

1. Introduction

This paper aims to analyse the mode of communication used on ‘Reddit’, a social media platform that is used primarily by English speakers. The analysis will pay special attention to Singlish, an informal, colloquial form of English spoken in Singapore (Yeo, 2010), its usage and presentation in Singapore-related communities/”subreddits” such as r/singapore and how it correlates to the speech-like and text-like communication features (Crystal, 2006).

The paper will be as follows. First, I will briefly mention the changes the Reddit has gone through since its inception, the current statistics on Reddit’s popularity, before introducing r/Singapore as part of the discussion on the presentation of Singlish. I will then link the Singlish comments found in the subreddit to the speech and text features (Crystal, 2006).

2. A brief introduction to Reddit

Reddit was founded in 2005 by then college friends Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian. (redditinc, 2020) Since then, the platform has seen exponential growth and change in the past 16 years, with significant changes made to its interface. Despite the changes, the basic functions of Reddit remain.

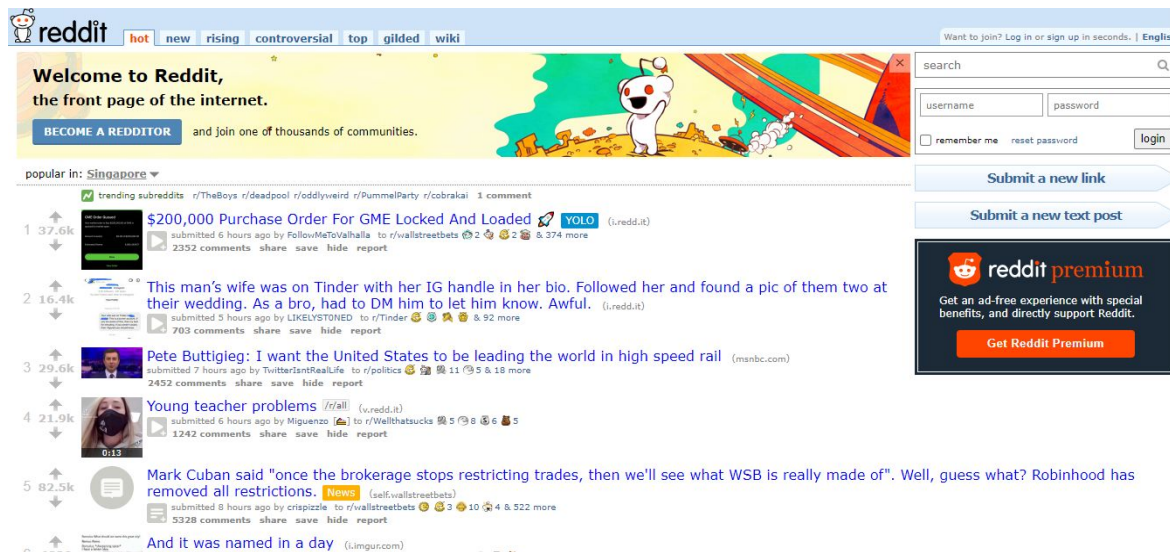


Figure 1: Old Reddit front page.

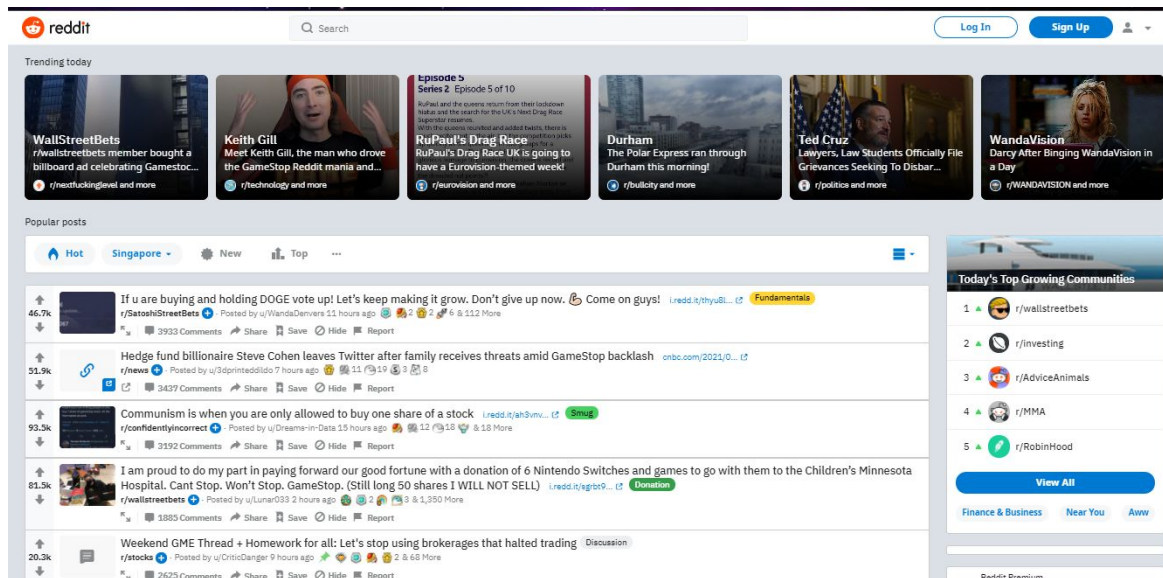


Figure 2: revamped home page of Reddit. Users are allowed to toggle between the new and old versions of Reddit.

There were 430 million monthly active users on Reddit as of 2019. (Lin, 2020) This was a massive jump from 330 million monthly active users in Q2 2018, in which the cause has been attributed to a revamp that the site has gone through in 2018. (Lin, 2020) As seen in figure 2, the old Reddit home page had plain-looking colours with bright blue fonts. This is in contrast with a 'softer' looking interface, shown in fig 2.2. After the revamp, there is a new 'trending today' visual segment on top of the page. The login/sign up portion has been shifted into a bar at the top of the page. Users are also allowed to upload a profile picture. This tilted Reddit towards a more graphical medium of communication as there are more visuals and colour coding as compared to the old Reddit. In 2020, there were 2.2 million communities, otherwise known as 'Subreddits', where users gather and discuss anything related to the topic of the subreddits. About 130000 of the subreddits were active in 2019. (Lin, 2020) Posts in subreddits are known as 'threads', and users are allowed to leave comments in threads. Threads and comments are both collectively known as 'submissions'. While users are allowed to create a thread using graphics and texts in a subreddit, comments are usually left in textual form. Subreddits are identified with the 'r/' notation before the name of the subreddit community (i.e r/Singapore), while Reddit users are identified with the 'u/' notation before their username. In both screenshots, the iconic up and down arrows and the number of comments remain, showing the signature communication feature used in the site. The numbers in between the two arrows are known as 'karma points', where users can award or take away a karma point for submissions. The higher the karma points a submission has, the more well-received the submission is in the subreddit. As an American-centric platform, the main language used is English. However, in certain country-specific subreddits, the language native to the country of that subreddit is used. For example, the submissions in r/sweden are mainly in the Swedish language, although there are a few English submissions dispersed in the subreddit.

3. Comparison of Reddit between Speech and Text features (Crystal, 2006)

Speech like	Text like
Time-bound	Space-bound
Spontaneous	Contrived
face-to-face	Visually decontextualized
Loosely structured	Elaborately structured
Socially interactive	Factually communicative
Immediately revisable	Repeatedly revisable
Prosodically rich	Graphically rich

Table 1: Summary of the seven features of speech and text (Crystal, 2006)

The bolded ones are features applicable to Reddit. As seen in the table, Reddit exhibits more text-like features as compared to speech-like features. This is due to the nature of Reddit being an online platform that cannot facilitate verbal communication. The following sections will use submissions found in r/Singapore to illustrate the features mentioned above.

4. r/singapore and Singlish

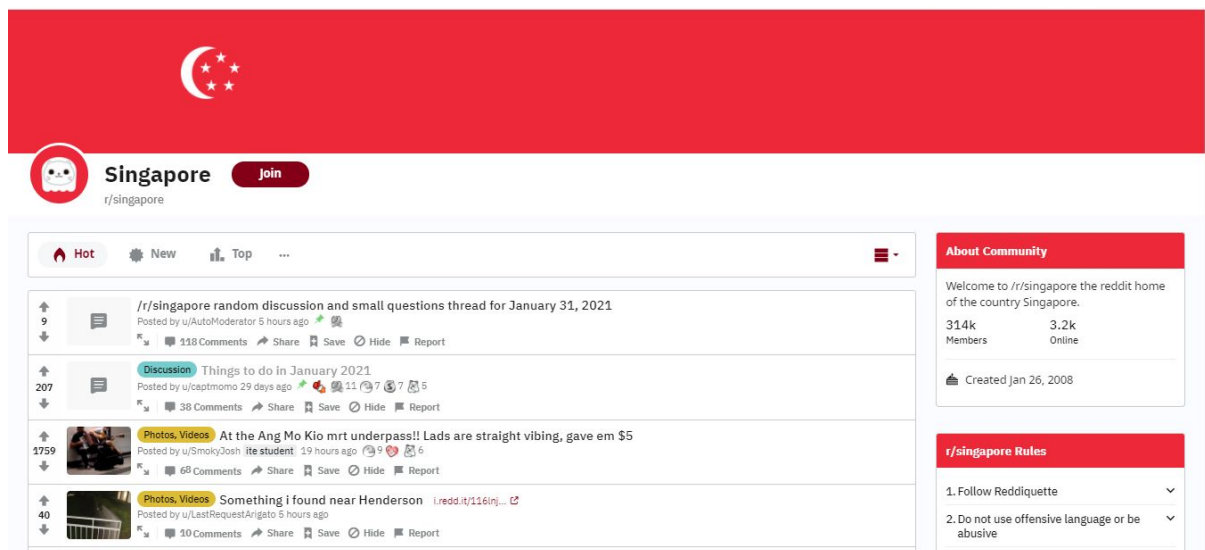


Figure 3: r/singapore, sorted by 'Hot'. Note that the 'r/singapore random discussions and small questions thread for January 31, 2021', otherwise known as the 'daily thread' in the subreddit is pinned on the top to prevent users from cluttering the subreddit with irrelevant and trivial posts.

r/singapore is a subreddit that primarily caters to Reddit users who reside in Singapore. As of 31 January 2021, the number of members in the subreddit stood at about 314,000, with a few

thousand members online in the subreddit at any time. The main language used in the subreddit is English, although in certain threads when there are jokes that only make sense in a non-English language, other languages are used, including but not limited to Mandarin dialects, Malay, Singlish etc, which mimics the linguistic diversity found in the country. As with other subreddits, there is a group of users who manage the quality of submissions r/Singapore, known as the ‘moderators’. Submissions that are not related to r/singapore or deemed as too insignificant to have a thread of its own are removed to prevent clutter. There are different types of threads in the subreddit. One of the threads is known as the “daily thread”, a bot-generated thread where users can leave a comment about anything that comes to their mind. The other types of user-generated threads do not have an official name, though there are threads where people post local news articles, ask controversial questions, show off their self-created pieces or findings on Singapore. Usually, separate threads are made by different users for different genres. For example, users in the subreddit would use one thread for one news article, and another thread to ask controversial questions. In this section, the focus will be on the Singlish comments made in the daily thread, as well as comments made in other threads in the subreddit.



Figure 4: a comment in Singlish found in the daily thread

In the daily thread, users do not need to adhere to a topic to comment in the thread; instead, they are allowed to comment in the thread on any issue that they wish to discuss. In this comment, the user u/HeavyArmsJin has asked a question with no known addressee. While it is a textual construction, the frequency of the coordinator ‘or’ appearing in the comment, along with the usage of ‘you all’ makes the comment loosely structured and spontaneous, as the sentence boundaries are unclear. This comment thus makes Reddit more speech-like.



Figure 5: Archived posts in r/Singapore, as indicated by the yellow box-shaped icon

In r/sg and Reddit in general, threads are usually archived after 6 months due to limited storage space. When a thread is archived, users will not be able to leave new comments or upvote/downvote the thread. This creates more space on the database for new threads to be created on topics that are more relevant and new. Thus, it exhibits the space-bound feature of text

communication, as there are limited storage space and servers for submissions on Reddit. This makes Reddit more text-like.

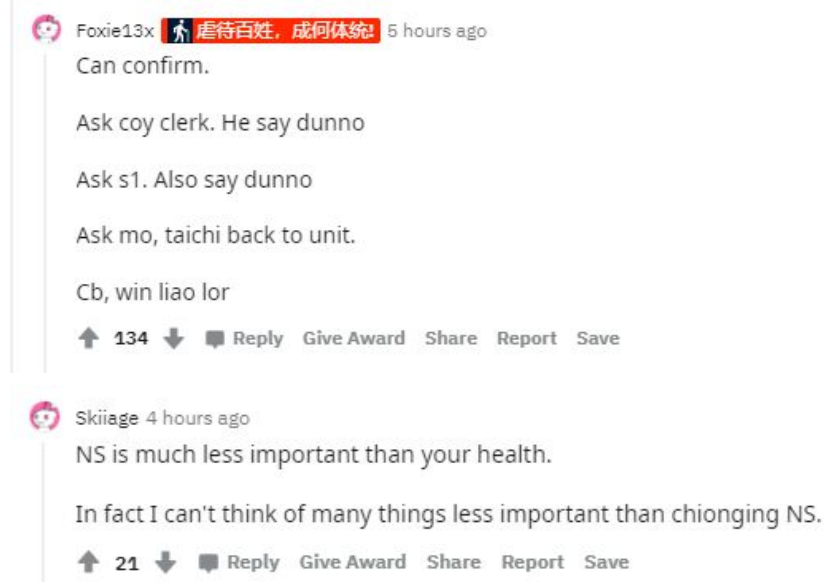


Figure 6: two comments made under a discussion thread about a thesis on National Service in Singapore, otherwise known as ‘NS’, one in Singlish and the other in Standard English.

In r/singapore, it is common to see both Singlish and English comments made in the same thread. The phrase ‘in fact’ in the Standard English comment signals that the comment is more elaborately constructed, as it is unusual for people to use that phrase in casual conversation. As such, the standard English comment is elaborately constructed, and it is one of the features that defines a medium as text-like. Also, both users in the screenshots have contrived their comments, as seen in the clear sentence boundaries with the use of full stop and paragraphing. These features make r/Singapore more text-like.

Both comments also gave a general overview of their own experiences in NS to support the topic of the thread, which makes r/Singapore a factually communicative platform that allows users to share their knowledge and wisdom of a specific field with other users.



Figure: 7: a comment and a reply in a news thread on Chinese New Year lights in Chinatown. Note the time difference between the two comments.

As seen in the screenshot, there is a visible time lag between the comment that u/halloween123 made and the reply from u/I_love_pillows, showing that communication in r/singapore is

visually decontextualized, as the users do not expect instantaneous responses. The same screenshot also exhibits the socially interactive aspect of speech-like communication, as there is some form of interaction between the users since they can reply to one another.



Figure 8: A comment in Singlish. Notice that there is an ‘edited 1 hour ago’ labelled next to the age of the comment

As a Reddit user, one is allowed to edit their threads and comments multiple times. The function is only available to the users who posted the thread or comment. In this screenshot, the user u/overwearthief has edited their comment. The number of corrections made, along with the time interval between when the comment was posted and the first edition made, however, is unknown. Yet, it does show that submissions on Reddit are repeatedly revisable, which makes the platform text-like.

5. Other interesting things to note

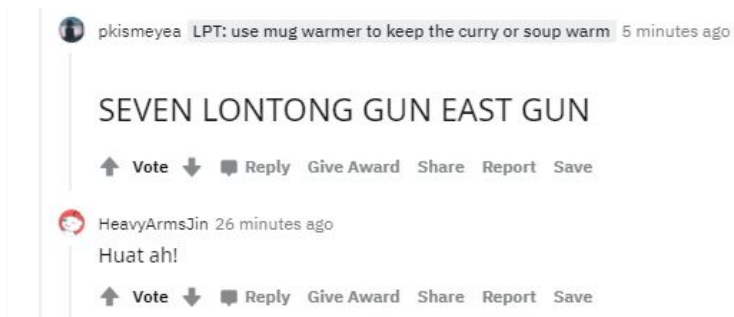


Figure 9: a literal translation of a segment of the lyrics belonging to the song “bai nian”, typically played during Chinese New Year.

There are comments in r/Singapore that do not fall under the typical convention of Singlish, yet only understandable if one is proficient in both English and Mandarin Chinese, as well as the Chinese culture. This is an example of such a comment. While it is not a standard example of Singlish, it does show that there is a sense of linguistic diversity in the subreddit, as this is not a typical English phrase but yet understandable, as seen in the reply made by u/HeavyArmsJin. To understand the meaning behind the phrase, one has to be familiar with a song commonly played during Chinese New Year, known as “bai nian” (拜年). In the song, there is a lyric that is based on an onomatopoeia on the sound of firecrackers that are used during Chinese New Year festivals. The following line is the lyric and the derived meaning is processed as follows:

七 个 隆 咚 锵 咚 锵
qi1 ge4 long2 dong1 qiang1 dong1 qiang1
Seven Lontong Gun East Gun

[Mandarin]

“Seven Lontong Gun East Gun”

The character for qi1 means ‘seven’ in English, while ‘Lontong’ comes from the ‘long2 dong1’ part. It could mean a type of food that is commonly consumed in Malay cuisine, although the meaning does not affect the meaning of the sentence. qiang1 is a homophone of the actual word for ‘gun’ in Chinese. The user has also deliberately made the second dong1 as a homophone of the actual Chinese character of ‘east’. Hence, the above comment is a literal translation of the onomatopoeia. The reply from u/HeavyArmsJin is a blessing phrase in Hokkien that is commonly uttered during Chinese New Year.

This is also a comment that exhibits the feature of being graphically-rich in a text-like medium. The large font size serves to mimic the loud volume of noise generated by firecrackers after being set off. The volume is further emphasized by the capitalization of all the alphabets in the comments.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the above features illustrate r/Singapore and Reddit as a whole to be a medium that strongly leans toward the text-like spectrum of communication.

In addition, it is interesting to note that Singlish, a primarily spoken colloquial language in Singapore, has made its entrance into a text-like American-centric forum. r/Singapore has played an important role in bringing Singlish to an international platform and gaining wider international attention. This paper has served its aims of analysing the use of Singlish in r/Singapore and its illustration of the features of communication introduced by Crystal (2006). However, this analysis does not apply to other subreddits that do not have their in-group language. As such, a separate paper may be needed to analyse the language forms used in such subreddits.

7. References

Crystal, David. (2006). Language and the Internet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lin, Y. (2020, July 13). 10 REDDIT STATISTICS EVERY MARKETER SHOULD KNOW IN 2021 [INFOGRAPHIC]. Retrieved from oberlo: <https://sg.oberlo.com/blog/reddit-statistics>

Reddit. Inc. (n.d.). reddit.com. Retrieved February 9, 2021 from <https://www.redditinc.com/>

r/Singapore. (n.d.) Retrieved February 9, 2021 from www.reddit.com/r/Singapore

u/Foxie13x (2021). r/Singapore - While reading the thesis of a junior, Dr. Soh Kian Wee, I was horrified of the unfolding of his unjust treatment in SAF. This is unacceptable and I hope he got deserved compensations. Retrieved February 9, 2021, from https://www.reddit.com/r/singapore/comments/ld0z5e/while_reading_the_thesis_of_a_junior_dr_soh_kian/gm3augv?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3

u/HeavyArmsJin. (2021). r/Singapore - /r/singapore random discussion and small questions thread for February 07, 2021. Retrieved February, 2021, from https://www.reddit.com/r/singapore/comments/le7xdv/rsingapore_random_discussion_and_small_questions/gmem5zw?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3

u/halloween123. (2021). r/Singapore - Chinatown Chinese New Year street light-up will be turned off on weekends to deter crowds. Retrieved February 9, 2021, from https://www.reddit.com/r/singapore/comments/ld0l5m/chinatown_chinese_new_year_street_lightup_will_be/gm3qbms?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3

u/I_love_pillows (2021). r/Singapore - Chinatown Chinese New Year street light-up will be turned off on weekends to deter crowds. Retrieved February 9, 2021, from https://www.reddit.com/r/singapore/comments/ld0l5m/chinatown_chinese_new_year_street_lightup_will_be/gm3xz8n?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3

u/pkismeyea. (2021). r/Singapore - /r/singapore random discussion and small questions thread for January 31, 2021. Retrieved February 9, 2021, from https://www.reddit.com/r/singapore/comments/l8wvbm/rsingapore_random_discussion_and_small_questions/glfzab2?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3

u/Skiiage (2021). r/Singapore - While reading the thesis of a junior, Dr. Soh Kian Wee, I was horrified of the unfolding of his unjust treatment in SAF. This is unacceptable and I hope he got deserved compensations. Retrieved February 9, 2021, from https://www.reddit.com/r/singapore/comments/ld0z5e/while_reading_the_thesis_of_a_junior_dr_soh_kian/gm3hf6a?utm_source=share&utm_medium=web2x&context=3

Yeo, T. R. (2010, December 29). Singlish. Retrieved from Infopedia: https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1745_2010-12-29.html