Singlish in the classroom: Native-speakerism and native and non-native speaking teachers of English in Singapore

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A dissertation submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

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2013
Abstract

The notion of ‘native-speakerism’ in the field of English Language Teaching (Hollliday, 2005, 2006) involves a cultural chauvinism said to originate in prevailing Western educational culture, whereby learners and teaching associates are ‘Othered’ to stereotypical caricatures by language teachers of a sociolinguistically more dominant linguistic heritage. The discourses of native-speakerism assume that native speakers of a language are its authorities and arbiters and as such place ‘native speaker’ competency as a learning target. This study compared the attitudes of a sample (N = 32) of self-identified ‘native speakers’ and ‘non-native speaking’ English Language subject teachers in Singapore toward the classroom role of a local variety of English (Colloquial Singapore English or CSE, popularly known as Singlish). Data gathered through analyses of an attitudinal questionnaire, follow-up semi-structured interviews and a document analysis study suggested, in regards to Singlish, an apparent role reversal: while Singapore self-described ‘non-native speaking’ English language teachers evidenced negative views of CSE, their expatriate ‘native speaking’ counterparts asserted the legitimacy of Singlish as a language variety. These findings share some commonalities with earlier studies identified by Waters (2007b), where data gathered from ‘non-native speakers’ appeared counter-intuitive to some of the tenets of native-speakerism. The research suggested that the aims of government campaigns intended to foster negative attitudes toward Singlish have been effective among Singaporean English Language teachers, while the field of World Englishes, with its emphasis on pluralism in language varieties, has exerted attitudinal influence on their expatriate colleagues.
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CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

__________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of candidate                        Date

ENDORSEMENT

__________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of supervisor                        Date
Acknowledgements

The researcher is grateful for the help and support of Kari Lawson; of my colleagues at CfBT Education in both Singapore and Malaysia; of Simon Reynolds and team at the CPDD of the Singapore Ministry of Education; of my supervisor Shirley O’Neill; of Cristy Bartlett from the USQ Faculty of Education; of my colleagues at RELC; and of Keltie Ross at the UCQ Learning Commons. Thanks to Donna Blewett, Eric Tull, Hassan Kandar, and Jolisa Tweedie for their help in proofreading. Ken Ryba provided timely encouragement and helpful feedback during the draft phase. Robert Johnson gave tireless and patient advice, invaluable assistance in the statistical analysis, hard work and inspiration throughout the process in ways too numerous to mention. I am grateful to my colleagues at RELC in Singapore who graciously mentored me in so very many ways. I feel very fortunate to have had opportunity to work alongside dedicated educators in rural Malaysia who inspired, challenged, taught and always humbled me. A special thank you goes to the teaching staff and students at the neighbourhood secondary school in Singapore where I spent three fulfilling years: you have breathed life into this research.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>Colloquial Singapore English, commonly referred to as Singlish</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPDD</td>
<td>Curriculum Planning &amp; Development Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Critical Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>English Language (the school subject)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELT</td>
<td>English Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>(Singapore) Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>native speaker(s)/native speaking</td>
</tr>
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<td>NNS</td>
<td>non-native speaker(s)/non-native speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>political correctness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCE(s)</td>
<td>Postcolonial English(es)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>Research method</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ</td>
<td>Research question</td>
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<td>SGEM</td>
<td>Speak Good English Movement</td>
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<td>SSE</td>
<td>Standard Singapore English</td>
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<tr>
<td>StdE</td>
<td>Standard English</td>
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<tr>
<td>TC(s)</td>
<td>Teacher Consultant(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>WE</td>
<td>world Englishes</td>
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