
Title	Singlish in the classroom: Is Singapore ready for additive bidialectalism?
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Source	<i>International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism</i> , 21(8), 982-993
Published by	Taylor & Francis (Routledge)

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* on 02/09/2016, available online:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13670050.2016.1226757>

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Citation: Tupas, R. (2018). Singlish in the classroom: Is Singapore ready for additive bidialectalism? *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21(8), 982-993. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1226757>

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“Beware Singlish.”

The Straits Times 29 October 1999

Introduction

More than two decades ago, Pakir (1991) described how students and teachers were adeptly shifting between two local varieties in the English classroom, Standard Singapore English (SSE), or “Standard English with a Singaporean rather than a foreign accent” (Tan & Tan 2008, 474), and Colloquial Singapore English (CSE), more intimately called *Singlish*. Such demonstration of bidialectal competence showed that these local varieties were used by competent speakers of English in the classroom who knew when to use one instead of the other.

A decade after, Fong, Lim and Wee (2002) made a proposal for strategic and informed use of CSE in the teaching of English in Singapore classrooms, arguing that (using evidence elsewhere) CSE as vernacularized and systematic English actually helps build linguistic confidence among learners and improve their learning of standard English. However, such a powerful and linguistically-informed proposal has not been taken up earnestly by other scholars, much more policy-makers and teachers, except for Tan & Tan (2008) which nevertheless did not refer to the Fong, Lim & Wee article.

Indeed, a good amount of work has appeared since then to provide further evidence of the rule-governed and sociolinguistically legitimate nature of Singlish. (Tan & Tan 2008; Rubdy 2007; Alsagoff 2010) In fact, Alsagoff (2016) now alerts us to specific English language usages of young children in schools (for example, grammatical errors in writing) which cannot simply be explained – and solved – by going back to the ‘correct’ grammar of the so-called standard English. According to her, an efficient and effective way to improve pupils’ writing is to gain a deeper understanding of the contextualized nature of the pupils’ errors, and a huge part of it is, first, to understand how they have been taught grammar in the first place and, second, to develop an awareness of traceable structural influences of Singlish and other mother tongues on their writing. These insights provide more theoretical and practical justification for explorations of the role of non-standard English language use in the classroom.

Why additive bidialectalism?

This paper explores the concept of *additive bidialectalism* in the context of classrooms which aim to teach standard English. It argues that promoting it in dialectally diverse English language classrooms such as in Singapore can help address the ‘problem’ of non-standard language use in these contexts and, at the same time, facilitate the teaching of standard English. The paper draws on the extensive literature on the use of non-standard Englishes in English classrooms and situates the pedagogical, political and cultural viability of the concept within the educational and social landscape of Singapore. The paper further argues that learning standard English should not displace, but rather enhance and expand, the linguistic repertoire of students, especially those

who enter the English language classroom with greater competence in localized but largely stigmatized English language varieties. Consequently, in these specific classroom contexts where devalued but structurally stabilized varieties are used, standard English should be reconceptualized either as (1) an additional dialect or variety that needs to be taught and learned, or as (2) an inextricable part of classroom discourse that encompasses standard and non-standard use. It should not be viewed as one that is taught and learned through reductive pedagogies which devalue, stigmatize and aim to eliminate non-standard language use in the classroom.

While research has strongly supported these statements, classroom practices and ideologies have largely ignored these pedagogically sound perspectives on the teaching of standard English. SCE or *Singlish* is pervasive across all sectors of society and serves as the inter-ethnic lingua franca among culturally diverse Singaporean speakers. It is also hailed as a marker of a *truly* Singaporean identity. (Tan & Tan 2008) However, it is shunned in the classroom because it supposedly interferes with the learning of standard English. This is the “Singlish problem” (Wee 2004, 56) in Singapore education which has been hotly debated for more than three decades now. (Bockhorst-Heng 2005; Tan & Tan 2008)

Positive construals of the use of non-standard English language varieties in the classroom have been put forward in the literature and in public debates since the 1960s. (Labov 1969; Piestrup 1973; Zimet 1978; Sato 1989; Siegel 1999; Taylor 1989; Adger 1997; Fogel & Ehri 2000; Holley 2001; Wheeler 2006, 2016; Malcolm 2007) As a consequence, non-standard language-affirming pedagogies have become controversial topics in popular media, perhaps the most celebrated of which is the case of the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as a resource for teaching standard English to speakers of AAVE. (Wheeler 2016; Rickford 1999) However, while used by some scholars in the past, especially those who work with speakers of minority English language dialects in the United States and Australia, additive bidialectalism remains a marginalized perspective on the teaching of English around the world. Sato (1989), in a provocative article entitled, ‘A nonstandard approach to Standard English’, introduces the concept of additive bidialectalism as the aim of English language teaching for “speakers of minority varieties of English” (p. 260) in the United States. Nevertheless, Sato’s work, while theoretically illuminating, is context-sensitive; unlike AAVE, for example, Singlish is “spoken by a *majority* of Singaporeans on an everyday basis” (Ansaldo 2009, 138, italics supplied), many of whom are also able to switch between it and SSE. Therefore, it is thus an entire nation of different ethnic affiliations that speaks Singlish and grapples with the ‘Singlish problem’. Moreover, Sato’s work, like other studies (Labov 1969; Malcolm 2007; Siegel 1999), conceptualizes standard English in the classroom mainly as an additional variety; in Singapore, it really depends on specific classroom contexts. There are classrooms where both teachers and students are competent speakers of standard English (Pakir 1991), but what they do with it is to mix it up with non-standard use with the result that classroom discourse is a dynamic fusion of standard and non-standard use. (Alsagoff 2010; Rubdy 2007; Tan & Tan 2008) In these contexts, standard English is not an additional variety to be learned, but both students and teachers may not yet espouse additive linguistic attitudes.

Additionally, additive bidialectalism has not taken root in the teaching of standard English among speakers of non-standard English varieties. “So much research”, according to Wheeler (2016, 367), yet “so little change.” According to Nieto (2010), “most educators today believe in additive bidialectalism” (41), a rather overly optimistic view given that she is referring mainly to the teaching of Standard Spanish as a second dialect in the United States, and not to the teaching of standard or prestige varieties of English. There have been recent attempts to

introduce English linguistic variation into curricula (Crystal 2006), but this is different from classroom practice. By and large past and current practices of teaching English around the world are still dismissive of the role of non-standard varieties in the classroom, in fact blaming them for the underperformance of pupils and students. (Labov 1969; Siegel 1999; Farrel & Tan 2007) Thus, there continues to be a need to explore the usefulness of additive bidialectalism as a core concept in the activist politics of non-standard English language use in the classroom, especially in postcolonial contexts such as Singapore which have not been the target contexts of earlier work on additive bilingualism.

Defining the pedagogy of additive bidialectalism

In the pedagogy of additive bidialectalism, the learning of standard English (or the school-preferred variety), remains **the main aim of English language teaching** but it must not be done at the expense of structurally stable non-standard varieties like Singlish, for example through pedagogies which attempt to eliminate them from the classroom, or ascribe them extremely negative values and attitudes which then perpetuate condescension towards them and those who have difficulty switching between them and the more standard form of English. William Labov (1969) almost five decades ago already declared that the “the fundamental role of the school is to teach the reading and writing of standard English.” (1) However, there is no need for students to sacrifice their “identity-related” (Malcolm, 2007, 60) variety of English in order to succeed in school.

In Singapore, the use of a language other than English is largely not possible in English language classrooms because local classrooms are typically a mix of students who speak Mandarin Chinese, Malay, Tamil, and a host of other Asian languages. The common language is English but, as will be discussed in more detail in another section below, this English splinters into two kinds, CSE and SSE and, in the context of the classroom, generates a discourse that implicates standard and non-standard use. Although Singlish is generally reviled inside and outside the classroom, it enjoys covert prestige. Singaporeans across all social strata use it to talk to one another informally, many of whom actually switch between it and the more standard variety depending on the context of use. (Pakir 1991; Tan & Tan 2008) However, depending on pupils’ family, early school and socioeconomic backgrounds, some classrooms may have pupils who are more comfortable in Singlish and are, in fact, not yet capable of making competent switches between the two varieties.

In Singapore classrooms, thus, we see a range of different but interdependent dimensions in the pedagogy of additive bidialectalism. One dimension of this pedagogy is *attitudinal change* – this is important because while it is unlikely that pupils will abandon Singlish, their negative attitudes could affect their linguistic confidence in the form of ownership of English. Some of them, in fact, refuse to admit that they speak Singlish even if they do. (Tan & Tan 2008, 472) Another dimension is *facilitative learning* – this is important because this could help in convincing skeptics about the positive contributions of Singlish to the learning of standard English. The third dimension is *cultural affirmation* – this is also important because it helps in the forging of a national identity for Singaporeans, with the Singlish speakers themselves “keen to negotiate a space for Singlish.” (Wee 2005, 52)

These three dimensions of the pedagogy of additive bidialectalism should be viewed as mutually constitutive. They require strategic practices and materials which do not lose sight of the fact that the explicit aim of the teaching of English is for students to learn standard English

(Labov 1969; Sato 1989; Fong, Lim & Wee 2002). Their deployment in fact ensures better learning while affirming of culture and identity. It is for this reason that additive bilingualism is offered as a viable solution to addressing the ‘Singlish problem’ since it consolidates and reconciles all competing claims about Singlish: it allays fears of those who think that Singlish interferes in the learning of standard English; it demolishes deep-rooted misconceptions about it as corrupted, ungrammatical and uneducated; and it also reassures those who feel strongly about Singlish as a legitimate mode of national identification. In short, additive bidialectalism reconciles the need to learn standard English with the need to uphold the linguistic and cultural integrity of the identities and values that accrue to Singlish. These views about Singlish have been described as contradictions, tensions or anxieties reflected in attitudes and practices of teachers (Farrel & Tan 2007; Tan & Tan 2008), or Singaporean speakers in general (Fong, Lim & Wee 2002), but additive bidialectalism aims to transcend these ‘opposing’ views and argue that they should, in fact, be seen as complementary.

Locating additive bilingualism in Singapore

Singapore is uniquely positioned to take on (and possibly embrace) additive bidialectalism in English language classrooms because its sociopolitical and sociolinguistic trajectories hugely depart from those of similar postcolonial English language contexts such as Malaysia, the Philippines and Hong Kong. Singlish is deeply embedded in the everyday lives of Singaporeans to a point where it actually functions as the language of inter-ethnic communication (Vaish & Roslan 2011) being “used in the home, on the streets, in the playground and in school.” (Ansaldò 2009, 138) It has fully developed as a local variety such that it does not only have an extensive localized lexicon but, more importantly, it has an internal grammatical system which can be (and, in fact, has been) described formally. (Bao 2003; Fong, Lim & Wee 2002) In fact, its uniqueness “is easily detected in *all* those aspects of its usage that distinguish different languages, or different dialects, from one another: pronunciation (or sound system), words in usage (or vocabulary), and ways in which sentences are constructed (grammar).” (Ansaldò 2009, 138, italics supplied)

One cannot say the same thing about most of the other postcolonial Englishes whose use remains limited to more formal contexts, with the streets reserved for local languages with a smattering of English. Colloquial or informal forms of English are heavily interspersed with codeswitches to local languages, and are then labelled ‘uneducated’ (Parakrama 1995), a situation in Singapore which was perhaps true in the 1960s and 1970s “when English was only spoken by highly educated individuals.” (Fong, Lim & Wee 2002, 26) Among the more formally educated local speakers, one hears codeswitching between the local languages and English. In other words, in these contexts there is no distinctly informal indigenized English from which to shift to another *local*, albeit more formal and standard, English variety in everyday communication. In this specific sense, competent locally-generated bidialectalism in English typically does not exist. In Singapore, on the other hand, there are clearly “two different linguistic norms” (Alsagoff 2016, 115), even if “fluidity and movement” between the two is now “the rule.” (Alsagoff 2007, 38) There are questions about the nature of Singlish as a dialect, for example with Wee (2010) arguing that it is actually a social language that does not have an extensive lexicogrammatical system and a long sociolinguistic history (109), and Wee (2008) also asserting that English linguistic variation in Singapore as “in actuality a continuum.” (259) Nevertheless, what is clear is that there are traceable pronunciation, lexical and grammatical

features which can be attributed to its indigenized nature, leading Ansaldo (2009) to argue that as the colloquial local variety, “Singlish, as an Asian English variety, is more an Asian variety with English influences than a variety of English.” (145) Such traceable features can constitute the explicit knowledge base of teachers (Schaetzel, Lim, & Low 2010), especially those in classrooms where pupils use Singlish (Alsagoff 2016; Tan 2005; Rubdy 2007), which they can deploy to raise language awareness and improve English language learning.

Contextualizing additive bidialectalism: Politics of English language use in Singapore

This section now aims to provide a deeper contextualization of additive bidialectalism through a discussion of the politics of English language use in Singapore, focusing on the rise of English as a dominant language and the different perspectives on Singlish resulting from a range of linguistic, cultural and economic concerns.

From an English-knowing to English-dominant nation

Singapore is an “English-dominant” (Author) multilingual nation. Before it became independent from British colonial rule in 1956, the English language was available only to “the privileged local population who worked for the colonial administration and whose children had access to the limited opportunities of learning the language.” (Chua 2003, 71) However, massive social and educational transformation has led to English being the dominant language in the country. From the 1960s, it has been deployed (as part of language management and nation-building strategies) as the language of inter-ethnic communication, serving as the ‘neutral’ language of a highly ethnically diverse nation. Thus, alongside the three ‘mother tongues’ -- namely, Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tamil --- English has also been designated as an official language.

From the late 1960s to the 1970s, because of the need to industrialize the nation and train its workforce to be competitive in the job market, English took on broader societal roles which, in turn, convinced many parents to send their children to English-medium schools (Author). Enrolment in Chinese-, Malay- and Tamil-medium schools dramatically decreased such that by 1983, the sociopolitical conditions were ripe for the educational system to embrace English as the primary medium of instruction. Thus, the bilingual policy of 1987 was precisely implemented for this purpose, but with a strong mother tongue education component which required pupils to study one of the three official mother tongues as a separate subject. During this period of the consolidation of the symbolic and material power of English, Singapore became an “English-knowing” multilingual country (Pakir 1992), with the local languages, especially the official mother tongues, still widely entrenched in the linguistic repertoire of individual speakers. This English-knowing situation would soon become English-dominant when the language saw itself being legitimized as the most important language of education.

English as the most dominant home language

The purpose of the bilingual policy has been to produce Singaporeans who are bilingual in English and a mother tongue. However, official statistics on home language use since 1980 have shown that English is increasingly displacing the traditional languages of the home. Although detected to be slower in Malay Singaporean households, this language shift from local

languages to English is true of all ethnic groups. From 11.6% in 1980, 18.8% in 1990, 23% in 2000, and 32.3% in 2010 (Tan 2014, 320), English is now the most frequently used language at home for 36.9% of Singaporeans. (Lee 2016) The figures are starker among Primary 1 students of Singapore. By 2005 Tamil “ceased to be a dominant home language for Tamils” with 55% of P1 Tamil Language pupils coming from English-dominant homes (Tamil Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee 2005, 2). Among Chinese Language P1 pupils, 17% spoke English predominantly at home in 1985 (Wee 2010, 105), but this increased to 34% in 1994 (just a few years after the language became the primary medium of instruction in 1987), and jumped further to 50% in 2004 (Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee 2005, ii).

What all these findings imply is that English has not only “penetrated almost all aspects of life for the everyday Singaporean” (Tan 2010, 337) and thus has undergone structural and functional indigenization, but it has also become the first language of a huge number of speakers. Tan (2010) goes further in arguing that English in Singapore has become a mother tongue, especially among the younger generation, based on “the extent to which English is used across different domains and Singaporeans’ identification with English; and these are not data that the census would have been able to provide.” (337)

Singlish as the language of interethnic communication and cultural expression

The changing theoretical lenses used by scholars to account for the nature of English language use in Singapore can inform our understanding of the sociolinguistic transformations that have served to embed the emergence and growth of Singlish. (Alsagoff 2010) In the 1970s when English use was not yet pervasive, Singlish was characterized as a basilectal variety of English, meaning that its use was associated with lack of education and socioeconomic disadvantage. (Platt 1979; Platt & Weber 1980) In fact, the use of standard English was associated only with speakers who went to English-medium schools. (Tongue 1974) This is understandable since the local languages, especially Bazaar Malay and Hokkien, then still served as the main languages of communication among Singaporeans of different ethnic backgrounds. At the time, one had access to English through formal education, a privileged, English-educated family background, or through passive learning and limited use of it in informal contexts. (Tongue 1974) Kuo (1977), for example, found positive correlation between English proficiency and use of the language at home with education, prestige and social mobility.

As the English language became more culturally entrenched, however, especially in the 1980s and the 1990s when the language became accessible to most Singaporeans through formal education, and when the bilingual policy began to alter Singaporean speech (now dominant in English and one state-designated mother tongue), English in Singapore would increasingly be characterized as an indigenized language, developing its local norms and espousing local cultures and identities. (Pakir 1991, 1992; Tay & Gupta 1983) For the past decade or so, with the undeniable pervasiveness and dominance of English in Singapore as the country continues to pursue global competitiveness and global citizenship in the context of a knowledge economy as desirable economic and social aims, it is no longer correct to characterize Singlish simply as the language of the uneducated precisely because it is now spoken by practically everyone. (Fong, Lim & Wee 2002; Ansaldo 2009) Alsagoff (2010), in fact, has begun to describe Singlish and SSE as representing different cultural orientations in Singaporean speakers’ speech. That is, when Singaporeans switch between the two varieties, they actually signal different orientations

as well, for example the use of Singlish indexes local identities, and the use of SSE orients their speech towards global identities and cosmopolitan preferences.

Thus, Singapore has reached a sociolinguistic situation where an indigenized local variety of English is serving the inter-ethnic communication needs of the population (Vaish & Roslan 2011), while a more standard form, which is comprehensible internationally, serves the same population in more formal contexts. Singaporeans who are bidialectally competent in these two local varieties know when to use them – and why (Tan & Tan 2008) – but because Singlish is pervasive in the intimate, informal and mundane realities of everyday life, it serves “as a unique vehicle for intra- as well as inter-ethnic identification.” (Cavallaro & Ng 2009, 156) Ansaldo’s (2009) stand is even more compelling: “Today Singlish is the native language of a majority of young Singaporeans.” (139) And as Singaporeans speak both *local* varieties – SSE and Singlish – they are “the native speakers” of these varieties. (Fong, Lim & Wee 2002, 34)

Singlish as a structurally stable language

The rise of Singlish, however, has been one of the government’s worst nightmares. True, it has aimed to position English as the dominant language in the country, partly because of its alleged ethnic neutrality (thus linking different ethnic groups together through a common language that does not belong to one of the groups), and partly because of its role as the language of globalization and the global economy. However, what has not been part of the equation in the government’s otherwise highly efficient and effective management of linguistic and cultural diversity is the sociolinguistic fact that if a language is introduced into a community, it does not develop independently of the speakers’ and the community’s linguistic and cultural repertoire. Singapore being a multilingual country, English would naturally have developed through its interactions with local linguistic ecology, and this is exactly what has happened to the language. “Multilingual ecologies”, according to Ansaldo (2009, 136), “are by definition a natural locus of change, and multilingual speakers are natural innovators”. Singaporean speakers of English – speakers of Malay, Chinese and Indian languages and varieties, as well as other Asian languages – have certainly refashioned the language through the lenses and structures of their own languages and cultures.

Scholars continue to take varying positions regarding the autonomous status of Singlish as a language with a grammatical system of its own (Wee 2010; Ansaldo 2009, Bao 2003; Alsagoff & Ho 1998), but what is clear is that there is “a wide grammatical chasm between SCE and SSE” (Bao 2003, 25), but both of which, to emphasize again, are also both local varieties (Fong, Lim & Wee 2002, 33), and which then would have massive implications for the teaching and learning of English given that both varieties are dynamically deployed by both teachers and learners in the classroom. (Alsagoff 2010; Rubdy 2007; Pakir 1991)

Singlish as bad English

However, the emergence and rise of Singlish must not be mistakenly understood as an isolated sociolinguistic phenomenon. It *must* be appraised against the backdrop of Singapore’s staunch drive towards economic progress and global competitiveness. Singlish is viewed by many as an identity marker of being a ‘true’ Singaporean (Tan & Tan 2008), but in a hugely pragmatic society its history has been defined by systemic State-led denigration and devaluation. (Chng 2003; Rubdy 2007). Singlish has purportedly no place in the country’s aim to develop

global citizens, and with education serving as the means through which global citizenship is harnessed and achieved, Singlish too has no place in the education system. (Wee 2010) Social policy-making in Singapore has been avowedly pragmatist or utilitarian in nature, perpetually in search of global capital for the country's economic survival and progress. (Tan 2012) Singapore has invested hugely in the teaching and learning of English in order to produce a workforce that is English-speaking. English has been valued as desirable, valuable, forward-looking, cosmopolitan and modern. An English-speaking population signals to the world that Singapore is open for business, and that it is indeed an educated and culturally sophisticated population. More specifically, standard English (even if this is actually not a straightforward term, see Fong, Lim & Wee 2002) or 'proper' or 'good' English, represents Singapore's economic triumph on the world stage. Thus, "the economic rationalization for learning English overrides any relevance the language may have for issues of cultural identity or social cohesiveness." (27). The relevance of Singlish in national identity formation is "summarily brushed aside." (Tan & Tan 2008, 469)

Nevertheless, Singlish interrupts the standard English narrative of the Singapore state. Because Singlish is not 'correct' English according to this narrative, it represents what English is not. Framed within the state's pragmatist/utilitarian framework, the former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's National Day Speech in 1999 succinctly consolidates the state's view about Singlish: "We cannot be a first-world economy or go global with Singlish." (in Wee 2005, 57) Thus, since the 1970s at least, Singlish has been the subject of state-driven vilification with the hope that it would eventually be eradicated from every Singaporean's speech repertoire as it allegedly threatens Singapore's competitive edge in the world market. It has been called many names such as "corrupted", "broken", "ungrammatical" (Wee 2005, 58), a "handicap" (60), "bad" (Fong, Lim & Wee 2002, 19), "sub-standard", and "communicates social inferiority." (Tan, Swee, Lim, Detenber, & Alsagoff 2008, 80) Singlish, in other words, "is always understood to be non-standard, and carries with it the pejorative connotations that non-standardness implies" (Fong, Lim & Wee 2002, 19); it is "attached to whatever use of English that is the target of demonization." (24)

Is Singapore ready for additive bidialectalism?

What is clear from the preceding discussion is that, first, Singapore's linguistic ecology has transformed radically such that English is now the most dominant language and, second, there is a range of perspectives on English and Singlish which are embedded in this transformation and which thus need to be reconciled. Such perspectives are:

- English is the most dominant home language
- Singlish is the language of interethnic communication and cultural expression
- Singlish is a structurally stable language
- Singlish is bad English

What this paper has emphasized is that – in fact – these discourses are not irreconcilable. Critical and nuanced voices have come out quite strongly in the public sphere but they are "drowned by louder ones that call for eliminating the colloquial variety altogether." (Foo, Lim & Wee 2002, 26) According to Wee (2004), "Because non-standard varieties are generally devalued, attempts to extend the use of non-standard varieties into status domains (e.g. to use as

the medium of education or for official broadcasts) are unlikely. (54) Even among those who rally behind Singlish as a source of national identity, there is generally silence about its use in the classroom: “the possibilities of using the vernacular as a means for teaching the standard have rarely been raised in the Singlish debate.” (Bockhorst-Heng 2005, 200) It is just inconceivable to some to make that shift from identity-affirming Singlish in society to identity-affirming Singlish in learning standard English. The state’s discourse is overwhelmingly powerful in this case as it continues to use the “‘*interference*’ argument” to justify the conclusion that the stigmatized variety ought to be eliminated, because of the confusion and contamination it causes” (Wee 2010, 101, italics supplied). Singlish is ‘ours,’ yes, but it interferes with the learning of standard English which, in turn, could result in Singapore losing out in global economic competition.

Ironically, if something substantive has to be done at all to raise awareness of people’s understanding of the nature of language change, variation and diversity, “[t]he most obvious place to start is in the schools” (Fong, Lim & Wee 2002, 31) Thus, there needs to be a usable concept that addresses and consolidates the differing perspectives on Singlish. This could be *additive bidialectalism*. As mentioned earlier, for it to be a viable concept in Singapore, its three main pedagogical orientations must be highlighted; that is, it must be oriented towards attitudinal change, facilitative learning, and cultural affirmation. One cannot argue simply along the lines of Singlish as a measure of Singaporean identity without showing evidence that its use in the classroom facilitates the learning of standard English. On the other hand, one cannot argue simply along the lines of the facilitative potential of Singlish without changing fundamental attitudes towards the variety as ungrammatical or corrupted. It has been found that those who describe Singlish as ‘not broken’ are those who have favourable views of Singlish as legitimate or appropriate (Kang 1993). Let us make these points concrete.

The most common strategy – in fact, “the most effective way” (Wheeler 2006, 17) -- which supports additive bidialectalism, and one that has been shown to have positive results (Taylor 1989; Harris-Wright 1999; Rickford 2002; Wheeler 2006), is contrastive analysis which teachers can use to facilitate the learning of standard English. For example, the grammatical structure of Singlish is contrasted with the grammatical structure of SSE, but the assumption here is that both grammars are equally rule-governed, that is why it is inappropriate to say that one is superior to the other. For example, Foo, Lim and Wee (2002) note that one grammatical aspect that is ripe for contrastive work in Singapore classrooms is tense marking, which is actually optional in SCE and thus poses a problem among pupils, especially those with emerging competencies in the standard. There is a need to give examples of optionality in tense marking, and then contrast these with examples of similar sentences in SSE where tense marking is obligatory. The important point to remember here is that SSE and CSE are “described in their own terms” (29).

The theoretical tenet that undergirds contrastive work in the classroom is: “knowledge of the underlying structure of the non-standard vernacular will allow the most efficient teaching.” (Labov 1969, 7-8) Contrastive analysis begins from a position of strength (Rickford 2002), thus making Singlish a “source of strength” (36) in the learning of standard English. This, in turn, enhances pupils’ “self-identity and motivation”, as well as increasing their chances of becoming competent users of SSE. We can see here that knowledge of the grammatical structure of Singlish is a cultural resource in the classroom. This means strategic and judicious -- not pervasive and unrestrictive -- use of Singlish in the classroom; it is constructive, not destructive. The key dimensions of additive bidialectalism are addressed with even such a simple contrastive exercise: it is simultaneously oriented towards changing attitudes towards Singlish, facilitating

the learning of standard English, and affirming the cultural identity of pupils as Singaporean users of English.

Alsagoff (2016) recently has opened more ground for the need for a pedagogy of additive bidialectalism. From identifying differences in grammatical structures between SSE and SCE and then using them for teaching, Alsagoff instead begins with a description of pupils' writing, with the aim of identifying their most common error patterns through a locally-generated coding system which teachers themselves can use with ease. Some of these are in the areas of verb errors, punctuation and clause structure, and spelling errors. The key challenge now, according to Alsagoff, is how to interpret the error patterns because by simply resorting to the rules of standard English, one glosses over hugely important factors such as how the pupils were taught grammar in the first place (the local culture of learning), and how undergirding these describable patterns are grammatical structures traceable back to the pupils' use of Singlish and other mother tongues (influences of the local linguistic ecology). Alsagoff alerts us to the possibility that this kind of approach to understanding learner language use is prone to many ideological pitfalls, foremost of which is the privileging of native speaker norms against which pupils' writing is directly measured. However, this can be mitigated by deploying a comparative approach that is "mediated by local norms" (116), such as by using a locally produced reference grammar text which focuses on aspects of grammar that have been found to be relevant in the teaching of English in Singapore.

For example, drawn from a learner corpus of primary level writing of narratives, verb errors have been found to be structurally patterned; that is, "the students are using tense in a systematic manner, although one that departs from what is expected in standard English." (119) Constant superficial correction of these errors would not help as the pupils are operating within an underlying grammatical structure which is influenced by Singlish and other major vernacular languages of Singapore. These languages do not have morphological tense markers for verbs, which could then help explain the difficulty of some pupils to use the correct tenses of the verbs. Another frequent error pattern is in the area of spelling. Aside from the expected problems to do with the inconsistent spelling forms of English, there are also spelling errors which can be traced back to pronunciation patterns in localized English speech, for example the conflation of closely related phonemes and the reduction of consonant clusters. The point here, according to Alsagoff, is that spelling errors cannot be solved through more drills in spelling, such as the current practice in schools of giving pupils a list of words to bring home and memorize and be tested on them a week after. There is a subtle but highly critical relationship between spelling and pronunciation (or oral language for that matter) which is embedded in the local linguistic ecology of Singapore pupils.

Over-all, there is thus a need for pupils to "explore internalised rules and be given opportunities to compare these with the rules of standard English in self-discovery learning exercises." (119) This does not only assume competence of teachers in standard English, but also deep knowledge of structural patterns of vernacular language use. The key pedagogical dimensions of additive bidialectalism here are once again simultaneously addressed: when teachers begin to see the pedagogical usefulness of knowledge of Singlish structure, and start "to explain grammatical variations, not to blindly condemn them" (Crystal 2006, 142-3), they can then also begin to change classroom attitudes towards it while scaffolding students' learning of standard English. A basic pedagogical principle at work here is: "teachers need to begin where students are" (Sato 1989, 276), affirming who they are and what they bring into the classroom, but something that is usually lost in rhetorically-intensive debates on Singlish.

Conclusion

These examples all point to one deceptively simple yet possibly ironic view: that knowledge and strategic use of Singlish help improve learners' competence in standard English. The official stance towards Singlish is that it 'interferes' in the learning of the standard, but assuming that the interference argument is correct, does it not follow that to eliminate it from pupils' English language use – from their writing, for example – there is even greater need to study that which 'interferes'? Does it not follow that Singlish should be treated as an ally, rather than the enemy, in the schools' quest for 'better' English? Why should Singlish – a symbol of national identity and a vehicle for Singaporean cultural expression – simultaneously be viewed as an example of what is not good for Singapore? Of course, in a sociolinguistic sense, eliminating Singlish is not possible. It is a natural by-product of an English-dominant local language ecology which is deeply multilingual. Wherever languages and dialects interact, there is bound to be mutual linguistic influence. Singlish, in other words, is a product of language contact, and all pedagogical solutions must acknowledge, rather than deny, this basic sociolinguistic principle.

Additive bidialectalism, however, is not without ideological issues. While it does aim to reconcile various discourses on standard and non-standard Englishes, it could be viewed as complicit, although in more subtle ways, with dominant societal ideologies. It perpetuates society's reverence for standard English and does not confront the values and meanings which the state and the people attach to this standard. This is the "ethical injustice" to which Wheeler (2006, 29) refers as she embarks on a life-long advocacy for the acceptance of AAVE in some American classrooms. Such a compromise, according to her, is justified on grounds that she is pursuing two main goals of social justice in education: to help teachers treat students as smart and creative human beings (regardless of the languages and dialects they speak), and create a classroom environment where students feel safe and confident about themselves. For Wheeler, aligning herself with standard English increases the chances of her achieving these goals as the schoolhouse will remain open to her to promote "a linguistic viewpoint" (29).

In Singapore, the main aim is to introduce the concept of additive bidialectalism – the same 'linguistic viewpoint' – but as mentioned earlier, the context is different. While standard English is highly desirable, competent English speakers in Singapore are, in fact, typically bidialectal in both the standard and Singlish. In other words, it is not Singlish per se which is the problem; rather it is the inability of some speakers to switch between these two local varieties. Therefore, an explicit mention of standard English as the main aim of additive bidialectalism is a way to assuage fears of linguistic contamination and corruption, and thus a way to keep us "welcomed in the schools" (Wheeler 2006, 29) while working towards bidialectalism.

However, there still remains the question of complicity with the values and ideologies associated with standard English. The strategy of additive bidialectalism should not be an adversarial approach, but rather it should be silent work in the classroom with the hope that, in the end, teachers and students discover on their own values and ideologies which are unnecessary and destructive. Wheeler (2006) recalls that without explicit mention of honoring home languages and dialects (because this threatens or angers some educators), teachers nevertheless have come back to her and say, "Your work is so respectful of the students and their culture" (27). If it remains focused on developing specific classroom strategies that simultaneously work towards attitudinal change, facilitative learning, and cultural affirmation, Singapore may just give additive bidialectalism a try. The country is a highly progressive

English-dominant multilingual nation, well-known not only for its stellar economic performance, but also for its peace and order and educational system. There is no reason for “linguistic self-flagellation” (Wee 2008, 265) to continue.

Word count: 7672

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