) review of the research on educational programmes that involved the use of stigmatised varieties reveals, there is no evidence that classroom codeswitching is actually harmful.

On the contrary, a number of studies (Ferguson, 2003: 43; Lin, 1996, 1999; Liu *et al*., 2005: 607) have argued that, far from being a dysfunctional form of speech behaviour, as some educational authorities have implied, classroom codeswitching can be an important, even necessary, communicative resource for the management of learning. Yet other studies have demonstrated, for instance in the Ebonics debate (Rickford, 2006), how instead of ignoring or condemning the vernacular, a more constructive approach would be to recognise and take account of it in seeking effective pedagogical solutions. Similar arguments can be put forward for considering the use of Singlish as a pragmatic strategy that teachers have evolved for coping with situations where pupils have limited proficiency in the official instructional medium and for facilitating classroom management.

What would be the implications of taking such a constructive stance towards Singlish? By linking the findings of the two projects reported above with scholarly work in the literature on the use of the vernacular as an educational aid, we can explore ways in which Singlish can be made to function as a practical communicative and pedagogic resource rather than an obstacle:

In facilitating curriculum access

One approach is to use classroom codeswitching as a *bridge* or *springboard* in helping students understand the subject matter of their lessons, to provide a scaffolding for helping them to cope with new content or unfamiliar concepts. It could serve:

- to annotate and clarify the meaning of certain sections of the texts,
- to demarcate reading of the text from commentary on it,
- to encourage student participation, and
- to scaffold knowledge construction for pupils with limited English language resources.

There are obvious cognitive advantages in the potential role of vernaculars as a *bridging tool* to help learners gradually adapt to using standard English. A study by Simpkins and Simpkins (1981) involving 540 children in 27 different schools in the USA, where 417 children were taught through a transitional series written in a variety intermediate between Ebonics and English, and ended up with a final series written entirely in standard English, showed a dramatic 6.2 months of reading gain after four months of instruction by contrast with only 1.6 months of reading gain achieved through conventional methods.

Similarly, Lin's analysis of a geography lesson in a Hong Kong school showed the cognitive advantages of introducing Cantonese equivalents of English terms to enable students not only to understand scientific terms, but

also form richer multiple conceptual connections (Gagni, 1993). As Lin (2000: 191) observes, the use of the vernacular 'may also have the psychological effect of making things that belong to the distant L2 academic world appear as close as those that exist in the students' immediate L1 lifeworld' and help lessen students' frustration.

In enhancing uptake of language input

Another possible pedagogical solution involves some form of *contrastive analysis* where students' attention is drawn specifically to the differences between the vernacular and the standard language. Singlish can be used to enhance students' understanding and uptake of standard language input, and to facilitate the acquisition process by helping them focus upon, notice and compare systematic linguistic differences between the vernacular and the standard form. This would include using the vernacular:

- to highlight important points or salient vocabulary,
- to draw students' attention to what they already know,
- to make students aware of new rules and items in the standard variety,
- to help students 'notice the gap' and make comparisons, and
- to draw students' attention to the appropriate contexts of use for each variety.

From what we know of SLA theory and psycholinguistic research (following Schmidt & Frota's (1986) and Swain's (1998) *notice-the-gap* principle), by focusing specifically on the linguistic differences between SSE and SCE and getting students to (a) notice, (b) compare and (c) integrate the new items and rules of SSE, the latter can be made the focus of student *intake* and become an integral part of their interlanguage system. Such contrastive approaches that can be designed to increase awareness would enable students to notice the linguistic differences between SSE and SCE (e.g. in the use of tense markings, plural and possessive inflections, consonant cluster simplifications, and so on) and help them sort out these differences.

Based on decades of research on African American Vernacular English, Labov (1995) suggests the use of such a *linguistically informed approach* as giving more attention to the ends of words than is given to their beginnings, presenting words in context (*testing* or *test of* – rather than *test* in isolation, as words that are followed by a vowel favour retention of final consonants), and using full forms of auxiliary verbs (e.g. 'He will be here', 'He is tall'), all of which are relevant also in bringing out the differences between SCE and SSE.

In extending their awareness of the written/spoken genres

The students in the above projects clearly had an appreciation of the written/spoken distinction, as evidenced by the reduction of certain predominantly Singlish features in their written work. In extending such awareness classroom CS can be brought into play while exposing students to a variety of oral and written genres, both formal and informal:

- to raise awareness of their appropriate contexts and domains of use,
- to familiarise them with certain formal uses of oral genres (debates, interviews),
- to sensitise them to the presence (or absence) of the distinctive features of these genres, and
- to engage them in practising these features through role play and simulations.

By creating awareness of the more formal styles that go with certain written and also spoken genres, students can be enabled to acquire the appropriate discourse skills required for communicating in them.

In the management of classroom discourse

The use of the vernacular in the classroom vis-à-vis the standard can effectively denote a suspension of both the definition of the situation as a lesson *per se* and of the role of the teacher as the 'instructor' in demarcating talk about the lesson content from other kinds of talk. In other words, code contrast often indicates a shift of 'frame' (Goffman, 1974) away from lesson content and toward some 'off lesson' concern, such as occurs in the management of student learning. We saw from the teachers' project reports that Singlish can (and does) perform a variety of such functions:

- to motivate students,
- to discipline or praise students,
- to signal a change of footing,
- to attend to latecomers,
- to gain and focus student's attention, and
- to negotiate task instructions, invite student contribution, etc.

In building interpersonal relations in the classroom

The special potential Singlish has in humanising the affective climate of the classroom and in helping to negotiate different identities should be recognised and valued. It is well known that implicit meanings, often evoking cultural norms and values, can be signalled by the use of different codes in social interaction. In many Singapore classrooms, SSE represents a more distanced, formal teacher–pupil relationship and the local language(s) – Singlish in this case – a closer, warmer, more personal one. The teacher may, therefore, when the occasion is suitable, switch to Singlish:

- to build rapport with individual students,
- to establish a warmer, friendlier atmosphere,
- to encourage greater student involvement, and
- to create a climate of inclusiveness.

This category of functions highlights the fact that the classroom is not only a place of formal learning but also a social and affective environment in its own right, one where teachers and students negotiate relationships and identities. Singlish can function as a resource for navigating between different identities. Ferguson (2003) notes that teachers are both members of a profession and

members of the local community. For much of the time they play out their role as practitioners operating in situations clearly defined as pedagogical, but from time to time they may wish to step out of their teacher's persona and stress co-membership of the local vernacular community with their students, as for example, when they scold or praise them. In heteroglossic Singapore, where such shifts in identity are largely accomplished by switches from SSE to the SCE and back again, it may be argued that classroom codeswitching not only reflects but may also socialise pupils into patterns of multilingualism in the society beyond (Canagarajah, 1995).

In recent years, applied linguists interested in ameliorating educational problems have been willing to think out of the box and capitalise on the learners' and teachers' existing linguistic resources in finding more creative and practical ways to assist classroom L2 development. Some have proposed that L2 students should learn codeswitching to succeed in intercultural communication (Cook, 2001), while others (Liu *et al*., 2005: 633) even argue that in an increasingly globalised world, codeswitching may need to be added as a curriculum objective, a required life skill. Many language teachers, however, are likely to find the idea too radical, as it contradicts well entrenched beliefs and orthodoxies about what should and should not be practised in the second/foreign language classroom. Therefore, such awareness-raising can profitably be incorporated into teacher education programmes by encouraging teachers to engage in critical reflection on their classroom language use as part of their continuous professional development. This can be done by peer observation, or recording samples of their own lessons to critically analyse their own and their students' language switching practices and strategies, somewhat along the lines of the teachers in the two projects reported here. They will come to understand the many important functions CS has in multilingual classrooms and see it as a common, in fact normal, behaviour in these settings, as did the 19 teachers on completing their projects.

Concluding Remarks

At present, there is little research on teachers' and students' codeswitching behaviour in Singapore schools to help determine whether mixed code language use is truly detrimental to the acquisition of the standard as believed by the authorities. More research is needed to help and guide teachers' classroom practice. There is a need to analyse actual instances of codeswitching or mixed code usage and to examine factors associated with code choice: What does mixed code use actually look like in the English language classroom; how and why are teachers and students doing what they are doing, and what are the possible consequences of what they are doing? In the case of Singlish in particular, as studies on its use have tended to be predominantly descriptive, what we need is detailed empirical information on the consequences of classroom CS for learning and teaching SSE. A greater degree of intervention in future research studies seems warranted in addition to classroom discourse analysis and ethnographic research for a better understanding of the complex issues involved.

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