

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

M. Gregory Tweedie

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Supervisor: Associate Professor Shirley O'Neill

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### Abstract

The notion of 'native-speakerism' in the field of English Language Teaching (Holliday, 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.

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Signature of candidate

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Date

**ENDORSEMENT**

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Signature of supervisor

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Date

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### **Abbreviations**

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