THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY OF SINGAPORE 2006

Norhaida Aman, Viniti Vaish, Wendy Bohkorst-Heng, Aisha Jamaludeen, Durgadevi P., Feng Ying Yi, Khoo Boon Suan, Mardiana Roslan, Pauline Appleyard and Tan Teck Kiang

The Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore 2006 (SSS 2006) is a survey of language use and users in Singapore to update the one last done in the 1970s by Kuo (1976). The main research question of SSS 2006 is: who speaks what language to whom in what context with what attitude with what level of fluency and to what end?

This project uses an ecologically balanced mix of research methods that include both the qualitative and the quantitative. Using Panel 6 of the CRPP Core Project as a data source, the project surveys 716 students from primary 5 using a bilingual survey instrument. Stratified intragroup, this project spans across all three ethnic groups—Malay, Indian and Chinese. In the qualitative phase follow-up studies were conducted with 12 participants who were selected randomly from the three ethnic groups and ranging from a broad spectrum of social classes. The visits resulted in 70 hours of audio/video recordings in total. Transcripts of these recordings were coded manually and by using NVIVO 7.

Our main findings are:

- The domain of religion retains the Mother Tongue the most followed by the domain of family and friends. English dominates in the domains of school, media and public space.
- For the Chinese and Malay ethnic groups there is a correlation between socio economic status (SES) and dominant home language. Middle class homes are English dominant and disadvantaged homes are mother tongue dominant.
- In terms of language attitudes majority of the children wished that they spoke their mother tongue better. The Chinese children had the less positive attitudes towards their mother tongue as compared with their Indian and Malay counterparts.
- Majority of students across the three ethnic groups thought that learning English will not alter their ethnic identity.
- Social class is not significantly correlated with language attitudes.
- In terms of language proficiency, the Malay students claimed the highest proficiency in their Mother Tongue. Chinese and Indian children reported higher levels of proficiency in English than in their Mother Tongues. The Indians had the highest proficiency in English and the Chinese the least.
- Across all social classes most Singaporean children speak Singlish and not Standard English.
- Most children are unaware of the differences between Singlish and Standard English.
Acknowledgements

This paper makes use of data from the research project "A Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore" (CRP 22/04 AL and CRP 23/04 AL), funded by the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, National Institute of Education, Singapore. The views expressed in this paper are the author’s and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centre or the Institute.

First and foremost, we offer our sincerest gratitude to Allan Luke, whose idea it was to do a Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore. Anne Pakir and Lionel Wee from the National University of Singapore also offered the team much advice and insight during the initial stages; Nancy Hornberger for her invaluable support and insights throughout the project; Rachel Saffman for her assistance and patience in guiding us with the use of Nvivo. Our heartfelt thanks for the hospitality and patience of the schools, teachers and parents who hosted us and tolerated our interminable presence. Last but not least, to the students of Singapore who made this study a reality.

About the authors

Norhaida Aman is a Lecturer with the English Language and Literature Academic Group at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Viniti Vaish is an Assistant Professor with the English Language and Literature Academic Group at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Aisha Jamaludeen, Mardiana Roslan and Tan Teck Kiang are research staff with the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Pauline Appleyard is a Project Manager with the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Contact us

For further information, please email: reports@nie.edu.sg