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Mapping out Unequal Englishes in English-medium Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The link between globalization and the spread of English is well established in the literature, resulting in the emergence and burgeoning of studies on the pluralization and localization of English. However, Englishes are also valued unequally and, thus, impact the lives and identities of their speakers differently as well. "It is a pity," lament Pennycook, Kubota and Morgan (2017), "that so much work has focused on putative varieties of English from a world Englishes perspective, when what we really need to address are the questions of unequal Englishes" (p. xiv). This paper aims to discuss the politics of Unequal Englishes by mapping out the specific ways inequalities of Englishes are realized in classrooms in Singapore. This requires mapping out accurately both the dynamics of locally-produced but globally-shaped teaching of English, as well as concrete instantiations of culturally responsive pedagogies which aim to make learning and teaching more nondiscriminatory and equitable.

Authors' Bio

Ruanni Tupas is editor of *Unequal Englishes: The Politics of Englishes Today* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), and co-editor of *Why English? Confronting the Hydra* (with Bunce, Phillipson, and Rapatahana, 2016, Multilingual Matters) and *Language Education and Nation-Building: Assimilation and Shift in Southeast Asia* (with Sercombe, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

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Introduction

The link between globalization and the spread of English is well-established in the literature, resulting in the emergence and burgeoning of studies on the pluralization and localization of English (Kachru, 1990; McKay, 2002; Seidlhofer, 2001). The main argument in this body of work is that "English doesn't exist but *Englishes* do" (Reagan, 2004, p. 56; see also Mahboob, 2014). Substantive evidence that supports the heterogeneous nature of English in the world today has been put forward in terms of differences in structure (e.g., phonology and syntax), meaning and lexicon, pragmatic use, rhetoric, and even cultural viewpoints (Kachru, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Jenkins, 2000; Sharifian, 2006). Yet despite academic acknowledgment of the plurality of English, it is also clear that these Englishes are valued unequally and, thus, impact the lives and identities of their speakers differently. "It is a pity," lament Pennycook, Kubota and Morgan (2017), "that so much work has focused on putative varieties of English from a world Englishes perspective, when what we really need to address are the questions of unequal Englishes" (p. xiv, see also Kubota, 2015; Buripakdi, 2012; Mahboob, 2010; Parakrama, 1995; Kubota & Lin, 2006).

      The inequality of Englishes has a deep history entwined with the twin processes of colonization and globalization, and enshrined in institutions like schools that through their practices reinforce the inequities among these varieties as well as their speakers. As such, language and literacy education are fundamentally implicated in how unequal Englishes are created and maintained; a process that is both complex and wrought with tensions. Some of the mechanisms enabling the continued stratification of Englishes in education are systemic: For instance, curricula tend to prioritize prestige varieties at the often-complete exclusion of others; and most (pedagogical) grammars are built upon a single variety – that of the written, formal English of international news media (Mahboob, 2014). At the same time, teachers play a crucial role in mediating ideologies through their beliefs about language use and enactments of curricula, which can often be at odds. For instance, while many educators increasingly acknowledge the validity of different Englishes and emphasize intelligibility over native-like pronunciation, they often have negative views about the instructional value of emerging varieties of English and prefer standard native varieties in their pedagogic practice (Tajeddin, Atai, & Pashmforoosh, 2020). Along with Pennycook, Kubota and Morgan (2017), we contend that there remains a strong need to investigate how teachers navigate the ideologically charged terrain of plural Englishes in their classroom practice.

      This paper responds to the call for critical investigations of Unequal Englishes through an analysis of how Englishes were positioned differently in the everyday conduct of English language lessons in Singapore. Much of the linguistic unease in Singapore has revolved around the use of Singlish – the local vernacular variety of English – which is discouraged in institutional communication, especially in schools. There is extensive research on the dynamics and politics of English language use in Singapore vis-à-vis the status of Singlish, standard English and other linguistic varieties (Alsagoff, 2010; Chng, 2003; Wee, 2018; Bockhorst-Heng, 2005; Chua, 2015). Yet there is limited empirical research that examines how the 'Singlish problem' (Wee, 2018) shapes teachers and students' ideologies and practices, and how teachers and students also mobilize and transform these ideologies and practices. This paper aims to examine precisely that: How the unequal status of Englishes helped structure interactions, relations and identities in English-medium classrooms, and how teachers and students mediated and transformed such forms of linguistic inequalities.

Unequal Englishes

The notion of *Unequal Englishes* refers to "the unequal ways and situations in which Englishes are arranged, configured, and contested" (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015, p. 3; see also Tupas, 2019; Tupas, 2015; Tupas & Salonga, 2016; Salonga, 2015). It aims to capture how the uneven spread and valuation of Englishes is dialectically tied up with all kinds of inequalities. While it also asserts the legitimacy of various Englishes – including people's right to use their own kind of English – its primary and central concern is to map out configurations of power, politics and ideology which are responsible for the making, reproduction *and* transformation of unequal Englishes. Such making, reproduction and transformation occurs within the political economic dynamics of the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991) of 'different' Englishes through which 'standard' Englishes function as linguistic capital. The manner by which such 'standard' Englishes take on legitimate forms of communication is accomplished through unequal changes between social actors who come into the market (which in itself is constructed by and embedded in overlapping structures and conditions of coloniality and capitalist globalization) with volumes of economic, cultural and social capital which are unequally valued.

Thus, *Unequal Englishes* is more than simply a descriptive term which alerts us to the existence of a hierarchy of Englishes and their speakers. *Unequal Englishes* is primarily a critical account of the uneven spread of English across the world (including places where the language is considered a 'foreign' language) due to the combined impact of globalization and colonization (Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Pennycook, 2002; Hsu, 2015), thus drawing attention to and documenting how unequal Englishes come about and impact people's lives (Park, 2015; Sabaté-Dalmau, 2018; Lee & Jenks, 2019; Dovchin et al., 2016; Pan, 2015; Ha, 2015). The theoretical lens it offers allows one to see enactments of inequalities in/through the use of English at the center of practices of communication between individual speakers, as well as within and across sub-national, national and transnational institutions or groups. As such, *Unequal Englishes* affords multiple analytic levels of empirical investigation, encompassing institutional, national or international policies, political and public discourse, communicative practices as well as intersections across these.

At the same time, conceptualizing Englishes vis-à-vis inequality should not be seen as a top-down or uniform narrative of domination. Undoubtedly, macro-level policies and discourses set powerful structures for the social distribution and resultant valuation of different Englishes. But like any dialectical approach, *Unequal Englishes* is interested in the tensions that arise in communicative encounters, understood as socially mediated contexts for agency (Ahearn, 2001). In other words, empirical study of unequal Englishes examines communication as part of social practices where inequality may be present in the interactional frames, physical setting, communicative repertoires and participant roles; or more fundamentally, in the differential access to these social practices. An important line of research into *Unequal Englishes* then aims to analyze these tensions at the intersection of structures of domination (including the deployment of particular ideologies) and agency (of participants) within the situational and broader social-institutional context of communicative encounters.

Unequal Englishes in Singapore

Singapore is a rich source for discussion of *Unequal Englishes* because of its history of sustained and vigorous engagement with the English language (Bokhorst-Heng, 2005). Its language policy

has always been enmeshed in its nation-building project (Hill & Lian, 1995; Bockhorst-Heng, 2005), ever since the country gained self-governance from the British colonizers in 1959 and when it became an independent nation in 1965. Singapore through its bilingual policies reconfigured Singaporean's multilingual repertoires in order to align it with its desire to be a highly industrialized and, later, a globally competitive nation. Whereas during the British colonial period English was only available to those who studied in English-medium schools, postcolonial Singapore made English accessible in school to all children regardless of ethnic and language groups. English was first offered as a second language option (regardless of medium of instruction), and with the consolidation of the national school system it became the primary language of instruction in 1987. The country's official ethnic languages (or 'mother tongues' – Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tamil) – became school subjects and taught as second languages (Dixon, 2005; Pakir, 1991).

While the official line constantly refers to equal bilingualism in English and a mother tongue as the desired outcome of the language-in-education policy, the country's "thorough fashioning of pragmatism" (Tan, 2012, p. 68) as the main ideology through which important decisions are made and legitimized, produced early on an 'English-knowing' (Pakir, 1991), and then in more recent years, an 'English-dominant' (Tupas, 2011) nation. Thus, English has consistently been the 'pragmatic' choice in Singapore – to get everyone talking to each other in one common language and to propel the economy forward -- while the 'mother tongues' are seen as vital for Singaporeans to be culturally rooted in their respective ethnic communities' histories, values and traditions. Consequently, the inter-ethnic uses of English have generated a ubiquitous colloquial use of Singapore English – referred to as Singlish – which has drawn extensively on Singaporeans' deeply multilingual and multicultural base. In fact, from the experience of many ordinary Singaporeans, Singlish (not standard English) has become the truly inter-ethnic language of communication (Vaish & Roslan, 2011; Chua, 2015).

Consequently, Singlish has punctured and threatened the official discourse of Singapore as a competent English language speaking nation. The government has nervously – but also ferociously – warned Singaporeans that without a high degree of proficiency in standard English among its labour force, the country would lose its competitive edge in the global market. According to the late founding Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew, Singlish is a *handicap* no one should wish upon Singaporeans (Bokhorst-Heng, 2005). Former Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (2000) framed it more clearly as a pragmatic imperative when he argued for the elimination of Singlish from individual Singaporeans' linguistic repertoire: "If we speak a corrupted form of English that is not understood by others, we will lose a key competitive advantage". Wee (2018) aptly captures the main essence of the negative and subtractive discourse associated with Singlish for the past two decades: "Singlish is a problem, a linguistic menace that needs to be eliminated" (p. x). Such a discourse is based on the assumption that Singlish interferes in the learning of 'proper' English. It also hinges on a deficit view of Singlish – that it is ungrammatical or that it does not have any grammar at all compared with standard English. Perhaps most importantly though, a nation of Singlish-speakers will be unintelligible to the rest of the world; making Singapore less competitive in the global market. The fear of Singlish, in other words, is the fear of losing out economically.

There has been vigorous resistance to this deficit framing, especially in the insistence of some that Singlish has a central space in everyday cultural life (Wee, 2014, 2018; Fong et al., 2002; Chua, 2015). However, the interference and the global competitiveness arguments have pretty much remained unscathed and continue to inform arguments that justify why one variety –

(Standard) English – is more preferable than the other (Singlish) (Kwek & Alsagoff, 2006; Tupas, 2018; Fong et al., 2002). Although the stance from the government towards Singlish as undesirable has become somewhat less adversarial in recent years, Wee (2018) nevertheless claims that "public discussions of the Singlish controversy have remained largely mired in these same issues for nearly two decades" (p. 46). According to him, "Each time Singlish is discussed in public, the same arguments tend to be thrown up and the same responses made…there is no evidence of a closer meeting of minds…" (p. x).

Unequal Englishes in English-medium Singapore classrooms

A substantial amount of research has explored the use of Singlish in the classroom, but the bulk of this work has focused on describing its pedagogical functions (Rubdy, 2007; Pakir, 1995), what standard English and Singlish mean in terms of Singaporeans' 'global' aspirations and 'local' identities (Alsagoff, 2010; Chua, 2015), attitudes of students and teachers towards its use in the classroom (Farrell & Tan, 2007; Tan & Tan, 2008; Xavier, 2017) and (to a much lesser extent) its impact on the learning of Standard English (Alsagoff, 2016; Rubdy, 2007). Much less explored is the issue of how Singlish and standard English as unequal Englishes surface in the everyday conduct of classrooms. Several relevant questions may be asked in this regard. First, against the backdrop of polarized/polarizing discourses surrounding Englishes in Singapore (Wee, 2018; de Costa, 2016), what are the roles of teachers and students in the legitimization and mobilization of unequal Englishes? How do the tensions noted in connection with the role of Singlish in Singaporean society surface within the English classroom? And finally, how do teachers and students confront or transform linguistic inequalities perpetuated through the teaching and learning of Standard English?

Such investigation is important for several reasons. Research in language attitudes, language and identities, and culturally-responsive pedagogies has demonstrated that positive and strategic construals of pupils' linguistic repertoires correlate with improved learning, enhanced self-beliefs and higher chances of success after school (Abidin et al., 2012; Godley et al., 2006; Sato, 1989; Fong et al., 2002; Siegel, 2008). Therefore, mapping out configurations of unequal Englishes in the classroom will provide us with opportunities to identify specific pedagogical spaces where teachers can intervene strategically in order to make their classrooms more equitable and nondiscriminatory. These pedagogical spaces – whether or not they are imbued with transformative ideologies and practices – are not at this point clear to many who believe that English language classrooms in Singapore should be off limits to Singlish (Farrell & Tan, 2007; Tupas, 2018), even among those who generally agree that it is an identity-affirming use of English. In other words, there is a gap of understanding between Singlish as a cultural and identity marker *and* Singlish as a pedagogical resource because of the dominance of the 'interference argument' in the language ideologies of Singaporeans, including teachers (Wee, 2010). *Additive* language pedagogies (Tupas, 2018; Siegel, 1999) -- which refer mainly to attitudes, practices and strategies which promote the learning of varieties (e.g., Standard English) and languages (e.g., English) *in addition to* what students already know and speak -- have been found to simultaneously promote attitudinal change, and facilitate learning and cultural affirmation in multilingual English language classrooms (see also Siegel, 2008, for 'pidgin' in the classroom; Mordaunt, 2011, for African-American English; Sato, 1989, for the use 'non-standard' English in the teaching of 'standard' English; Malcolm, 2007, for Aboriginal English in Australia; Preece, 2015, for bidialectal speakers in the UK). But unless we tease out the

specific configurations of unequal Englishes in the classroom, we may not be able to create fresh, innovative and nondiscriminatory ways to address the unequal Englishes in schools.

The study

The data used in this paper is drawn from a research project that aimed to explore how secondary school English teachers develop their students' cross-cultural communication skills through the teaching of writing. As such, the project was not about Singlish or the issue of *Unequal Englishes* at all, which is important to bear in mind. While the original research project (described further down) provided the data for the present study, in its design, it was not meant to address the politics of Englishes in Singapore. The impetus for this paper was borne out of emergent themes from the data analysis which saw some of the teachers, either in the course of their teaching, in interviews or in their use of materials, surface Singlish as a 'trigger' for potential cross-cultural facilitation in the classroom. Thus, the aim of this paper which is to find out how teachers and students instantiate *Unequal Englishes* in the classroom is not part of the broader aims of the larger research project described below.

      As mentioned, the research project, of which both authors were co-investigators, was a primarily observational study to understand whether and how Singapore language teachers taught cross-cultural awareness and skills as part of English education. Three mainstream government schools in Singapore participated in the project, with two teachers from each school teaching at the Secondary 2 level (13-14 year-olds), making it a total of six teachers whose writing classes were observed. Each of the teachers was observed for one Unit of Work which ranged from 3-10 lessons or 3-8 hours depending on the specific curricular plans of their respective schools, with each lesson covering 30 minutes to one hour teaching time. The teachers were not required to alter their lessons according to the research questions of the project, thus the assumption was that they planned for their Unit of Work as they would plan it every year.

      Aside from observations of classroom teaching (which were videotaped, with simultaneous audio recording of the teachers' voices through a clipped microphone), the teachers were also interviewed for about an hour before they began their Unit of Work in order to understand the decisions behind their choice of topic and materials. Short and unstructured interviews were also conducted after each observed lesson (10-20 minutes) in order to elicit teachers' reflections on the lesson they had just taught. Three school-based Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving the two teachers representing the school, and one final FGD involving all six teachers, were also conducted to elicit their views on cross-cultural communication, their choice of materials, as well their understanding of the Ministry of Education's emphasis on educating 'global' Singaporeans as stipulated in the national curriculum. The research also collected all materials used by the teachers, both the school-endorsed textbooks, as well as their own supplementary materials such as PowerPoint slides and class worksheets to identify *potential* content for the exploration of culture in class. All of the data were collected to gain a deeper understanding of how, if at all, cross-cultural skills are taught in secondary English language classrooms in Singapore.

      To reiterate, because the focus of the study was not on Singlish or the issue of *Unequal Englishes*, there was no mention of either in our explanations of the study to teachers, nor did anyone instruct the teachers to incorporate Singlish content in their facilitation of cross-cultural skills in the classroom. The surfacing of these issues in data generated from the project is thus spontaneous in the sense that it was not an outcome of the research or pedagogic design. The two

data excerpts in this paper were chosen as examples of how unequal Englishes, in the same social context shaped by similar ideological and structural conditions, are navigated differently by the teachers referred to below by their pseudonyms, Adeline and Anna. Therefore, the focus of the analysis will be on teasing out the different ways in which unequal Englishes surface in one teacher's views of her own use of Singlish in the classroom (Adeline) and another teacher's use of it as part of the day's lesson (Anna), highlighting the tensions, missed opportunities and spaces of transformation that emerge through teachers' differential engagement with unequal Englishes.

Unequal Englishes in action

Teacher Adeline and students mobilize Unequal Englishes

In this section, we tease out one particular configuration of *Unequal Englishes* in the classroom. This concerns one Secondary 2 teacher's appraisal of her own use of Singlish with students in school which acknowledges its usefulness but consequently also subverts this point by affirming students' demand for her to speak in Standard English. The excerpt below – which is the first of three post-observation interviews with the teacher -- also alerts us to how unequal Englishes are mobilized both by the teacher and her students as they perform their role as implementers of language policy (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Wang, 2008; Johnson & Freeman, 2010).

Excerpt 1

1	Adeline:	So they try [to speak in proper English]. But then in class I
2		sometimes fall into you notice Singlish because I hope- it's
3		wrong. But I think that's the only way sometimes to make
4		them feel that they are near me that that 'oh I'm with her now'.
5	Interview:	I agree.
6	Adeline:	because if I were to speak so formally all the time. I notice that
7		I'm away from them you know I'm standing on some pedestal
8		and they are looking at me.
9	Interviewer:	Yeah.
10	Adeline:	So sometimes I do that but, but most of them would say that's
11		Singlish, to attract your attention.
12	Interviewer:	So they are able to point out.
13	Adeline:	Ah! Sometimes some of them would say 'Cher [teacher] that's
14		Singlish you know'. I say 'yeah'.
15	Interviewer	That's right.
16	Adeline:	And, and, and I'm glad they do that because at least they they
17		realize that.

In the excerpt above, Teacher Adeline expresses her struggle with the use of Singlish in school. She encourages her students to speak in 'proper English' (line 1, this is the term she uses in other parts of the interview), but she admits that she also uses Singlish in class with her students. Her justification for using Singlish is consistent with what other researchers have found in Singapore classrooms (Farrell & Kun, 2007; Alsagoff, 2010; Rubdy, 2007) and elsewhere (Harrison, 2004; Siegel, 2008) where a 'non-standard' English is used to establish rapport with students, thus creating safe spaces for teaching and learning. However, despite her pedagogical argument for Singlish, Teacher Adeline is unable to reconcile it with her belief that such practice is 'wrong'. She relates approvingly her students' slight admonishment that she is speaking in Singlish (line 13-17) when, by implication, she should be using Standard English. That she is 'glad' that they do this is not unique to her experience. In fact, other teachers in Singapore also share the same classroom practice where they want their students to 'catch' (Farrell & Tan, 2007, p. 389) them speaking Singlish. As one teacher in Farrell and Tan's (2007, p. 389) study reveals in an interview, "I told them if they can spot my mistakes, I'll add points to their groups. If they can catch me saying a particular Singlish phrase, I'll give them points and if they catch someone else speaking in Singlish, they will also get some points".

What we see here is the co-enactment of unequal Englishes by Teacher Adeline and her students. They do not just espouse dominant language ideologies; more importantly, they enact and reproduce language policy from the level of classroom practice. That is, both teacher and students are actively participating in the reproduction of the dominant and official view of the 'Singlish problem' (Wee, 2018). At the same time, the excerpt also illuminates the ideological dilemma facing Teacher Adeline: she is unable to stop herself from speaking Singlish, leaving her with the only ideological recourse of labeling her own use of Singlish as 'wrong,' even if there is a clear pedagogical justification for its use. This tension arises from her lived experience as a Singlish speaker and a classroom teacher who values Singlish for its ability to facilitate students' learning, being challenged by official discourse and policy essentially prohibiting its use in the classroom. The consequent self-censoring and language-policing she encourages among her students negatively impact, by her own account, the social dynamics of teaching and learning. If we go by the contention that "Policies which discriminate against a local variety also, by implication, discriminate against the local speakers" (Fong et al., 2002, p. 34), then Teacher Adeline engages in self-discrimination, thus validating the socially devalued status of Singlish in her classroom.

"How many of you consider yourselves experts?": Anna confronts Unequal Englishes

In this section, we show how one teacher directly engages with local issues confronting *Unequal Englishes*. Locating her engagement with unequal Englishes within a lesson on discourse markers and essay writing, the teacher acknowledges – and legitimizes, albeit in a subtle way – her students' 'expertise' in Singlish, uses a sample essay about Singlish and Standard English which affirms the usefulness of the two in the context of Singapore, and introduces the idea of what in the literature is referred to as bidialectalism in English. In this particular example of directly dealing with the problem of *Unequal Englishes*, the teacher deploys an *additive* approach (Tupas, 2018) to the teaching of English in multilingual classrooms.

The excerpts also come from the first of a series of six sessions meant to teach expository essay writing, although the context is another Secondary 2 class in a different school. In this initial session, Teacher Anna introduces the notion of 'discourse markers' as important elements

in the writing of a coherent essay. The session begins with her introducing Singlish and asking students what particular Singlish words and terms mean in Standard English. She then asks the students to read an essay on Singlish and Standard English in Singapore, and puts them in groups so that they can identify the discourse markers used in the essay. The rest of the session is devoted to unpacking the essay in terms of its organization – Introduction, Body and Conclusion – and asking students to identify the main idea of each paragraph. The session is not meant to be a lesson on Singlish but on the basic elements of an essay, but Teacher Anna surfaces the content of the essay as and when there is an opportunity for her to do so. The first excerpt below is part of the lesson introduction where Teacher Anna asks students about meanings of some Singlish words and terms.

Excerpt 2

1	Anna:	Okay okay, now put aside your reading materials…Right.
2		Today's topic is something I'm sure you're very familiar with.
3		If I ask you if I ask you to close your eyes and stand anywhere
4		in the world, anywhere at all, how would you identify a
5		Singaporean?
6	Students:	*Inaudible chattering*
7	Anna:	So what is it that you're using?
8	Students:	Singlish.
9	Anna:	Singlish, right? It's not going to be heard anywhere else.
10		How many of you consider yourselves experts?
11	Students:	Experts. *Most students raise their hands.*
12	Anna:	Expert. Number 1 expert, yes number 1 expert. Very good.
		….….
		Next three minutes is spent unpacking the meaning of Singlish words and terms.
		….….
13	Anna:	Of course! Wow! You are sure experts yeah? Everything had a
14		very precise English translation? Good job!
15	Student 1:	I thought it's [inaudible]'?
16	Anna:	Okay, so some of you would love that if I say, "All Right,
17		Keep Calm and Speak Singlish." [flashes the meme on the
18		board] But is that really the case?
19	Student:	No!
20	Anna:	How about this?
		Teacher Anna flashes another meme on the board with the text "All Right, Keep Calm and Speak English".
21	Students:	Boo!
22	Anna:	How about a mix of two? Have you heard about that?
23	Students:	Can la, can la!
24	Anna:	Can la.
25	Students:	Can la, can la!
26	Anna:	What is *can la*?
27	Students:	Okay la.

28	Anna:	What is *okay la*.
29	Students:	All right.
30	Anna:	All right. Okay! Good! So let's look at this one. I want you to
31		take out your discourse markers. Do you know discourse
32		markers?

Pedagogically, the purpose of the introduction is to prepare the students for the essay which is on English language use in Singapore. However, as can be seen from the data, Teacher Anna does more than that by providing a space for students to talk about Singlish. In the excerpt above and in the rest of the session, Teacher Anna treats Singlish as an unmarked topic in class, neither explicitly devaluing it nor celebrating it as a resistive form of communication against Standard English. Instead, the opening exchange she facilitates is an *identity-affirming* (Tupas, 2018) classroom strategy that validates students linguistic identities in at least two ways. Firstly, her opening question (How would you identify a Singaporean?) and the ensuing exchange explicitly marks language, and very specifically, Singlish, as a marker of identity for Singaporeans. Second, she also positions students as language experts of this variety through a) getting them to translate between Singlish and standard English; b) explicit praise (*Wow! You are sure experts yeah?,* line 13) for their quick and accurate translations. In other words, in this episode Teacher Anna confronts the reality of unequal Englishes by providing a counter-discourse to the prevalent and deep-seated bias against Singlish, not simply by explicitly espousing her view on Singlish as 'good' or 'desirable', but by legitimizing students' expertise in the use of the colloquial local variety of English.

Consequently, notice how the students quickly frame their understanding of the Standard English/Singlish debate in Singapore by refusing to take an either/or position. They reject the use of Singlish (*No!*, line 19) *or* English (*Boo!*, line 21) as the phenomenon that best describes their English language repertoire in Singapore, and instead endorse the need for the two Englishes to operate simultaneously. Such endorsement comes in lines 23 and 25 with '*Can lah! Can lah!*' which Teacher Anna, instead of correcting them for using a Singlish expression, also reappropriates pedagogically by tapping into the students' 'expertise' again to surface the meaning of '*Can lah*' in English. Teacher Anna legitimizes bidialectalism in English in Singapore, and the students, who have been provided with a space to articulate a potential counter-discourse, confidently surface their bidialectal attitudes or dispositions.

The rest of the one-hour lesson is spent unpacking the formal features of an essay, emphasizing the importance of writing in Standard English, with Teacher Anna only occasionally bringing into the discussion the content of the essay. Towards the end, however, she reframes her lesson on the essay form again in terms that are associated with additive pedagogy. She makes sure that her students pick up the main message of the essay, and by doing so she attempts to transcend the dichotomous discourse on Englishes in Singapore – Standard English is good, Singlish is bad -- which perpetuates *Unequal Englishes*:

Excerpt 3

1	Anna:	So! Can I just ask, raising your hands, after you've read the
2		article, do you still, do you agree that we should speak
3		Standard English and nothing else?

4	Students:	No! Of course not!
5	Anna:	No? So? What should it be?
6	Students	Speak both!
7	Anna:	So we can speak Singlish and English?
8	Students:	Yes!
9	Student:	And mother tongue too!
10	Anna:	Mother tongue too. When?
11	Students	*Inaudible responses*
12	Student	When it's appropriate time.
13	Anna:	Thank you! At appropriate times. That's the, that's the
14		conclusion. Okay? Thank you very much. Now this is what
15		you do, write down your homework first.

In her first turn (lines 1-3), Teacher Anna explicitly invites students to disagree with the ideology of 'standard English only', which students readily take up with a choral '*No*' response. The teacher's contributions are interesting because through requesting confirmation and further clarification (line 5, line 7) she is prompting students to articulate the response, rather than her simply 'summing up' the lesson by reiterating these points. In essence, in this exchange (supported by the choice of the essay as class material) teacher and students co-articulate a critical stance against socially prevalent attitudes that devalue Singlish. What Teacher Anna has accomplished in this lesson is to undercut the harmful discourses embedded in unequal Englishes, affording students a space to retreat from the dominant view of Singlish as objectionable and to engage with a sociolinguistically informed position that better approximates their experiences in the everyday multilingual ecology of Singapore.

At the same time, there were opportunities in this exchange that were left unexplored. For example, the students' attempt to open up a discourse on multilingualism in the English language classroom beyond talk on varieties of English (*And mother tongue too!*) is not taken up – possibly as this short dialogue took place at the end of the lesson and there was no time for it. Indeed, in the debriefing conversation with one of the researchers (the second author) right after the lesson, Teacher Anna expressed regret that they ran out of time and that she could not focus more on the 'cultural aspects', as she put it. She was nevertheless pleased that at least students "got a sense that Singlish is part of their identity, and mother tongue too, so it's not exclusively Singlish" (Teacher Anna, Day 1 debrief). At the same time, during the interview, Teacher Anna also spoke about the students' mother tongue as a "challenge", stating that she had to "constantly remind them not to use mother tongue" when they chatted among themselves in class. Because the majority of the class were ethnically Malay, and Anna is Chinese Singaporean, she felt this was an "advantage" – she could use the intelligibility argument (i.e., that she did not understand what students were saying) rather than merely prohibiting the use of the language. This we argue is an example of a type of tactical maneuvering teachers like Anna devise in order to mitigate the tensions and constraining effects of monolingual language-in-education policies.

Teacher Anna also missed the opportunity to unpack the meaning of 'appropriate'. Throughout the lesson, she alerts the students to the need to contextualize the use of English, thus the differentiated use of Standard English and Singlish, but nowhere in the lesson does she describe or define what is meant by 'appropriate' contexts, even if she herself expertly navigates her use of the two Englishes in appropriate classroom moments. In fact, she opens the next day's English lesson with a continuation of this issue, reiterating the point about the use of different

Englishes in appropriate contexts. As such, Teacher Anna affirms the legitimacy of Singlish, mother tongue, and the identities of students as competent speakers. Yet despite advancing a sociolinguistically informed position, her actions leave the 'sociolinguistic order' (Alim, 2005) undiscussed and thus unchallenged: that linguistic varieties belong to different contexts, and standard English claims most contexts that are consequential for social status and mobility.

Discussion

Engagements with unequal Englishes are alive in secondary classrooms in Singapore, at least in classrooms which we have observed. Adeline is unable to reconcile her deficit and negative view of Singlish with her pedagogic use of Singlish in the classroom to build rapport with her students. This is not a straightforward denigration of non-standard English, however, as Adeline obviously struggles with her own use of it in the classroom, especially since she sees some value in it as a pedagogical tool. This is, thus, one clear enactment of language policy in the country, where teachers navigate tensions emerging from classroom practice where dominant language ideologies condition or shape teachers' everyday work. Anna, on the other hand, avoids devaluing Singlish in the classroom and deploys strategies that legitimize students' ability to use Singlish and thus affirm their multilingual identities, primarily through overtly addressing the language ideologies as part of classroom discussion. At the same time, there are tensions evident in Anna's practice and the beliefs that shape that practice. While she knows that for the majority of her students in the class, their ethnic mother tongue (Malay) is the preferred language, and while (as shown in Excerpt 3), she affirms the validity and place of mother tongues in Singaporeans' linguistic repertoire, she polices mother tongue use in her English lessons. In other words, while Teacher Anna is able to refute language ideologies (e.g., the deficit view of Singlish) in talk *about* those ideologies, her classroom language policy helps to confirm the 'rightful' places of non-standard, non-English varieties as not belonging in the (English) classroom.

Of course, this is not a surprise. The national curriculum explicitly mandates the teaching of "internationally acceptable English (standard English)" as the goal of English language education (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2008, p. 7). The predominant view discussed at the beginning of this article that sees any other variety as a source of interference rather than support in the teaching and learning of standard English therefore seems uncontested and holds strong sway in school education in Singapore. In this sense, both teachers in this study can be seen as enablers of state-sanctioned ideologies and practices. At the same time, as we have seen in the excerpts analyzed here, the two teachers also grapple with inequalities of English that manifest in their respective English language classrooms, and address those in different ways. Adeline subscribes to language attitudes which are subtractive in nature (Menken & Kleyn, 2010; Heugh, 1995) because it reinforces the prevalent and dominant approach to the teaching and learning of English – destroy Singlish and replace it with Standard English. Anna's pedagogical deployment of "difference as a value" (Macedo, 1998, p. xxiii) is, in fact, a response to English language diversity in the classroom which is in need of legitimization. Her additive engagement with Singlish acknowledges that Singlish does indeed require some re-valuing in the classroom.

The two teachers show awareness of inequalities of English in their classrooms, and recognize the tensions arising at the intersection of macro-level ideologies, lived experiences of multilingualism and the social microcosm and pedagogic needs of the classroom. But they also demonstrate how teachers can be agents of new or innovative pedagogies which promote the

learning of privileged varieties and languages while also rehabilitating the status of the other(ed) varieties and languages. In additive, compensatory pedagogies, *attitudinal change*, *facilitative learning* and *cultural affirmation* go hand-in-hand (Tupas, 2018). Even if Adeline—as a matter of argument—understands and accepts the role of Singlish as a cultural identifier and as an effective tool for learning, without change of attitudes which can partly be accomplished through a deeper appreciation of diversity as resource for learning (especially learning of the 'standard'), she will continue to be entangled with subtractive discourses and practices.

The lesson which can be learned from Anna is that additive pedagogies *are* possible even in relatively restrictive and centralized education systems such as that of Singapore (Weninger, 2019). However, exactly how they can be operationalized against the incapacitating power of standard language ideologies and practices is not clear. It has been found that even among teachers who have a sophisticated understanding of sociolinguistic issues in their respective communities of practice, it is crucially important that they are shown examples of how to work against subtractive pedagogies because linking theory to practice does not come easy among practitioners (Godley et al., 2006, p. 33). Contrastive analysis as a pedagogic strategy remains subtractive if teachers continue to imbue non-standard varieties and languages with negative and undesirable attributes. That is why Anna's contrastive work is more holistic and less discriminatory because it is framed within an understanding of Singlish and their speakers as no less valued than Standard English.

One important matter about *Unequal Englishes* as a lens through which the politics of English language teaching and learning in the classroom may be viewed is its emphasis on the complex entanglement of language, ideology and power in the classroom. It is complex because as we have hopefully shown throughout the analysis, teachers mobilize and mediate macro language ideologies, but also simultaneously aim to transform them, all within conditions of constriction and possibility. The question of the use of localized Englishes in English language classrooms in different contexts of the world has been a constant conversation in the field (Siegel, 2008; Alsagoff, 2010; Yoo, 2014; Ren, 2014). However, *Unequal Englishes* places questions of linguistic inequality and unequal distribution of power at the heart of English language learning and teaching. Thus, celebrating Englishes in the classroom or, denying them, is counter-productive as such perspectives do not do justice to the complexity of ideological dynamics and power relations in the classroom. Indeed, what have seen in this paper is the struggle of teachers to mobilize, mediate, and transform *Unequal Englishes*, setting up unique configurations of learning and teaching which must be unpacked for their local operationalization, while not losing sight of their imbrication in broader phenomena of politics and power such globalization and coloniality.

Conclusion

Along with the spread of English due to colonization and globalization came the diversification and localization of the English language, but while other scholars refer to their realizations in the classroom merely in terms of Englishes or "various forms of English" (Farrell & Tan, 2007, p. 382), we refer to them as unequal Englishes. The notion of *Unequal Englishes* alerts us to the centrality of inequalities of Englishes as people, political regimes and local and translocal institutions develop their respective strategic responses to the various demands of globalization. In this paper, we have hopefully shown how the English language classroom has become and continues to be a locus of the intricate dynamics of *Unequal Englishes.* Teachers and students

mediate the "effects of *unequal Englishes*" (Pennycook, 2017, p. ix, italics as original), but they do so in complex ways and not simply in terms of how they are subjected to or resist the political, economic, cultural and ideological configurations of the power of English. Our approach to the diversification and localization of English highlights the mechanisms and forms of linguistic inequality accomplished through the 'different' Englishes, yet if viewed through the lens of the classroom, we see how unequal Englishes are mobilized by teachers and students in ways not easily captured by macro-explanations of the dynamics of power, culture and politics in the use of English today. Classrooms and schools in Hong Kong (Lee & Jenks, 2019), Beijing (Henry, 2015), Kuala Lumpur (Ha, 2015), and Cuba (Martin & Morgan, 2015) activate ideologies and practices of *Unequal Englishes* but their heterogenous realizations reveal unique configurations of mediation in the classrooms, thus making classroom practice a practical yet also a complex space to interrogate and intervene in global and national discourses on language, bilingual education and multiculturalism.

In Singapore, the case is perhaps even more complicated, with top-down policy implementation as a core feature of political governance (Ortman & Thompson, 2016). Thus, when the government some time ago insisted that all English language teachers must undergo reeducation to learn Standard English and eradicate Singlish from their linguistic repertoire, this directive did not only suggest that there was very little space for negotiation (Kramer-Dahl, 2003), but it also helped affirm or perpetuate Standard English language ideologies in the country (Chua, 2015; Rose and Galloway, 2017). The Ministry of Education positioned the English teachers "guilty as charged" (Kramer-Dahl, 2003, p. 172). Although with a less (explicitly) militant stance against Singlish in recent years, it remains clear that this variety should have no place in the classroom (Chua, 2015; Tan, 2017).

Thus, we should locate *Unequal Englishes* within the mutilayered -- and conditioned -- discourses, identities and practices of individual English language teachers. In doing so, we can more clearly see where the gaps and opportunities are in order to make the training of teachers using critical tools and lenses more effective (see Martin & Morgan, 2015). Culturally responsive interventionist pedagogies are possible even within conditions of (perceived) impossibilities.

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