
A Communicative Pedagogical Grammar for English in Singapore

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The variety of English used by Singaporeans has been labelled one of the “New Englishes” and has been the subject of a lot of debate, both popular and academic. Many of the discussions, however, including those by academic linguists, tend to generate more heat than light due to a tendency to conflate together the many different aspects of language use which actually need to be considered separately. The complexity of the issue ultimately has to do with the complexity of the linguistic ecology in Singapore, as well as with the general, multi-level, multi-faceted nature of language itself. This paper seeks to review the arguments for and against the recognition, codification and standardization of “Singapore English,” with particular reference to the pedagogical consequences of such recognition for the Singapore educational context. The discussion will briefly go down some well-trodden paths such as the problems surrounding notions such as “native/non-native” and “Standard English/International English,” but the main focus will be on a discussion of where many debates on Singapore English and other New Englishes tend to go wrong, and on what a communicative pedagogical grammar of English that recognises and takes full account of the local variety of English could look like.

Whose language is it anyway—and who lays down the law about it? I feel tempted immediately to rephrase the questions as “Whose languages are they anyway—and who CAN lay down the law about them?” because the name of the demon of English in the late twentieth century appears to be Legion (“for we are many”).

Tom McArthur, *English Today*, 25, Jan 1991

Introduction

The last fifty years or so have seen a phenomenal diffusion of the English language throughout the world, so much so that at present, English is “more widely spread, and is the chief language of more countries than any other language is or ever has been” (Quirk, 1985, p. 1). With this spread of the language has arisen the problem of standards and questions about intelligibility. Increasingly, countries which belong to what Kachru (1985) has famously termed the “outer” (p.12) (English as a Second Language) circle of English users have been pressing for their own local standards (e.g., India, Nigeria, and Singapore). One can trace the root of this phenomenon to the fact that:

the emergence of new forms of English is not subject to external control since it is of the very nature of language to adapt itself to the varying sociocultural needs of its users.... Furthermore, language is not only used instrumentally as a means of communication but also *as an expression of social identity, as an emblem of group membership.* (Quirk, 1985, p. 35, italics added)

This last point, that language is used as an expression of social identity, is probably the most

important reason that many academic linguists (and an increasing number of ordinary Singaporeans) are persuaded that Singapore should have its own codified variety of English, because the British norms and models of English currently being used as reference points just do not seem to fit into the Singapore context, especially as English expands its range of uses and deepens its roots in the country. However, there is, at the same time, an undertow of unease among laymen and linguists alike that the many “new varieties of English,” as they are now called, will together set up one too many standards for English and bring about general chaos and mutual unintelligibility at the international level. Quirk’s (1989) articulation of this general fear is by no means the lone voice crying in the wilderness. One can trace this concern all the way back to Prator’s 1968 diatribe against liberal linguists’ tolerance of less-than-native-like standards of English. Recently, other linguists besides Quirk, while less direct and insistent in their views, have also expressed their doubts about the practicality and desirability of multiplying standards in an already heterogeneous linguistic landscape (where even native speakers of the various “old varieties of English” occasionally have problems understanding one another). Svartvik (1985), for instance, expresses his concern in the form of a question: “is it really worth having a variety of norms even for institutionalized outer circle fellowships, considering the likely long-term negative consequences for global English?” (p. 34). For further discussion see also Greenbaum, 1985a.

It is my belief that too much confused thinking has prevailed in much of the debate on this issue and too much ink spilt over inadequately set out arguments. As a Singaporean and as a linguist, it is my hope that this paper may contribute towards teasing apart some of the confounding issues and so move the discussion on to more important matters. To this end, I will first review the current arguments being made for and against the recognition, codification and standardization of what have been termed the “New Englishes,” with particular reference to Singapore. This will involve, among other things, a scrutiny of notions such as “native/non-native” and “Standard English/International English.” I hope to show that some of the cobwebs of misunderstanding that have been gathering over the years can be put down to muddled thinking (and argumentation), and to the neglect by parties on both sides to spell out clearly what it is they are arguing about: there may, in fact, be more general agreement once the various linguistic issues have been disentangled. In the second part of the paper, I then make some suggestions on what a communicative pedagogical grammar of English for Singapore could look like. In the process, I hope to show why the “native”/older varieties of English, taken as wholes, with all their genre, stylistic, and discourse-pragmatic norms for both written and spoken channels, do not make the best pedagogical models of English for Singapore, and may even frustrate (if not impede) Singaporean learners of English in their attempts to master the language.

What is Standard English? What Aspects are We Talking About?

The question of standards has always been a bone of contention. From Bernstein’s (1962a, 1962b) rather unequal terminology of social class-linked “restricted” and “elaborated” codes to today’s notions of sociolects, dialects, registers and styles, we have come some way towards a better understanding and appreciation of the different ways in which people choose to express themselves, and, more importantly, the reasons for these differences. Through a greater appreciation of the ways in which power shapes society, linguists now also appreciate that “Standard English” is not so much a more beautiful, developed and elaborated code (or even “*the* only correct English”) as just one of the many dialects of English, albeit *the* dialect of power and influence (and of people that matter). According to Greenbaum (1990), there are only two actually codified standards of English: British

and American, but in countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, there are high-prestige forms which are the *de facto*, if not *de jure*, standards for both written and spoken English. From a global perspective, therefore, it is perhaps more accurate to talk about “standardized Englishes,” with the *-ized* suffix drawing attention to the arbitrary process of selecting and privileging certain linguistic features, and the plural “Englishes” recognising that a unitary, internationally agreed-on and codified standard simply does not exist except at a very vague level of “general consensus” because of the many different stakeholder countries. The shorter and more handy term “International English” is also sometimes used to refer to this perceived common core which most varieties of English seem to share (largely in terms of lexis and syntax, thus excluding spelling, pronunciation, and discourse-pragmatic features), the belief being that differences among these varieties, especially in writing, are largely minor and inconsequential to mutual comprehension. For the purposes of this article, I will use “Standardized English” (StdDE) or “International English” to refer to this putative shared variety.

The problem with broad, high-level, monolithic terms such as International/Standardized English, however, is that they are too general, and do not address the local, immediate, and specific contexts of use that every piece of written or spoken text is always embedded in: different *channels* (spoken, written, electronic), *media* (televised political speeches, newspaper editorials, journal articles), and *modes* (written-to-be-spoken, written-as-if-spoken, mixed and embedded genres, and so forth), different *sociolinguistic configurations* (e.g., familiar/distant, equal/unequal), different *purposes* (e.g., formal/informal, permanent/ephemeral), and so forth. When people use the term “English” in their arguments, they may be referring to the level of pronunciation only, or to dialect, or register, or style, but they often do not say so. Exactly which aspects of language are we referring to, for example, when we compare “New York City English” with something called “Black English”? The term “English” is often pressed into service to mean a lot of different things, and this is precisely the source of many confusions: when we use labels like “British English” or “Singapore English” or even “Standard British/American English,” we must go on to specify further which aspects we are actually referring to, because each category will have sub-categories or facets, and if speakers/writers and hearers/readers have different things in mind when interpreting such labels, confusion and misunderstanding will result. This, I believe, is partly the cause of the perplexity that surrounds the issue of “non-native” Englishes, with attitudes ranging from vehement rejection and utter disdain (e.g., Enoch Powell’s infamous imperialist claims for sole British ownership of the language¹) to scepticism (e.g., Quirk, 1985, 1989), cautious acceptance (e.g., Greenbaum, 1985a, 1990; Kennedy, 1985; Svartvik, 1985), and stalwart support (e.g., Bloom, 1986; Foley, 1988; Platt, 1980; Richards, 1982). There are many linguists working on the “New Englishes,” and Braj Kachru is perhaps the most well known and most prolific in writing. Not all of these writers are consistent all the time in making clear what it is they are arguing for or about. Sometimes, they claim to be talking about national standards of English (e.g., “Singapore English”) even though most of the data they cite point to a spoken, colloquial variety that no one in that country would want to claim as “standard” (e.g., Platt & Weber, 1980). Kachru himself frequently fails to point out that when he talks about codifying an “Indian English,” he is really referring to an *educated* variety of English (and he is also guilty of focusing too much on *differences* rather than similarities, thus giving cause for

1. “Others may speak and read English—more or less—but it is our language not theirs. It was made in England by the English and it remains our distinctive property, however widely it is learnt or used” [quoted in Greenbaum, 1990, p. 15]. Powell’s remarks are so extreme and “imperialistic” (or even “racist,” as the popular opinion goes) that they merit no rebuttal.

purists to get unduly worried). Tay (1986) drives the point home:

one needs to compare the proficient and non-proficient speakers of English within the same speech community first ... Just as one would not characterize American English purely in terms of what high school students speak and write, it would be absurd to characterize Singaporean English in terms of the language of someone who has had only [6 years] of education in English. (p.105)

Another source of confusion can be traced to the linguists and educators who confuse EFL countries with ESL countries. It is important to recognise the difference between the two types of countries in terms of the legitimacy of their arguments for a standard, a point repeatedly made by Kachru (1985, 1986). Certainly, the pro-New Englishes educator who made the following remark to Japanese teachers in Japan (an EFL country) was arguing on very mistaken assumptions which show a very basic misunderstanding of what Kachru has been arguing for over the years: “Language behaviour which at first sight appears to be flawed may in fact be a manifestation of a new—though as yet unrecognised—variety of English” (as cited in Quirk, 1991, p. 24). As I hope to show later, this is *not* the argument being made for the New Englishes, as there is a very fundamental difference between “learner errors” or “developmental errors” made by those who have a poor command of the language and are still learning (those who do not know what they are doing) and the “non-standardisms” (phonological, lexico-grammatical, pragmatic, stylistic) produced by those in the ESL countries who *do* have a command of various genres and registers of English and therefore know what they are doing. New “standards” of English even for ESL countries would still need to be based on the stabilised practices of educated speakers and writers, not learners.

The Justification for and Validity of the New Englishes

Let me now go through the basic arguments for the recognition of the new varieties of English. I prefer the term “New Varieties of English,” which has gained currency in the literature, to “non-native Englishes,” as it implicitly repudiates the myth that languages are inherited genetically: all languages are learnt and not present at birth, so the only distinction between the English spoken in countries such as Britain, North America, and Australia, and that spoken in India, Singapore, and Nigeria is that the former are old varieties of English (OVEs) while the latter are new varieties of English (NVEs). The terms NVE and OVE also avoid the unwarranted stigma attached to “non-native.”

The New Englishes are the varieties which are spoken in countries where English has a very wide range of functions internally (within its social institutions, hence the alternative term “institutionalized non-native Englishes”), usually as part of a colonial “heritage.” As Kachru (1988) says, in such countries,

The English language is not perceived as necessarily imparting only Western traditions. The medium is non-native, but the message is not. In several Asian and African countries, English now has national and international functions that are both distinct and complementary. English has thus acquired a new power base and a new elitism. The domains of English have been restructured [from those in colonial times]. (p. 12)

The roles of English in such countries are thus different from those in countries such as France or Japan, because, as Greenbaum (1990, p. 21) acknowledges, “Where English is a foreign language, those who speak English look to the standard language of mother tongue speakers, chiefly standard British English and standard American English, for their norms.... French or Japanese speakers may make characteristic mistakes in their use of English, but they would not claim to want to speak French English or Japanese English.” Kachru thus distinguishes between the varieties used by EFL

learners (“performance varieties” or learner varieties) from those used in the Outer Circle by ESL users (“institutionalized varieties”), which have had a long gestation period and are now deeply embedded in their local contexts, to the extent of having different registers, styles and creative uses. Even then, as mentioned earlier, there also needs to be a distinction between the users of English and the uses: not all *users* are highly proficient in using what may be called the “standard,” and not all *uses* require that standard to be used—in which cases, the appropriateness of the English used will have to be judged according to communicative effectiveness and appropriateness in that particular culture. In the field of language teaching, arguments for a more “communicative” grammar of English take the same premise: that we cannot study or teach grammar apart from its social context, because form is intimately tied up with use and meaning, and meaning-in-use. I will come back to this connection between the New Englishes debate and the communicative language teaching approach later in this paper, but here I will point out that another important parameter of difference usually ignored is the pragmatic dimension of non-native varieties of English. As Leech (1983) says,

[pragmatic principles of language use] operate variably in different cultures of language communities, in different social classes, etc. One has only to think of... the way in which politeness is differently interpreted in (say) Chinese, Indian, or American societies, to realize that pragmatic descriptions ultimately have to be relative to specific social conditions. (p. 10)

Kachru (1991) puts it in even stronger terms: “The culture-bound localized strategies of, for example, politeness, persuasion, and phatic communion transcended in English are more effective and culturally significant than are the “native” strategies for interaction” (p. 10). The truth of this fact cannot be in doubt, as any linguist who has spent any time at all in an ESL country can testify. But why is it that non-native speakers cannot simply copy the pragmatics of, say, British English instead of creating new norms and principles? Part of the answer lies in the fact that language is not inextricably linked to any particular culture, but can and should be bent and shaped to serve its users’ ends. Another part of the answer lies in the socio-historical facts of colonialism: English was the language of power, and still is the language of the elite in many of the former colonial countries. To speak or write exactly as the English do, with all the idiosyncrasies, culturally bound idioms and other baggage is not particularly desirable in ESL countries (especially in informal speech) as it will be perceived as “showing off” and “putting on airs” (especially with respect to pronunciation). On the other hand, a certain proficiency in so-called “standard” forms of the language is desirable, and the way to educational and economic success. This tension is captured by Kachru (1988) when he writes, “The second-language user never seemed to win in this see-saw of attitudes. If he gained “native”-like linguistic competence he was suspect; if he did not gain it he was an object of linguistic ridicule” (p. 22). The answer, of course, lies in a kind of compromise: an English which is internationally acceptable and yet distinctively “local,” especially in pronunciation. Contrary to Quirk’s (1991) claims of the issue being one of “liberation linguistics,” with former colonies trying to shake off the yoke of linguistic oppression, the issue is more of linguistic pragmatism: the internal uses of English in these countries simply demand new idioms, new lexical items, new rhythms of speech, new ways of speaking (cf. Kachru, 1988).

What goes on in the new varieties of English (NVEs, for short) may be illustrated by the case of Singapore English. This is a variety which has emerged out of the interaction and contradictions (in the early days) between British English and the local linguistic, cultural, and communicative norms. Over the years, some of the myriad features of the local languages coalesced with those of British English to produce a totally new system which has its own internal logic and norms,

quite separate from the original input languages. In colloquial Singapore English, for example, it is possible to say “Can you *fetch* me to the party?” to mean “Can you give me a lift/ride to the party?”. Such usage of *fetch* is unidiomatic in StddE but is so common and so pervasive among Singaporeans, that it would be quite futile trying to persuade them that it is wrong according to some British or international standard. This use cannot be explained by interference theories as none of the L1 languages has equivalents which are used in quite the same way in the same contexts. The Singaporean use of the word *blur*, too, in expressions such as “He’s *blur* like sotong” [“He’s very clueless/easily confused, just like *sotong* (the Malay word for *cuttlefish*)”] also indicates a creative process at work that cannot be explained by the input linguistic systems: no one knows how cuttlefish came (unfairly) to be associated with confusion or disorientation, but Singaporeans of all ethnicities share a common understanding of this figure of speech. Singapore English can thus truly be said to be genuinely Singaporean—something which Singaporeans as a whole have had a part in shaping, and in which is invested a unique cultural heritage as a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, former British colony. The “deviations” in ESL varieties of English, then, are of a different order from those made by learners of English. Another distinguishing feature of NVE “deviations” is that they are used (and have been used for some time) by almost everyone in the country, including the educated elite under certain circumstances. Among these “non-standardisms,” however, it is still crucial to separate those produced in spoken, informal situations, from those produced in formal written discourse or formal speech, and to separate usages made by “people who know” from those made by people who are in fact still learners. To confuse these very important distinctions is to argue on very shaky linguistic grounds.

What about Intelligibility?

People who speak these new varieties of English usually have two main concerns: (a) international intelligibility, and (b) value judgements of purity or acceptability. The second concern is perhaps easier to settle from a theoretical perspective, although in reality it just as thorny as the first. Many people still believe in a golden period of English, when it was “purer” than it is now, and thus fear that the New Englishes will further “corrupt” the language. Such beliefs are not easy to change, and must be recognised for what they are: subjective judgements based on ignorance of basic historical facts. They are, however, very much connected with the question of international intelligibility, which is an issue meriting serious discussion since the viability of NVEs rests more or less on this matter. There have been numerous notes of caution issued by linguists all over the world either predicting the decline of English as a world language or warning of a dire situation of mutual unintelligibility if “non-native” standards are allowed to flourish. Most often, linguistic conservatives carefully couch their arguments in terms of a concern for people attaining full competence in a notional “standard English” in order to communicate internationally in both spoken and written channels. However, the supporters of the NVEs are just as concerned about international intelligibility, and are not the advocates of linguistic anarchy that they have been made out to be. For example, Tay and Gupta, two advocates for the recognition of a Singaporean English, are quoted in Bloom (1986) as saying, “It would be immoral and irresponsible to recommend a local standard which went beyond the bounds of tolerance of the international Standard English-speaking community” (p. 432). Kachru’s (1985) appeal for balance is also typical: “[we] must realize that at one level, there is a stake in maintaining an international standard for English, and, at another level, there is a need to describe the uses of English with reference to diverging English-using speech fellowships” (p. 27).

As with the issue of non-native standards as a whole, the question of intelligibility can be sensibly discussed *only* with reference to particular genres or purposes of language use: spoken or written, standard or non-standard, informal or formal, academic or casual, and so forth. With regard to the written medium, it is generally agreed that practically all the standard, written, formal varieties of English, whether OVEs or NVEs, are internationally intelligible (i.e., not the same, but very similar). Awonusi (1990), for instance, says that “Nigerian English syntax ... has the same basic features as Standard English. This is particularly true of written English unlike speech and/or informal English where the deviations are more pronounced” (p. 31). Gupta (1988, p. 30) similarly finds little difference between the written English of high prestige writers in Singapore and Standardized English. However, Tay (1986) makes the very important point that intelligibility is not a “yes” or “no” phenomenon, but a complex cline that depends on a host of factors: “Perhaps it is time we asked some sociolinguistic-type questions about intelligibility, i.e., who is intelligible, about what, to whom, where, when and why” (pp. 94–95). I would add that intelligibility is a two-way street and also depends on who is listening: communication is most successful when both parties accommodate to each other to the extent that this is possible and in situations where it can be expected. Without an officially recognised and codified Singapore English to refer to in the classroom, however, such questions cannot be legitimately brought to the attention of learners and thus the real questions of genre appropriateness, contexts of use, and other intelligent sociolinguistic questions cannot be addressed pedagogically—much to the loss of the Singaporean student.

For spoken English, Tay’s (1986) intelligibility test suggests that the main obstacles to intelligibility often lie in “discourse markers, lexical items and the [choice] of styles and registers” rather than in tense and other major syntactic areas (see pp. 96–98). These features are precisely those which can be expected to vary the most from one variety of English to the next (just think of the differences between American and British English), and will not pose problems once outsiders get used to them. In one test of international intelligibility, Campbell, Vongvivanond, Haq & Smith (1983) found that educated speakers in formal settings who were judged to be highly intelligible in one country were likely to be found intelligible in others as well. Thus, the authors argued that the target model in English classrooms need not be the traditionally conceived “native speaker”. Perhaps the last word on this issue, however, should go to Trudgill and Hannah (as cited in Gupta, 1988), who argue for more bidirectional acceptance and tolerance: as long as the differences are not too great everyone’s variety should be accepted, and both native and non-native speakers of English should make an effort to improve their comprehension of other varieties of English. In today’s context, where English is an international lingua franca, there is certainly much sense in this plea for more accommodation and less chauvinism on the part of *all* speakers, whether OVE, NVE or EFL. American and British speakers of English who need to interact internationally with other speakers of English need to do their homework: they should not expect other speakers to sound like them or use language the way they do. Part of any business cross-cultural training should be an ecumenical linguistic consciousness-raising component: we speak the same language, but it is manifested in different ways.

A Brief Sociolinguistic Sketch of Singapore

I hope I have so far given some justification to the idea of the “New Englishes” and cleared up some misconceptions about them. Before going on to discuss the various pedagogical issues relating to the acceptance of a Standardized Singapore English (SSE), I will give a brief overview of the sociolinguistic context. The population of Singapore consists of an ethnic Chinese majority

(77%), Malays (15%), South Asian Indians (8%) and a small number of “others” (1.4%), and these proportions have remained very much constant over the last few decades. The original Chinese immigrants came from a variety of different regional dialectal backgrounds, including Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese and Hakka, while the Indians can be divided into the Tamil, Malayali, and Punjabi language groups (Kuo, 1985). In addition to all these ethnic languages and regional dialects, there is English, the main language of education, administration, law, commerce and, increasingly, inter-ethnic communication and expression of national identity. Abounding with all these varieties of languages, Singapore is not only multilingual, but polyglossic, as “certain functions, that is, uses within spheres of societal activity, may be shared by sub-codes of different speech varieties” (Platt, 1980, p. 63). Singapore, in the interest of achieving multi-ethnic harmony, has officially adopted four “languages”: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. The last three were chosen to represent the three major ethnic groups of Singapore, and are taught as “second languages” in addition to English, which has been the medium of instruction in all schools since the 1980s. English is considered to be the most important language to master, since not only are all textbooks written in English, a pass in “Advanced-level General Paper”² (a de facto, externally refereed English language proficiency examination) is also a university entry requirement. English is thus used extensively by Singaporeans in an ever-increasing number of social spheres³.

Social & National Identity

English in Singapore is much more than a dominant working language. Being a “neutral” tongue (because it is not “native” to any of the major ethnic groups), it bears the responsibility of being the vehicle of the emergent Singaporean culture (Foley, 1988). On the literary scene, for example, Singaporean poems, novels and songs in English have been cropping up. As far back as the fifties, Singaporean poets have been asserting their right to be free from both the political and *linguistic* chains of the British:

We do but merely ask
 No more, no less, this much:
 That you white man,
 ... see
 The bitter, curving tide of history,
 See well enough, relinquish,
 Restore this place, this sun
 To us ... and the waiting generations.

Depart white man.

...

Depart:
 You knew when to come;
 Surely know when to go.
 Do not ignore, dismiss,
 Pretending we are foolish,
 Harbour contempt in eloquence.
 We know your language.

2. Set, marked and examined by Cambridge University, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Singapore.
3. For a succinct account of the sociocultural and linguistic history of Singapore, see the web page written by Anthea Fraser Gupta, <http://www.une.edu.au/langnet/singlish.htm>, which also gives many examples of Colloquial Singapore English.

[...]
 Depart Tom, Dick and Harry,
 Gently, with ceremony;
 We may still be friends,
 Even love you ... from a distance.

(May, 1954, by Edwin Thumboo)

This poem captures the essence of the sociolinguistic fact that people who use English for self-expression within their own sociocultural milieu will naturally want to develop their own norms of appropriateness. Singaporeans have already “nativized” the English language by infusing it with a uniquely Singaporean flavour. Linguists write about a Singaporean stress and intonation pattern, a Singaporean set of lexical items, and even a Singapore pattern of code-switching and mixing⁴. And sociologists agree that only the English language stands a chance of being the language through which the national character and identity will be expressed.⁵ The time is therefore ripe for discussions about an endonormative standard because having language standards based in a foreign country not only threatens the validity and value of the home-grown dialect, but also means that local usages and norms do not get recognised officially, and this has implications for education, as this paper will discuss below.

Re-defining the “Native Speaker”

Tay (1982) argues convincingly that two criteria commonly used in most definitions of *native language* (priority of learning/primacy of the oral tradition and the lack of interference from other languages) are not relevant to the context of multilingual societies such as Singapore, and hence uses the term to include speakers other than those from the inner-circle English-speaking countries. English is increasingly the first language learnt by Singaporean children, and may even be considered to be the mother tongue or native language of an increasing number of Singaporeans (Anderson, 1985; Gupta, 1994; Tay, 1982). As Thumboo says to the so-called “native” users of the inner-circle: “We know your language”—to which one might add, “Your language has become *our* language.”

In fact, Tay (1982) has re-defined the meaning of “native speaker of English” so as to include the increasing number of Singaporeans who have such a high level of proficiency in and sense of belonging to the language that the term “non-native” just does not do them justice. She writes:

A native speaker of English ... is one who learns English in childhood *and* continues to use it as his dominant language *and* has reached a certain level of fluency. All three conditions are important. If a person learns English late in life, he is unlikely to attain native fluency in it; if he learns it as a child, but does not use it as his dominant language in adult life, his native fluency in the language is also questionable; if he is fluent in the language, he is more likely one who has learned it as a child (not necessarily before the age of formal education but soon after that) and has continued to use it as his dominant language.... According to our definition of native speaker, there are many more native speakers of English in Singapore than are normally identified in census reports. (pp. 67–68)

4. For complete and up-to-date bibliographies on research on Singapore English, see Anthea Fraser Gupta’s academic site <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/english/staff/afg/singeb2.html> (accessed June 6, 2005) or David Deterding’s site <http://davidd.myplace.nie.edu.sg/books/singapore-english-bibliography.htm> (accessed June 6, 2005). For an unscholarly but fun compendium of Singaporean English, see <http://www.talkingcock.com/> (accessed June 6, 2005).
5. The Malay language, constitutionally enshrined as the national language of Singapore, has largely symbolic significance only, since apart from the ethnic Malays, few of the younger generation of Singaporeans speak it.

I largely agree with this characterization: language “nativeness” should not be linked solely to geographical birthplace, but is something more personal, tied up with issues of acquisition, development and identity or affiliation. I suggest, however, it is probably more accurate to say that in Singapore there are many native speakers of *Singapore English*. This is a less controversial but still powerful claim, and identifies the variety as a regional dialect without lowering its status. The codification of its formal and informal varieties has not been done, but it is a variety which continues to be passed on from one generation to the next, and some people estimate that more than half of the Singaporeans born since 1965 may be considered native speakers of Singapore English. With this many native speakers, the time is now right for a codified national standard.

What is Singapore English? (or “Which Variety is Singapore English?”)

I must now explain what I mean by Singapore English (SE) as many of the writers on the topic of the New Englishes seldom explain what they mean when they employ terms like “Nigerian English” or “Singapore English” or “Indian English”. Singapore English is not a monolithic, single variety but a configuration of the different varieties of English used in Singapore; i.e., its various registers, styles, idiolects, and so forth. It does not include, however, (and this is important) the learner-varieties of English spoken by Singaporeans with only a minimal command of the language and who only use whatever English they know for a limited range of purposes in limited situations. Such people may use a variety of English similar to the colloquial English of educated speakers, but this is probably because Colloquial Singapore English (CSE) is the only variety of English to which they have easy access and therefore the main variety after which they model themselves and which they strive to imitate. It is, of course, probably the case that historically, many “non-standardisms” in CSE (vis-à-vis British English) arose out of the fossilisation of learner-errors (others, of course, were the result of creative innovations by Singaporeans). However, the CSE spoken nowadays by educated Singaporeans is not something picked up from limited-proficiency speakers, but, rather, is learnt as a native colloquial variety. Foley (1988), Gupta (1994), and Pakir (1988) (just to name three) show conclusively that Singaporean children pick up CSE very early on from the educated adults (principally parents, teachers and even private tutors) around them who do know standard English but choose to use CSE instead.

Visitors to Singapore may confuse the English used by non-proficient learners with the colloquial English used by educated speakers, but the two are quite distinct. The question of when a Singaporean stops being a learner of English and starts being a user is, of course, not an easy one to answer, mainly because even individuals with the same number of years of schooling in English may still have different sociolinguistic backgrounds (some will have been using and reading English a lot outside the classroom while others will not). Putting aside such complicating factors, however, Singapore English may be said to consist of a formal variety, which I will call Standardized Singapore English (SSE, incorporating both spoken and written varieties), and a colloquial variety, Colloquial Singapore English (CSE; mainly spoken, but increasingly being written down as well) which is used within the family, with small children, and in a range of informal situations. Gupta (1991) has characterized the situation of English in Singapore as diglossic, since the High (H) and Low (L) varieties are used in complementary situations, in a pattern very much like Ferguson’s (1959) classic characterisation of diglossic societies. This describes the Singapore situation accurately, but if we consider this formal-informal distinction as a cline of formality, we must also add a cline of proficiency, so that those who are more proficient are recognised as having more control over their language and a greater repertoire of registers (cf. Pakir, 1988). Both the H and

L varieties of educated speakers, then, together constitute Singapore English. Although both have characteristics which make them uniquely Singaporean, only the H-varieties (the spoken and written varieties tied to more formal or high prestige contexts of use) constitute Standardized Singapore English, or SSE, while the L-varieties, which used to be only spoken but are now increasingly appearing in print by creative Singaporean writers, constitute Colloquial Singapore English, where the bulk of the features which are typically Singaporean reside (and hence less intelligible, in the main, to outsiders).⁶

The H-varieties follow British English to a large extent in terms of grammar, and are substantially similar to “International English” in print, although they are characteristically Singaporean when spoken, since the majority of educated and/or high-prestige users speak English with distinctly Singaporean accents, including differences at the suprasegmental level of stress, rhythm and intonation (Deterding & Poedjosoedarmo, 1998; Lim, 2004; Low & Deterding, 2002; Tay, 1982); “accents” is plural because different ethnic group/L1 members have slightly different underlying phonological systems, although everyone agrees that there is an overall, characteristic Singaporean accent. The lexis of the H-varieties, however, may be peppered with Singaporean lexical items such as *hantam* (from Malay, meaning “to hit or beat”), *heng* (from Hokkien, meaning “What luck!/I was fortunate!”), and a host of other loan-words or coinages which are part of Singaporean English in the sense that all Singaporeans know them and use them even if they do not speak the languages from which the words originated. Crucially, educated Singaporeans choose these local lexical items in spite of their knowledge of the English equivalents, which is why these items should not be considered true loan words. The H-varieties are used by Singaporeans in typically more formal speaking and writing contexts and when dealing with foreigners.

The L-varieties of Singapore English are the ones that have most interested sociolinguists over the years, as they constitute the English which is heard most often. These varieties express a lot of “local colour” and, taken together, have been dubbed “Singlish”. The L-varieties usually contain more local lexical items: e.g., *goondu* (meaning “stupid, retarded, lummo, dullard”), *tekan* (Malay for “squeeze, put the screws on him, give her the slow burn”), *cheah lat* (Hokkien for “energy-sapping, a strenuous task”) (Toh, 1982 is a non-scholarly but highly entertaining book with a large collection of such items). There is no space here to discuss the grammar and discourse-level features of the L-varieties in detail, but below are three examples of CSE, which were produced by university undergraduates in informal conversation. It must be noted that these exact same speakers are also capable of using Standardized English if required to:

- (1) “Ai yah! Early early don’t (t) say—now so late already. Where got shop open now?”
(Gloss: “Oh no! Why didn’t you say so earlier? It’s too late now. There won’t be any shops still open.”)
- (2) “Eh, you know that girl Rosemary or not? She very havoc one you know. Every night come home so late, give her father scold!”
(Gloss: “By the way, do you know Rosemary? She’s a real wild one! She often gets home very late at night, and gets a scolding from her father.”)
- (3) “Don’t be like that lah. We all play play only lah.”
(Gloss: “Come on, don’t be like that. You know that we were only playing a game/trick right? [Don’t take it so seriously]”)

The glosses give my rendition of what the same message might sound like in more standardized

6. Richards (1982) comes to almost the same conclusion about SE, but instead of invoking the concept of diglossia, he characterizes the high and low as “rhetorical and communicative styles” respectively.

informal English—the kind which would almost never be used by Singaporean speakers in informal situations with acquaintances. In example (3) the word *lah* is the celebrated Singaporean discourse particle which many linguists find both fascinating and frustratingly hard to describe (cf. Besemeres & Wierzbicka, 2003; Platt, 1987; Richards & Tay, 1977). Other characteristic particles used as part of the grammar and discourse organisation of Singapore English include *meh*, *ho*, *what*, *man*, and *lor*. The precise functions of these particles are still being worked out and argued over by linguists, but what *is* known is that they function in very much the same way as intonation does in the “old varieties” of English: organising the message, changing the pragmatic force of an utterance, intimating familiarity, expressing politeness, and so forth. The pedagogical consequences of these L-variety features will be discussed in a later section below.

Codifying Standardized Singapore English: Precepts and Practice

In theory, the codification of Standardized Singapore English, should be based on purely descriptive facts: that is, on what educated users actually do in various genres and speech events (as evidenced by a corpus). At the macro level of grammar, there are very few differences from International English, and the British standard, which is already quite established ideologically in Singapore, can continue to serve well (cf. Tay 1982). In the areas of lexis (including lexicogrammar—the local grammatical context controlled by lexical items) and phonology, however, Singapore has its own identifiable standards, and it is in these areas that the Singaporean-ness of SSE can surface. With regard to phonology, linguists such as Tay (1982), have said that “In the Singapore context, it is neither feasible nor desirable to teach a variety of English that is indistinguishable from standard British English. When we consider writing in English, we can and should set such a standard.... However, in matters of pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, the acrolect [the dialect of educated speakers] would serve as an adequate teaching model” (pp. 68–69). As for lexical items, the general consensus of linguists is that items of local reference (such as *nonya*, *rojak*, and *kelong*, which relate to cultural or culinary items or concepts) should definitely be accepted as standard since there is hardly any way of “Anglicizing” them without sacrificing brevity or nuances of meaning. As Gupta (1988) notes, “Parallel lexical items can be found in all the geographical varieties of English,” (p. 39) and, besides, the history of the English language has been one of constant borrowing and calquing. And for local coinages and extensions of meaning, I agree with Bloom (1985) that such uses should be considered non-standard “if they entail a relatively brutal change of meaning from the international use” (p. 433). Here, Bloom’s (1985) admittedly impressionistic test of “distinguishing between writers who know what they’re up to and writers who don’t” (pp. 433–434) comes in handy. Bloom (1986) also has this to say about the codification of a standard:

[Tay and Gupta] feel it is possible to begin the study of a standard by isolating a particular population sector (basically those with some particular educational qualification) and examining their speech, while I would prefer to start with a specific social situation and look to a defined population only for judgments of whether the speech recorded in that situation was acceptable or not. (p. 425)

My suggestion is that we adopt Bloom’s method, as it takes a more functional approach to language. Our “language appropriateness consultants” would thus be “those for whom English is rooted, urbanized, flexibly stable and intellectualized” (Bloom, 1986, p. 425). As I have suggested above, the areas for codification are phonology and lexis (along with lexico-grammar where relevant), and we can build on the many studies which have already been done. One major theoretical problem

which remains to be resolved, however, is that of determining “the dividing line between Standard Singapore English and nonstandard-in-any-variety” (Bloom, 1986, p. 433), since this where even native-speaker judgments differ, sometimes significantly; this also brings us to the issue of whether codification should also have a prescriptive element to deal with such cases, by way of clearly marking areas where local usages (even widespread and ingrained ones) perhaps ought to be changed. Bear in mind that I am here only talking about Standardized Singapore English in certain contexts of use (e.g., formal or published writing): these are the formal varieties that should be accepted as correct or idiomatic by educators once they are officially recognised for the designated situations of use. Naturally, the L-varieties that make up Colloquial Singapore English should also be codified, but the status and functional domains of use for CSE are different, and should be clearly marked and taught as marked forms to learners.

Pedagogical Implications: Why We should Acknowledge a Singapore English

The implications of the diglossic English situation for language teaching lie in the fact that the two groups, H and L, are very different in terms of phonology, lexis, grammar, pragmatics, and so forth. These differences need to be overtly addressed in the classroom, not swept under the carpet, and this only be achieved when the government acknowledges the validity of the CSE varieties and consequently puts money into systematically researching and codifying SSE as well. Governmental and educational authorities need to explicitly recognise and accept that there actually exists a Singaporean variety of English that is acquired from childhood onwards and passed on from one generation to the next in much the same way as the different regional dialects in England are learnt and perpetuated: through highly salient, highly local social networks. Both the colloquial and standard varieties of English are very much part of English as it is used in Singapore, and this fact should be acknowledged in the textbooks and grammars that are used, especially in the light of the fact that the vast majority of students learn English from CSE-speaking teachers.

The recognition that the colloquial variety, CSE, is not just “broken English,” “bad English” (or, to use the CSE expression, “half-past-six English”⁷), has important pedagogical implications. For one thing, it would free teachers from having to fight the students’ internalized norms in getting them to speak or write British English in a range of uses where CSE is more natural and appropriate (e.g., in representing informal dialogues in compositions, or in doing role plays not involving old-variety native speakers). A second consequence is that teachers would then be able to focus on correcting the *real* learner errors, instead of correcting things which are virtually uncorrectable and which students will automatically learn to use selectively in different contexts anyway. Thirdly, and most importantly for the conservatives, once the diglossic situation is acknowledged and this fact reflected in the textbooks, by teaching students to differentiate between different contexts of use, the different varieties of English will be more effectively kept apart, because no longer will students hear “this is bad English” used to describe the kind of language which they hear in everyday use all the time, but, instead, teachers would be able to say “this is not appropriate for this situation (if you want to be understood internationally).” Not labelling the English which students speak in L-situations as “bad” or “rotten” would also have the added psychological benefit of boosting their confidence, and they would no longer have to struggle with identifying with and following the norms of Standardized English for informal, localised situations of use. At the same time, students

7. The origin of term “half-past-six” is uncertain. None of the writers who have written on Singapore English have been able to trace its source. It is also used in expressions such as “His mathematics also very half-past-six”.

who have reason to strive for competence in British or American English for the full range of registers (because of job or professional requirements) would be able to pay greater attention to the areas of difference and find the proper motivation for doing so.

With codification, differences between CSE and International English that may give rise to misunderstanding can then be explicitly addressed in the classroom. For example, imperative constructions are used very liberally in CSE, and are often softened in impact only by the use of Singaporean discourse particles. Foreigners in Singapore will often come across utterances such as “you go there and ask *lah*,” “hurry up *lah*,” “wait *ah*.” These structurally imperative constructions do not, in fact, have the force of commands because they are softened by the particles and by the Singaporean intonation, and are recognised as part of the familiar way of speaking in Singapore (such statements are thus intimate rather than impolite). In fact, the use of the alternative, more “proper” and structurally more polite English constructions would almost certainly be taken as more formal and less sincere if used between friends. The pragmatic force and “politeness quotient” of imperatives in CSE are thus different from those in British English.⁸ The examples shown in an earlier section demonstrate how Singapore English is not at all dependent on Britain for its pragmatic norms and strategies, but has its own rules for the production and interpretation of utterances. This obviously has implications for the teaching of English in Singapore, as students will continue to use an L-variety for informal talk no matter how many times they learn the British English or Standard English equivalents.

Yet another pedagogical implication lies in the potential for exploiting CSE to teach Standardized English. Many Singaporean children enter the language classroom with already a sophisticated knowledge of CSE grammar. It is only sensible that grammar textbooks and teachers should exploit this fact, because of the many points of convergence between CSE and SSE. The differences have been much discussed, but we need to see how the commonalities and even the differences can be exploited to stimulate interest and facilitate learning. As Gupta (1991) suggests, when teachers engage in context-sensitive, contrastive analyses of differences between Standardized English and CSE, the students’ oral abilities in CSE are validated (being important for social uses outside the classroom) and even used as resource for teaching Standardized English (because of shared vocabulary and some similarities in grammar). The school can thus provide two English-speaking environments: a StddE environment in the classroom (at appropriate points in the lesson), and a CSE environment in the playground (where CSE is almost always appropriate).

Perhaps just as important, however, are the implications for the social and national character of Singapore. Once Singapore English is officially accepted as a valid, diglossic variety of English in its own right, Singaporeans can then use the colloquial variety more freely and with greater confidence, instead of feeling somewhat guilty and insecure about using it.⁹ This will help Singaporeans break out of their linguistic schizophrenia: the phenomenon of Singaporeans believing

8. Another point to bear in mind is that informal discourse in Singapore is characterised by a high degree of complex code-switching between languages. Any description of the pragmatic norms of CSE should include a note that it is perfectly normal to switch into and out of different languages (and registers of the same language) while speaking CSE.

9. This is evidenced in the nervous giggles and embarrassed laughter of Singapore audiences when confronted with CSE on stage in various drama productions. Dramatists have often commented on this as a “lack of maturity” in the audience. It is more properly seen as a kind of linguistic insecurity: being unsure about CSE because its status is uncertain (not being officially acknowledged) and because it has been labelled for too long as “bad English.”

that native models of English are better, while at the same time not actually wanting to sound like a native-speaker in most contexts of Singaporean life (in terms of pronunciation, word-choice and grammar).¹⁰ This linguistic insecurity will continue as long as educators who have the power to define and make their definitions stick refuse to acknowledge a CSE or even a Singapore English. The government of Singapore and the educational authorities have so far refused to listen to the advice of the sociolinguists in Singapore to codify and then use Standard Singapore English in schools. Most of these sociolinguists, ironically, are old-variety native speakers of English, who know that the institutionalization of a Standard Singapore English will not result in a lowering of standards, but may in fact help students, especially since they are not advocating a variety which does not already exist, nor promoting a variety of English which is not already being used. As Bloom (1986) says,

The fear is that a Singapore English is just not good enough for the jobs English is required to do here. ... Personally I don't think there is any doubt: the language of educated Singaporeans from the English [educational] stream has served the purpose for years now and there is no linguistic reason why it should not continue to do so (p. 436).

A Pedagogical Grammar that is Communicative in the Singapore Context: Materials Development

What I think Singapore needs, once the idea of a codified Singapore English is accepted, is something on the order of Leech & Svartvik's (1975) *A Communicative Grammar of English*, which was "designed to present grammar to advanced learners in a way which encouraged a new awareness of the integration of grammatical form with meaning, use, and text organization" (Leech, 1988, p. 7). Singapore needs just such a textbook, but one that is suited the local context. Which variety of "language in use" do Singaporean students observe and hear all the time? Which pragmatic norms are operative in Singaporean situations? As Pakir (1988) observes:

how can classroom discourse development proceed naturally in Standard English that comes from elsewhere when (a) students find it too formal and irrelevant for natural discourse and (b) teachers find it irksome to teach prescribed exonormative standards when they do not themselves hold such standards? Indeed, it is tempting to subscribe to the notion that teachers may themselves be norm-breakers. (p 12)

However, to ensure that learners end up bidialectal/multi-dialectal, with a knowledge of both Singaporean and International English norms, textbooks ought to take note of the differences. We can thus help relieve the current tension between ideal and actual, textbook and practice, by teaching what the British (for example) tend to do and contrasting that with the codified Singaporean norms (the H- and L-varieties, the lexis, the different registers, norms, rules of discourse, and so forth). It seems contrastive analysis has been for too long a neglected a tool for language teaching (Marton, 1981). As Leech (1988) says,

Contrastive grammar, I would argue, should also be placed in the communicative grammar framework: the soundest basis for comparison between different languages and their grammars is translation equivalence; and grammatical "false friends"... should be related and contrasted in terms of meaning and conditions of use. (p. 15)

10. Seah (1987) reports a tension in Singaporeans between what they think should be standard and what they actually feel comfortable in speaking and hearing.

I would extend this argument to incorporate the contrastive analysis of CSE against SSE and British English (something along the lines of Bowers, Bamber, Straker Cook & Thomas, 1987; in which comparisons between languages are invited). This should not be too difficult as teachers will not be burdening students with a foreign language, but a variety of English which they already know and speak and which they identify with on an affective level.

Another important point is that there should also probably be a planning out of different goals that are to be attained by different groups of students. It is clear that for the majority of learners, an adequate goal is for them to be sufficiently literate in English to do their jobs well in Singapore. The goal should not be to produce people who will be able to blend in with “the natives” should they happen to land up in London, New York or Sydney. If even a sizeable minority of Singaporean students are destined to emigrate to England or America, then it might make sense to teach them British English or American English in all the relevant aspects of pronunciation, lexis, pragmatics, rhetorical and stylistic norms. But this is obviously not the case: the vast majority learn English primarily for instrumental reasons and to communicate with fellow Singaporeans. Contact with old-variety native English speakers is minimal in most occupations and professions. One thing is certain, however: Singaporeans do not need to learn to speak Received Pronunciation (RP), which seems to be favoured by the government and, in the past, by broadcasters too (news-readers used to be trained to mimic RP, with varying degrees of success; nowadays, news-readers with pronounced local accents can be heard on the TV and radio). In the first place, there are not enough teachers for this goal to be attained, and even if there were, the kind of English spoken outside the language laboratory is a much stronger influence. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, most Singaporeans do not even want to sound like the British.¹¹ As Tay (1982) notes,

The desire to be recognised as Singaporean probably explains why the average Singaporean, including the language teacher, considers it important to aim at a standard indistinguishable from standard British English in the area of *syntax* but not in the area of *phonology* (pronunciation, rhythm, stress, and intonation) and *vocabulary*. It is the phonology and vocabulary, rather than the grammar, that identify the speaker as distinctly Singaporean. (p.55, added italics)

To this, Smith (1985) adds: “Non-native speakers... should be trained to be examples of educated speakers of Standard English [who are] identifiably from their country... A good pronunciation is one that a variety of educated listeners find intelligible” (p. 3). One of the first things that needs to be done, then, is to decide on a Singaporean model of pronunciation that Singaporeans will actually use, with an intonational pattern that will be accepted internationally. Note that I am not saying that everything about the way most Singaporeans currently speak is absolutely fine and in no need of change. There are segmental and prosodic habits that Singaporeans will probably need to learn to break (and a new generation taught not to develop) in the interests of international intelligibility, for certain contexts of use. Many things, however, do not need changing, and so the ideal is not BBC English but, as has been suggested before, something more akin to the kind of English spoken by Singapore’s former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew.

What about the written language—in particular, academic written genres? My suggestion is that we follow current international norms as much as possible since academic articles are intended as a means for international scholars to communicate ideas within their specialised fields. The academic journal article is not, it seems to me, the best site for contestation of norms, or the best arena in which to insist on the right to be creative or different. After all, *all* writers, including old-variety native speakers, have to learn to “write into” these professional genres, not just

11. Again, the reader is referred to Seah’s (1987) findings.

non-native speakers. Academic English is not a monolithic variety, and certainly there are restive cries from the “periphery” about resisting the norms and challenging genre customs. However, we short-change our students if we take too liberal a stance and allow them to write however they like, in all genres. For many other written genres, too, I would recommend that contestation of norms be left to people who really know what they are doing, and who can afford to break the mould and deal with the consequences. Learners, however, should at least be taught what the generally accepted practices are. Thus equipped, they can then make their own informed choices on a case-by-case basis.

On the issue of textbooks, one of the consequences of recognising a Singaporean variety of English is that we can then achieve greater realism in the presentation of dialogues and reading passages. In one Hong Kong textbook (Methold & Tadman, 1990), for example, we find a “situational dialogue” in which a client consults a road-side palmist or fortune-teller in English (p. 7). This is a highly unlikely situation in Hong Kong, where Cantonese would be used in such situations, and it is similarly incongruous in the Singapore context. It is hard to see what benefit students will derive from such a dialogue since they will probably never get the chance in real life to converse with a palmist in English. Tay (1986) makes the following comment with reference to Singapore:

As far as curricula and materials are concerned, how does one teach the use of English in social situations when normally an informal variety of English is mixed with, say, an informal variety of Hokkien? If one introduces the type of English that is useful at cocktail parties, the student would perhaps be able to function well the next time he attends a cocktail party, but how important is such a function for the average Singaporean? *A hierarchy ought to be worked out of social situations in which only English is used in order to decide what to include in a communicative syllabus of English.* (p. 105; italics added)

This advice needs to be taken seriously, as nothing alienates students more than unrealistic situations, with formal English dialogues in presented in contexts where colloquial Singapore English is the natural norm. Gupta (1991) warns that language teaching will not be successful where it is running counter to the prejudices of learners: in the context of Singapore, this means that StdE should not be presented to students as the model for informal situations because this simply does not reflect the discourse realities. Gupta also suggest that such mismatches in the presentation of English may even result in many Singaporeans rejecting StdE even for the more formal, non-colloquial situations where a more standardized variety might be desirable—a pedagogical outcome which we would surely wish to avoid.

All these points are sufficient reason for a change of attitude towards CSE (see Kachru, 1985 for a discussion of what these changes involve). Singapore’s materials writers have for too long depended on British English sources. One more point should convince them that a switch to Singapore English as a model is necessary: the fact of different cultural and sociopragmatic norms. Again I take an example from the Hong Kong textbook mentioned earlier (written by British English speakers). The following is another “situational dialogue” that is supposed to teach students how to conduct themselves in telephone conversations. Here, Tony rings John to invite him out:

John: This is 5354768. Hello?
 Tony: Hi John! This is Tony.
 John: Hi Tony! How are you?
 Tony: Fine, thanks. I’m ringing to ask if you’d like to go to [...]
 John: That sounds great! Yes, I’d love to come.
 Tony: Good. It’s more fun with a friend!
 John: Yes, I know what you mean! ...

What is interesting about this conversation is that its norms and word choices are highly culture-specific. As Sifianou (1989, p. 531) points out, the practice of answering a phone call by reciting your phone number is a very English practice that is not universally shared (it is certainly not practised in Greek or Singaporean culture). Tony's response of identifying himself as the caller is, again, a culture-specific practice. Sifianou believes that the Greek practice of not identifying who you are is tied to the positive politeness orientation of Greek culture: "allowing your hearer to identify you with minimal resources also conveys the idea that the two of you are very close ... if the answerer does not recognise the voice of the caller and asks "Who is it?" he or she will very often be teased instead of receiving a straight answer.... Expressions like "Oh! you've forgotten me" and a kind of guessing game are not uncommon" (pp. 533–534). There are, therefore, quite a number of subtle and not-so-subtle cultural assumptions behind even such a simple discourse event as a phone conversation. One could also point out that the rather effusive "That *sounds great!* Yes, I'd *love* to come" is not likely to be imitated by a Singaporean. A more typical Singaporean response would be rather more subdued, something like: "Can, can. Ok. Yah, I think I can make it." At best, a Singaporean would say "I don't mind going." Then, there is the "Yes" in John's reply which almost certainly would have been "Yah" in CSE (c.f. the British and American "Yeah"). What all these point to is the fact that if British writers write our textbooks for us, then sometimes, unlikely or awkward situations may be created which have nothing to do with the "real world out there," which communicative syllabuses are supposed to be linked to. And in the case of Indian English or Nigerian English, there is also the problem of different register norms: these two varieties of English are rather more "bookish" than British English, having more formal, "literary" styles of discourse for genres which in British English are more informal or plain. What is normal and plain English in India may be considered flowery or "purple prose" in England, but who is to be the ultimate judge? Such "purple prose" is not ridiculed in India, but is instead admired for its more "learned" flavour, probably because of the historical legacy that the Sanskrit tradition has left to the Indian people. Similarly, in Chinese culture, the memorising and use of proverbs, idioms and wise sayings is given much emphasis, and to use these liberally in speech or writing is considered a mark of great learning. In English, however, most of the equivalent fixed expressions would be considered clichés or platitudes, and are thus avoided in writing by old-variety native speakers because such uses are deemed as showing a lack of originality (Tay, 1986). The contexts and norms of Singapore English call for a different model against which to measure appropriateness, communicative effectiveness, and so forth. Of course, there are also contexts in which it is useful to know British, American, Australian, or other rules and norms, but materials writers will need to be selective, bearing in mind the level of the learner, aims and goals, and so forth. Yet another pedagogical implication of the recognition of CSE, therefore, is that Singaporean teachers of Singapore English will no longer have to pretend to be experts on the sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects of British/American English usage, but can rely on intelligently written, situationally sensitive textbooks which directly address areas of similarity and difference from an authoritative standpoint, being based on a properly researched and codified SSE.

One of the central tenets of the communicative approach to language teaching is that learning takes place most effectively when the language being modelled or rehearsed is "real" in the sense of being embedded in authentic communicative contexts: real tasks being accomplished in realistic situations. The question we need to ask, however, is: "Real for whom?" If students are to feel any affinity for the language, it must in some way reflect the sociolinguistic realities of their culture, not those of some distant land. Only then can so-called "authentic" language (a potential only) presented in textbooks be *authenticated* by learners (i.e., validated, appropriated, accepted

as worthy of study). The time is right for a communicative grammar of Singapore English “in which grammatical forms or structures are related to the meanings which they express, and to the conditions under which they are used ... a grammar of performance, as well as of competence ... in which grammar is related to semantics, pragmatics, and style” (Leech, 1988, p. 14). This would help alleviate the awkward situation that now exists, in which the existence of Colloquial Singapore English:

complicates life for the teacher who often fails to distinguish between errors unacceptable even in Singapore English and those which are acceptable variants according to objective and functions and whether reading or writing is being considered. Most language teachers seem unable to accept that styles and registers may vary according to function; they begin from a model of correct (almost always formal even frozen) language which they then seek to impose on their pupils. (Gopinathan & Saravanan, 1985, pp. 70–71)

With the codification and official validation of a Singapore English at the governmental level, directions should become clearer. It would also make possible a move away from external examinations set by Cambridge and other external bodies towards examinations relevant to the local context. To reassure people that notional “global standards” are still being maintained, there could perhaps be an international panel of experts set up to oversee things initially. A local examination and a local syllabus based on local sociolinguistic and discourse realities, however, is surely long overdue.

Conclusion

I agree wholeheartedly with Bloom (1986), who argues that:

the requisite international viability of the English of Singaporeans cannot be maintained *unless* the codification of SSE takes place; that the only alternative of a more-than-adequate Singapore standard is a wholly *inadequate* version of a British standard; that a refusal to accept the desirability of SSE may itself be responsible for the “degeneration” of local English that is so much feared. (p. 436)

Keeping an exonymic “dummy” standard of English which no one ever quite achieves just for the sake of appearances and conservative notions of “international intelligibility” does not do anything for the morale of teachers or learners. The government need not fear that SSE will be unintelligible, because, as I have outlined in this paper, what is characteristically Singaporean is largely confined to lexis and phonology and to the informal genres. Once Singapore sets up a coherent standard and allows it to gain currency, people (including foreign investors) round the world will know for a fact that the standard English of Singapore *is* intelligible, and that the anecdotes they hear about “bad English” in Singapore only refer to the colloquial variety, which is spoken in certain contexts in accordance with local linguistic norms. In relation to formal written Singapore texts, however, which are mostly indistinguishable from British texts, it is also important to note that the Singapore identity is still inherent, in spirit if not in form, “because it is written by someone who *speaks* Singapore English, spoken language having ontogenetic, phylogenetic and descriptive priority over the written form” (Bloom, 1986, p. 441). This is a fact which I hope will, in time to come, be accepted by government, academics and Singaporeans alike.

The challenges which the New Englishes throw up go beyond the parochial confines of the individual varieties: they have implications for corpus compilers and the writers of pedagogical grammars who aim to capture a representative picture of English as it is used internationally. Davy (1986), for example, argued that future surveys of English usage and future corpus collections should incorporate a survey of attitudes towards different varieties of English. The International

Corpus of English project (Greenbaum, 1991a, 1991b, 1996), currently underway in various countries where English has a major institutionalized role, should go at least half-way towards meeting this goal. Linguists and language teachers should all look forward to a more empirically based model of International English which is reflective of variation and shared features, not prescriptive of them.

I would like to end with a quote from a group of researchers involved in a questionnaire survey of disputed English usages (such as “He is taller than me/I am”). Although their comments relate to quite a different matter altogether, they point, nonetheless, to the same underlying cause for so many of the controversies in language and linguistics: “Both in the historical survey and in some of the answers to the questionnaire we found what seemed to be indications of pedantry, of prejudice, of readiness to pontificate, and of unrealistic conservatism” (Mittins, Salu, Edminson, & Coyne, 1970, p. 112). One can only hope that those who continue to oppose the recognition and codification of the New Englishes will show a little less ignorance and a lot more enlightened thinking in the years to come.

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