

Globalization and Multilingualism in Singapore: Implications for a Hybrid Identity.

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ABSTRACT

This essay is about language and unique forms of identity in Singapore resulting from globalization. Specifically it looks at language use amongst the Indians in Singapore in the domains of religion and public space. Identified as one of the most globalized nations in the world, Singapore is concerned about the erosion of mother tongue languages and the consequent demise of Asian Values. Through the preliminary findings of a large scale language survey and smaller scale follow up studies, this essay shows a heteroglossic use of languages and a concomitant hybrid identity which is the mark of being Singaporean. The essay also emphasizes that a unidimensional view of language and globalization, which only looks at globalization as a form of McDonaldization, is not in keeping with actual patterns of language use.

Key words: Singapore, globalization, hybridity, Bakhtin, identity, Asian Values, McDonaldization.

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Introduction

Singapore is one of the Asia Pacific countries that has gone from third world to first with an astounding speed of fifty years. This East Asian miracle is partly the result of the country's language policy perceived as one of the factors fuelling the inexorable engines of globalization. All four official languages, English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil are included in the language in education curriculum. The Bilingual Education policy, instituted in its current form in 1987, is that English is the medium of instruction, and all children learn their mother tongue, which is one of the other three official languages, as a 'second language'.

This paper reports the preliminary findings of a large scale survey and smaller scale follow up studies on patterns of multilingual language use in Singaporean homes. Because globalization causes the spread of English and loss of mother tongues, Singapore is concerned about language loss and the consequent endangerment of Asian values. My paper shows that, unlike what the Singaporean census emphasizes, there are hybrid patterns of language use that represent a pastiche of identities in the Indian ethnic group. Similarly there exist hybrid linguistic codes which are the mark of a pan Singaporean identity. This sociolinguistic situation is different from the ideology of the nation-state that languages are compartmentalized for their economic and symbolic value: English for economic purposes only and mother tongues for preserving Asian culture.

Methodology: A Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore

To explore these theoretical perspectives the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, Singapore, conducted a large scale language survey called A Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore linked to in-depth follow up studies (Vaish, Aman and Bokhorst-Heng, 2005, SingTeach). The main research question guiding the survey is: “Who speaks what language to whom in what context with what attitude and with what level of fluency?” The survey has a sample size of 1000 students from the Grade 4 cohort of Singaporean schools. This sample is stratified by race (Chinese, Malay and Indian) and socioeconomic status. The 4 levels of socioeconomic status are based on the census of Singapore. This survey takes about an hour to administer and is divided into five domains: school, family and friends, religion, public space and media. The survey also has sections on language attitudes and ideology and finally proficiency. On the basis of findings from this quantitative survey we conducted follow up studies with a smaller sample of students. The survey and follow up studies were administered bilingually by researchers from the community in the homes and lifeworlds of the Grade 4 child.

In this paper I present a detailed analysis of one case: of Dhruvam, a 10year old Indian boy. Dhruvam’s father is a security guard and his mother a cashier at the Shop and Save. The family is Hindu and the members speak both Tamil and English at home. The family lives in a three room public housing apartment. Dhruvam’s paternal grandmother lives in the next block as do his two uncles and he visits her daily. Dhruvam’s family is extremely religious. The store room has been converted to a prayer room with an alter and pictures of Hindu deities. In the living room too there is a picture of a Hindu deity. On top of the front door there is a ‘toran’ or string of dried mango leaves which wards off evil spirits.

In the follow up studies Dhruvam was observed for about two weeks in the five domains of the survey: family and friends, religion, media, public space, and school. The researcher tape recorded and videotaped whatever she could. She also filled out an ‘observation guide’ that documents those details of the child’s environment that could not be captured on tape or video. The children were requested to keep a journal in which they recorded their activities with a focus on language and literacy. Our approach to data collection emphasized the child as participant in and leader of data collection. Thus one tape recorder was left with the children and they were asked to record what they thought was typical language use in their lifeworlds. Consequently each one of our cases is made up of the survey instrument, transcripts and translations of all the audio and video recordings in the follow up studies, the observation guide of the researcher, photos, and finally the language log submitted by the child.

My focus is on the Indians in our survey which make up about 28% of our sample. I report and discuss data, which are our preliminary findings, from the domain of religion which is a strong marker of identity and from the domain of public space to showcase heteroglossia in Singapore. In setting up the theoretical spaces in which to explore issues of language and identity I introduce first Bakhtin’s idea of hybridity and follow that up with unique forms of globalization in Singapore.

Theoretical Perspectives: Hybridity and Heteroglossia

Young (1995) traces the origins of this term and concludes that “‘Hybrid’ is a nineteenth century word” (p.6). In 1861 the OED used this word for the first time to explain miscegenation. In 1890 the OED makes a link between racial and linguistic

miscegenation while referring to hybridity in Aryan languages. The concern in Victorian England with miscegenation was also related to Darwin's key ideas about the origins of the human species that he published in 1859. Young traces the debates in England at that time that swung between the idea that miscengenation causes infertility and that it perpetuates a new healthy species.

My concern is with linguistic and philological hybridity and its implications for identity. Bakhtin was probably the first literacy critic to popularize the use of this word and take it out from the field of anthropology and race studies into the field of language and linguistics. Currently it is a buzzword in the social sciences and occurs in various forms like creolization and the French 'metissage'. Bakhtin's philosophy of language is explicated in his extended essay 'Discourse in the Novel' that he wrote in 1934-35. Though the technical terms Bakhtin developed regarding language like dialogism, heteroglossia, polyphony etc are often used in sociolinguistics, I would like to concentrate mainly on his idea of hybridity and heteroglossia.

In 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin distinguishes between intentional and organic hybridity. The former is an artistic lens that novelists create through the language of their characters with which to view the world. He writes that the novelist must be sensitive to "the fundamental heteroglossia inherent in actual language" by which he means the multiple languages and registers present in actual utterances, otherwise the novel will be inauthentic. He asks:

What is hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor.

Such mixing of two languages within the boundaries of a single utterance is, in the novel, an artistic device (or more accurately, a system of devices) that is deliberate. But unintentional, unconscious hybridization is one of the most important modes in the historical life of all languages (In Holquist, 1981, p. 358).

It is this ‘unintentional, unconscious hybridization’ that I am concerned with in this paper:

Even in historical, organic hybridity it is not only two languages but also two socio-linguistic (thus organic) world views that are mixed with each other; but in such situations, the mixture remains mute and opaque, never making use of conscious contrasts and oppositions (In Holquist, 1981, p. 360).

What Bakhtin means when he writes that organic hybridization is ‘mute and opaque’ is that the languages that are mixed thus are not in ‘dialogue’ or contestation with each other as they are in the novel. He seems to suggest there is a harmony and ecological balance in organic hybridity which is not there in its novelistic counterpart.

Singapore: Probably the most globalized nation in the world

Definitions of globalization (Giddens 1990) show it as a web of economic and cultural networks in which a world wide production system locates demand, supply and service-centre in the most profitable parts of the world regardless of national boundaries. This network not only challenges the economic (Reich 1991) and cultural (Appadurai, 1996) foundations on which the social organization of the nation state stands, but also creates a new mode of development called ‘informationalism’(Castells, 1996). Informationalism arose at the end of the twentieth century, shaped by a restructuring of the capitalist mode of production, and the dismantling of the older Keynesian welfare state. The term refers

to a knowledge based economy where knowledge is not only the main product but also the main raw material for production (Castells, 1996).

According to the fifth annual A.T. Kearney/Foreign Policy globalization index (<http://www.foreignpolicy.com>) Singapore was the most globalized nation in the world in 2005 (up one notch from 2004 when it was no. 2) on the basis of data drawn from cross border flow of goods and services, capital, people and communications. Singapore has a unique form of globalization. Specifically 'privatization of the national school system', the role of the nation state, and most importantly the ideology of the state that language planning is open to 'dirigisme' make globalization in Singapore unique. I will now elaborate on each of these ideas.

Ka Ho Mok & Tan (2004) find that in East Asia globalization is causing privatization, corporatization, and marketization of education. Tan (2003) supports a similar view of Singapore. Their view is that in Singapore these processes are manifested in the rise of autonomous and independent schools, setting up of school clusters and use of league tables to rank schools. Under such conditions the provision of education becomes more market-like and is based on rational choice theory and competition for positional goods. Ka-Ho Mok and Tan predict a withdrawal of the nation state from the education scene and a growing role for non-state organizations like the market, civil society and the community which will have to take on more of the funding responsibility. Tan (2003) is concerned about the effects of this trend in the Singapore school system. He thinks that

not only will school rankings lead to unhealthy competition he also thinks that independent schools can aggravate social stratification. He comments that “Although the government is aware of the potential impact of social stratification on social cohesion as well as on its own political legitimacy, it shows no signs of bowing to pressure on such issues as independent schools and greater inter-school competition” (Tan, 2003, p. 51).

However, Singapore presents a unique case in that the national school system and the firmly entrenched bilingual education policy are run by a highly centralized and extremely strong nation state that does not show any signs of atrophy. Also, the national school system is well funded, as the state perceives it to be the key to economic progress and global participation in producing the flexible worker needed for the new knowledge economy. Thus unlike Ka Ho Mok & Tan (2004), Green (1997) thinks that Singapore is an example, not easily explained by globalization theory, of the survival of a manifestly national education system, even in a very cosmopolitan country wired up to the international market. Also, what is unique about Singapore is that unlike in other countries here there is no major trend that a national school system is being privatized. In fact, even in the case of the autonomous and independent schools mentioned by Ka Ho Mok & Tan (2004), firstly there are few such schools in Singapore and those that do exist also have to take the national exams.

Language planning in Singapore is undertaken by the government as ‘acts of dirigisme’ or guided management (Xu Daming & Li Wei, 2002). Globalization is equally controlled. Though in other parts of the world globalization has a ‘rhizomic’ development, i.e. it

proceeds haphazardly in different directions due to de-regulation, in Singapore it is carefully contained, a phenomenon that Koh (2002) calls 'tactical globalization' and Wee (2001) 'disciplinary modernisation'. This type of globalization does not undermine the state, but on the contrary reinforces its sovereignty.

Language maintenance is the ideology with which Singapore counteracts 'Westoxification' and fosters Asian values. According to the White Paper on Shared Values, which was made public in 1988, "Because of universal English education... Traditional Asian ideas of morality, duty and society which have sustained and guided us in the past are giving way to a more Westernised, individualistic, and self-centered outlook on life" (Quah, 1990, p. 106). These shared values of a National Ideology are instrumentally linked to the idea of economic progress, as these values have helped Singaporeans survive the economic crash of 1985 and the crunch of 1997. Thus unlike Reich's (1991) view of America, what is unique about Singapore is that despite the implacable march of globalization Singapore does have a National Ideology, and language, fostered through its bilingual education policy and national language campaigns, is central to it.

Globalization and language in Singapore

One of the most contested sites in globalization theory, and one that directly impacts language and education, is the atrophying nature of the nation state and all its symbols. Appadurai (1996) predicts the demise of the nation state while at the same time showing

disjunctures in the flow of images, capital, culture and people that reinforce this demise. This changing role of the nation state has hugely impacted language in society. For instance it has created concern about the state's ability to stop the juggernaut of English encroaching on mother tongues and disturbing the linguistic ecology of non-English speaking countries (Phillipson 1992; Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 1997, 1999; Pennycook 1998). In Singapore too there is concern that if more and more Singaporeans become English speaking this might erode mother tongues and with them the identities that go with being Indian, Malay or Chinese.

However, a close look at the census results and the data presented in this paper might have a different story to tell. The following table shows the decadal shift in language use in Singaporean homes:

Table 1: Language trends in Singapore

Language most frequently spoken at home	Chinese		Malays		Indians	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
English	19.3	23.9	6.1	7.9	32.3	35.6
Mandarin	30.1	45.1	-	0.1	0.1	0.1
Chinese Dialects	50.3	30.7	-	0.1	0.2	0.1
Malay	0.3	0.2	93.7	91.6	14.5	11.6
Tamil	-	-	-	0.1	43.2	42.9

Source: *Census of Population 2000*, p. ix

It is clear from these statistics that English has, indeed, increased somewhat as a language most frequently spoken at home, especially for the Chinese community, and that there are

substantial gains for Mandarin and losses for Chinese dialects. The number of Indian homes where English is the household language has not increased except by 3.3% though this number was high throughout the last decade compared to the Chinese and Malay communities. Yet policyspeak is that “The shift to English as the home language proportionately is more discernible among Indian Singaporeans than it is the case with other Singaporeans” (Census of Population, 1990, p. 3).

Despite the fact that these census data actually do not show a major shift towards the English language, the national newspaper, *The Straits Times*, conveys a deep concern that more and more children in Singaporean schools are now from English speaking homes (*Straits Times*, August 4, 2001; *Straits Times*, October 12, 2004; *Straits Times*, November 18, 2005). These articles comment on this trend in all the three ethnic groups. For instance the Law and Foreign Affairs Minister S. Jayakumar pointed out that “56 percent of the Indian Primary 1 pupils last year came from English-speaking homes, up from 44 per cent in 1988” (*Straits Times*, November 18, 2005). Commenting on the same trend in the Malay community the Mr. Yatiman Yusof, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Information, Communication and the Arts said, “This identity is Malay culture. Malay language is the core” (*Straits Times*, November 27, 2004).

These Census statistics and newspaper comments about mother tongue language loss do not acknowledge that there is, in fact, also language maintenance. For instance the Indians speaking Tamil have maintained their numbers at about 43%. Similarly the

numbers seem fairly stable for the Malay speaking community. I believe these census statistics are interpreted unidimensionally by policy makers in Singapore because of their view of globalization as only the process of McDonaldization and not that of reinforcing language loyalty while creating new forms of identity. I will elaborate on this idea further in the Discussion.

The Data: Heteroglossia in Singapore

In this section I present two transcripts from the follow up studies and one table of results from the survey. I have followed a broad transliteration of Tamil and Teochew shown in italics and bolded respectively. The rationale for the broad transliteration is that I am not attempting a fine grained linguistic analysis here. All translations appear within brackets and are set off in a different font.

In Transcript 1 Dhruvam, a 10yr. old Indian child, is buying something from a neighborhood store. He is being tape recorded by the Tamil/English bilingual researcher who is also participating in this speech event. Dhruvam is interested in buying a hair spray which can change the color of his hair temporarily. He calls the researcher ‘akka’ or sister and talks to her in Singlish and Tamil. Both the researcher and Dhruvam talk to the shopkeeper in Singlish.

Transcript 2 is part of a recording that the researcher made at the weekly visit Dhruvam’s family makes to the temple. The father is asking Dhruvam to wash his feet properly which is a ritual in many Indian temples. In all temples devotees must take their shoes off

before entering. In the final utterance Dhruvam is explaining to the researcher how she must walk carefully on the steps at the entrance to the temple. This is because platters of flowers will be placed there as offerings to God.

Transcript 1: Dhruvam in the market

Dhruvam: *akka* once use *panndunaa* use *pannikittae irukkunumaa*?
(Sister, if you use this once, do you have to keep using it?)

Dhruvam: Aunty, this one if once I use means....

Female Shopkeeper: You this once use. You want the hair? The gold colour one? You want black?

Researcher: This once hairspray is it?

Female Shopkeeper: No the play play one ah. You want to wash one ah black lor. Hey, very good leh. You want hair hor all the silver color hor you want hor black colour?

Dhruvam: oh *ithae adichittu eppa vaenumaanaalum* wash *pannulaama*.
Can can this once what colour?
(Oh, you can use this and wash it whenever you want)
.....

Female Shopkeeper: **Buey_sai lah, Yi si dui wah hor_hoe. Yi si li boey beh_zui. Yi, meng wah dah...**
(Cannot, he treat me very well. He (used to) sell white water. He ask me...)

Transcript 2: Dhruvam in the temple

Father: Boy, *kaalu pinnalae kazhuviniyaa* boy?
(Father: Boy, did you wash the back of your feet boy?)

Dhruvam: aah

Father: come come *keezhae vizhunthuraathae vazhukkum po po po*.
(Father: come come don't fall down it will be slippery. Go, go, go.)

Dhruvam: Must *thaandu* this one.
(Dhruvam: Must cross this one)

Researcher : Why ah?

Dhruvam: No last time my *maamaa* do he come here. Last time all we just step the one and go what because *anthae poo thattu ella vaippangae athu saamivodae thaanae. Atha thaandi poogae kuudaathu.*

(Dhruvam: No last time my uncle do he come here. Last time all we just step the one and go what because they keep the platter of flowers for prayers here and it is for God. We cannot cross and go.)

TABLE 2: languages used by Indians in the religious domain*

	QUESTION	LANGUAGE/S USED	PERCENTAGES
1	What language/s do you usually use to pray in the church/temple/mosque/others?	English Tamil	28.6 71.4
2	What language/s do you usually use to pray at home?	English Tamil English and Tamil	28.6 61.9 4.8
3	What language/s do you usually use in your silent prayer?	English Tamil English and Tamil	23.8 57.1 19.0
4	What language/s do you usually use to learn about religion in the church/temple/mosque/others?	English Tamil English and Tamil	52.4 4.8 9.5
5	In what languages do you read/write about religion?	English Tamil English and Tamil	33.3 4.8 4.8
6	Can you give me an example of a prayer?	Sanskrit English	47.6 14.3

* The numbers do not add up to 100% because of 'not applicable' and 'don't know' categories.

Discussion

The preliminary findings of our survey, and follow up studies like Dhruvam's, show that indeed languages are not compartmentalized in the lifeworld of individuals. When asked what are the language/s most frequently spoken at home nearly 52% of the children reported more than one language. The Singapore census only asks for one language which is most frequently spoken at home which is an incomplete picture of language use in the home domain.

In Transcript 1 Singlish is the lingua franca between the Chinese shopkeeper, the Indian researcher and Dhruvam. This is not the forum where I can offer a detailed definition of Singlish. Suffice it to say that it is a contested (Kramer-Dahl, 2003) colloquial form of English, a hybrid code, spoken in Singapore. The shopkeeper says, "No the play play one ah," meaning that this hair spray does not have real color. It's only a temporary color used for play. The researcher, who works at Singapore's National Institute of Education on this and other projects, can speak Standard English but deliberately uses Singlish to communicate with the shopkeeper as Standard English would not be the identity she chooses to index in this situation. Since I have been working with this researcher for over a year I am aware that in academic project meetings she chooses her work identity that goes with speaking standard English. Here she asks the shopkeeper, "This once hairspray is it?" meaning, "Can this hairspray be used only once?"

The Singapore Census (2000) shows that language planning processes of replacing Chinese dialects with Mandarin have been largely successful. A look at the census figures for Chinese dialect in Table 1 show that from 1990 to 2000 there has been tremendous shift in the use of Chinese dialects: from about 50% of households using dialects now only 30% of households are using these. This is considered successful language planning by policy makers (Census of Population, 1990) as the cultures inherent in the dialects will be sustained by Mandarin which is replacing the dialects. However, Transcript 1 shows that the dialect is still being used. Though the shopkeeper is talking to Dhruvam in Singlish she is talking to her husband in Teochew. She mentions a person who sells ‘white water’ who has not treated her very well. Though currently part of the heteroglossia of Singapore, given the current trend dialects will completely die out.

Transcript 2 shows that Dhruvam uses both Singlish and Tamil in the temple. While explaining to the researcher how she should walk he says, “Last time all we just step the one and go what because *anthaee poo thattu ella vaippangae athu saamivodae thaanae.*” The phrase ‘last time’ in Singlish refers to the past and the word ‘what’ is added at the end of a phrase for emphasis. At ‘because’ Dhruvam switches to Tamil. This switch is difficult to explain in terms of the literature on motivations for code switching. I interpret Dhruvam’s sentence as a composite utterance in the Bakhtinian sense: “It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses...” (in Holquist, 1981, p. 358). It is this encounter between two linguistic consciousnesses, in this case Singlish and Tamil, that leads to a syncretic ‘Indian’ identity.

Table 2 shows the project's preliminary findings from the domain of religion for the Indians surveyed. 86% of the Indians surveyed were practicing Hindus and it can be assumed that these are the languages used in Hindu temples. It is clear from this table that English is widely used in this domain along with Tamil and also Sanskrit. For instance in response to question 3, only slightly more than half or 57.1% said that they used Tamil exclusively. The rest use either English exclusively or both English and Tamil. Similarly for question 4 an overwhelming 52.4% said that they use English to learn about religion, in this case Hinduism.

I would like to adapt Bakhtin's definition of hybridity in literary criticism for sociolinguistics: hybridity is a way of looking at code switching in multilingual communities where the hybrid language has implications for identity. This hybrid identity defies a stable unitary set of values; rather it is a flexible, changeable set of values and positionalities which locate the culture of an individual not at one fixed site but in multiple enunciative and physical spaces. Bakhtin's 'organic hybridity', which is what I see in the utterances of Dhruvam, is creolization or metissage: "the imperceptible process whereby two or more cultures merge into a new mode" (Young, R.C., 1995, p. 21). Unlike intentional hybridity which is dialogic and in contestation "In organic hybridity, the mixture merges and is fused into a new language, world view or object" (Young, R.C., 1995, p. 21).

Canagarajah (2000, 2001) sees a similar hybridity in the way people in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, negotiate the ideological potential of English. The story he narrates of Thiru (Canagarajah, 2000) is similar to my story of Dhruvam in that Thiru sees no problem with English and Tamil co-existing in his personal linguistic ecology just as Hinduism and Christianity co-exist in his religion. Thus “In cases of linguistic and cultural contact, that is so characteristic of the postcolonial world, the sign systems have themselves become mixed and hybrid” (2000, p. 130). In my paper the ‘sign systems’ or I would prefer to call them enunciative spaces, are those of Singlish, a hybrid code, and the code switched utterances of Dhruvam which must be seen, in a Bakhtinian sense, as a semiotic whole.

The system allows no hybrids

In contrast to this view of hybrid language use the Singapore government’s view of globalization is that of Ritzer (1993) who introduced the term McDonaldization to mean “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world” (p. 1). These principles are predictability, calculability, efficiency and control. Phillipson (1992) carries this term over to sociolinguistics to mean the encroachment of killer English into the linguistic ecology of indigenous languages. Thus in sociolinguistics McDonaldization refers to a linguistic and cultural homogenization. However, this view of linguistic and cultural globalization ignores the reinforcing of national, ethnic and linguistic loyalties which are also a result of globalization emphasized by Appadurai (1996) and Huntington (1996).

Ironically the dirigistic processes of language planning in Singapore deplete those very linguistic resources that are supposed to sustain Singaporean identity. For instance through the Speak Good English movement, launched in 2000, the state of Singapore discourages Singlish (Rudby, 2005). In fact in his 1999 National Day Rally speech Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said, “We cannot be a first-world economy or go global with Singlish” (Ministry of Education, August 27, 1999). The Prime Minister also said that since English is a second language for many Singaporeans, mastering two codes of the same language, Singlish and Standard English, will be difficult for them. However, as I have shown in the case of ‘akka’ the Tamil/Singlish/Standard English multilingual researcher for this project, Singaporeans can actually dip into their cache of linguistic repertoires and pull out an appropriate code along with a concomitant identity that they wish to index in that particular speech event. Thus though ‘akka’ uses Singlish with the shopkeeper she uses Standard English in project meetings at her work place.

Singaporean sociologists are concerned about the government’s inability to see hybridity in society and language use (Chua, 2004). Referring to the rule that children of mixed marriages in Singapore must take the father’s mother tongue in school Chua comments that “The system thus admits of no ‘hybrids’...” (2004, p. 89). The system only recognizes that due to transnational flows of culture and capital there is emerging a global culture based on ‘McDonaldization’ or Americanization. What it cannot see, and what the data of our survey are showing, is new hybrid forms and functions of local discourses,

codes and registers that resist this reproductive ‘play-back’ and constitute a ‘third culture’ (Featherstone, 1990).

In the case of Dhruvam, rather than creating Westoxification and moral decay, English seems to be supporting his Hindu identity. Similarly Singlish is the way he communicates with people not in his ethnic group like the Chinese shopkeeper. Had Dhruvam used Standard English with her the shopkeeper would have thought he was a foreigner and, in fact, not a Singaporean. Thus Singlish, though discouraged by the government, is one of the identity markers of being Singaporean. According to Mui Teng Yap of the Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore, “There are clear signs that a uniquely Singaporean identity is emerging. One of these is the growth and use of Singlish...” (Yap, 2000).

The valorization of a non-standard hybrid code like Singlish does not mean that it must replace Standard English. I agree with Delpit (2001) that minority groups are particularly in need of the language of power. As Goh Chok Tong said in his 1999 National Day speech: “Parents send children to English language schools rather than Chinese, Malay, or Tamil schools, because they hope the children will get jobs and opportunities when they grow up” (Ministry of Education, August 27, 1999). Standard English represents the linguistic capital required to participate as an active citizen in a globalizing economy. In providing equitable access to this linguistic capital the national school system is attempting to uphold the foundations of a meritocratic society. However, the data from the Sociolinguistic Survey of Singapore shows that multiple codes can co-exist in the

linguistic ecology of a nation leading to hybrid identities which, in the Bakhtinian sense, are not necessarily in contestation with each other.

Conclusions

This essay has tried to show that the Singapore government's ideology of language and culture as demarcated by cultural and linguistic isoglosses is not borne out by actual language use. In fact hybrid forms of language like Singlish are used as a lingua franca amongst diverse ethnic groups. At the same time multiple languages are used in domains like that of religion in code-switched forms. These forms of language use point towards new hybrid forms of identities rather than a monolithic Indian identity which is only circumscribed within Tamil.

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