

Glocalization: A Global Language of Local Importance

Summary

This volume of the ELIS Research Digest, Volume 3, focuses on discussing a 'curriculum that prepares students for the future'. While Singapore must make its own preparations for the future, this can only be done by taking the wider context into account. The role of English in Singapore, and thus in its education system, will, to some extent, be affected by the role of English globally. Local needs and global influences will combine in creating the future. In this issue, we look at the importance of English in Singapore both as a global language providing, among other things, a link to trade, science and technology (including the Internet), and as a significant, unifying, local language. In order to do that, we need to look at the position that English may have in the near future not only in Singapore but also worldwide. The possible impact this could have on the education system in the future will be highlighted.

Introduction

Alsagoff (2010a) used the term 'glocalization' to describe the situation in Singapore where speakers of English used it as a language tool for economic reasons to deal with the wider world and, at the same time, as a local language expressing the identity and culture of being Singaporean. For Alsagoff (2010b), 'glocalization' emphasized the simultaneous global and local demands on the use of English in Singapore that produced a two-way flow between the global and the local. Similarly, Graddol (1998) felt that globalization produced a tension between the global and the local with a flow and counter-flow between them. The English language influenced local languages that assimilated words and concepts from English as the latter invaded some of the communication areas of the local languages. At the same time, the local languages influenced English, which resulted in the development of new hybrid language varieties. The term, glocalization, has thus been adopted in this issue to highlight the multiple considerations necessary when examining the future role of English in Singapore generally and in its education system in particular. (See also Pakir, 2000.)

In the following sections, we will first examine the possible trends for English globally before moving on to look at the situation in Singapore with regard to the growth and roles of English in Singa-

pore, the standards that Singapore might adopt and the place of English in education. In all this, it is worth remembering that trying to predict trends for the future is difficult: inaccurate at best and completely wrong at worst. Graddol (1998) noted that there had been many failures of prediction in the past and predictions regarding the future of English were not likely to do any better. However, planning for the future requires some attempt to extrapolate the past and current situations to future trends.

The ownership of English

In estimating the relative impact of a language, there is a need to decide whose use of the language to include in the calculation and the relative importance to attach to the contributions of each category of user.

Generally, writers (Graddol, 1998, 2004, 2006; Gupta, 1998; Kachru, 1998) divided language users into three groups – first language users (often also identified as native speakers), second language speakers (speakers for whom the target language was not the dominant language but who might use it within their own community for certain functions such as business) and foreign language speakers (i.e. speakers who had studied the language but for whom it was not generally a common communication tool). 'First language' was often seen as synonymous with 'native lan-

guage' and 'mother tongue'. However, Crystal (2003) drew a further distinction: 'first language' was the main language of a person at that point in their life while 'native language' (or 'mother tongue') was the first language a child learnt from his or her parents or caregivers. These were usually the same language but they could be different.

Kachru (1998) talked about the status of English as a language that was used in Asia but was not seen as Asian. He pointed out that English was already affecting Asian cultures in terms of aspects such as interaction patterns, economies and, importantly, the identities of individuals, of societies and even of other languages.

Bhatt (2001) felt that English had become the most respected and universally spoken and written language in the world and suggested that current linguistic and literary creativity was in the hands of non-native speakers of English rather than native speakers. He pointed out they outnumbered native-speakers by a ratio of 4:1. Canagarajah (2006) believed that generally the written language was universally the same (Standard Written English or SWE). (See also Bao & Hong, 2006.) However, creative writing was a bit more tolerant and postcolonial writers had been able to incorporate aspects of the local culture, values and discourse patterns into their literature. Later, he added, in the post-enlightenment period, it was understood that texts other than literary texts could also vary according to the writer's beliefs, values and approach to the subject.

Kachru (1998) suggested that the varied status of English resulted in there being a number of centres of English that provided norms and models as well as teaching methods and materials for teaching in their own context. This allowed for the recognition of local varieties of English altered through the influence of local languages with the changes being formalized in local dictionaries and teaching materials. He felt that this was likely to result in there being two sets of norm providers. One group would be first language (L1 or native) norm providers such as Australia and New Zealand. A second group would be second language (L2) norm providers such as the Philippines, Singapore and India. Outside these two groups, there would be a further group that would consist of users of the norms set by others. These would

include places such as China, Japan and Korea. This development was of concern to Kachru as he felt that regional varieties would then not have any standing vis-à-vis native standards with the implication that 'native speakers' could come only from specific countries.

Gupta (1998) suggested that an individual's native language was the language they learnt in infancy before any other (i.e. in that sense, their first language). She argued that a person's native language did not depend on genetics or location of birth. Thus, from her point of view, anyone who learnt English before any other language was a native speaker of English no matter where they were born nor what ethnic group they belonged to. Gupta (1994), however, noted most Singaporeans used 'native speaker' to mean 'a white person from a traditionally English-speaking country' (p. 15). She pointed out that, in Singapore's highly multilingual situation, it was, in fact, often difficult to identify native speakers (as she defined them) as opposed to highly proficient users of particular languages. The situation was quite different from a monolingual community where an individual was brought up speaking only the language of that community. Moreover, Gupta (1994) suggested, some Singaporeans were native speakers of Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) rather than Singapore Standard English (SSE), which further complicated the situation.

Graddol (2006) suggested that there was a new language that was pushing out the dominant English language – and that was English itself. However, the new English was not the language of Shakespeare: it was a language with new owners, owners different from the monolingual 'native-speakers' who traditionally claimed the language. As an example of how English had become a language used and 'owned' by others, Graddol (2006) pointed to the around 763 million international travellers in 2004. Of these, close to three-quarters involved visitors from a non-English-speaking country going to a non-English-speaking destination, people for whom the common language of communication would be English. (See also Ke, 2015.)

Graddol (2006) also commented on the proposal of the Indian Prime Minister to the 11th meeting of ASEAN in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005 as an example of the widening interpretation of 'native

speaker' teacher. The Prime Minister proposed that India set up 'Centres for English Language Training' in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam 'to equip students, civil servants, professionals and businessmen with adequate English language and communication skills'.

Graddol (1998) suggested that the difference between second language speakers of English and foreign language speakers of English (even fluent ones) was that, for the first, English was used in some areas of life in their immediate community whereas, for the second, English was not generally used within their own community. For the second language speakers, English was part of the speaker's identity and, as people in that community used the language with each other, they inevitably developed their own local model. Cavallaro and Ng (2009) highlighted that the language forms and words we used and the way we sounded all told others something about us and our backgrounds. This was important for establishing the group identity of individual language users (Canagarajah, 2006). For the foreign language speakers, there was no local model of English although their English might reflect similar language features as those of other speakers from the same language background.

Dor (2004), however, cautioned that the notion of 'native speaker' was still a concept heard in some discussions of English. He pointed out that these native speakers were still being seen as important to the operations of global businesses.

In terms of estimating the numbers of the different speakers of English, Crystal (2003) was a little cautious and looked only at territories that had some special relationship with English (e.g. where English was an official language of the territory or the territory had a history related to English). His figures for the 75 territories he identified showed they had an estimated total population of 2.2 billion of whom 423 million were second language speakers of English and 329 million were first language speakers of English, producing a ratio of approximately 5:4, quite different from the 4:1 given by Bhatt (2001). However, it has to be remembered that Crystal's figures did not include users of English in countries such as Argentina,

Brazil, China and France, which, if included, would have changed the ratio dramatically.

As an aside, for Singapore, the estimated figures for 2001 given by Crystal (2003, p. 109) were 4.3 million for the total population, 350,000 for first language speakers of English and 2 million for second language speakers of English. These figures were substantially different from the 2000 Census figures (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2001) which showed the Singapore resident population (citizens and permanent residents) in 2000 to be 2.9 million of whom just over 665,087 (23%) used English as their main home language. Some 1.6 million (56%) claimed to be literate in English.

Continued global growth of English

Canagarajah (2006) pointed out that, when English first spread to the colonies in the early 16th century, it was a contact language between the colonizers and the colonized. However, it was also

a contact language among the elite of the colonized. As a result, in a number of colonial countries, there had been some demands from the local population that more English be used in the schools to ensure those

graduating had the linguistic tools to attain political and economic power.

Suárez (2005) suggested that one of the important decisions for any national programme of language instruction was whether to focus on a local language or on a globally important language used for science, technology and business. Bhatt (2001) believed that the successful spread of English had been due to the economic dominance of the UK and the US and was a case of linguistic pragmatism that led to people and nations choosing the language of business. English was the language choice as multinational corporations (MNCs) generally required English proficiency from their workforce at all levels. (See also Ke, 2015.) Small countries were particularly sensitive to this issue as they tended to depend more on the attraction of investment from foreign MNCs and often sought to make themselves international trading hubs. Suárez (2005) noted that it was not just multinationals from English-speaking

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countries that favoured an English-speaking workforce. MNCs from places such as Japan were known to prefer such workers. Moreover, there was often a wage differential in favour of workers proficient in English that encouraged workers to learn to use the language. He pointed out that the English 'language has become so prevalent that it is increasingly being thought of not as a foreign language, but as a basic skill like mathematics.' (Suárez, 2005, p. 461)

While Graddol (1998) believed it was unlikely that English would lose this status as the world's most important economic language in the near future, he warned that the situation was less certain than some believed. He suggested that the world had already entered a period of rapid change that was likely to last for some 20 years with the patterns of usage and public attitudes to English only finally stabilizing around 2050. There was an assumption that, as English spread, it would adapt to local conditions and result in forms quite different to the current norms used in North America and Britain. In places where English was used extensively as a second language, as in some countries in South and Southeast Asia, distinct varieties of English were developing that included aspects from the languages used alongside English. This diversity would be in contrast to the perceived need for the global inter-intelligibility required of a lingua franca.

For Graddol (1998), one of the enduring strengths of English was that it had always been in contact with other languages, which resulted in the evolutionary changes that English had gone through. However, he wondered if, despite this strength, other languages would grow to rival English in importance and push it aside in much the same way as Latin had been pushed aside as a lingua franca 300 years earlier.

Graddol (1998, 2006) predicted that the dominance of English might be contested by a group of languages including Chinese and Spanish. While the total 'market' for English might grow, its share of that market would drop in competition with these other major languages. One of the current strengths of English came from its dominance of technological space. In the formative years of the Internet, for example, English completely dominated. Dor (2004) reported that in 1997, 45 million English speakers were using the

Net, whereas the number of non-English-speaking users was 16 million. However, continuing technological advances were constantly making it easier for other cultures and languages to be represented in video, Internet sites and other global communication systems. By 2003, there were only approximately 230 million English-speaking Internet users, as against the 403 million non-English-speaking users (Dor, 2004).

At the same time, economic growth in areas such as South America and East Asia meant that Spanish and Chinese were likely to become strong in their respective regions. Graddol (2004, 2006) argued that it was very likely that English would continue to have an important role but this would be in combination with other languages resulting in growing numbers of bilingual and multilingual speakers across the world. These bilingual and multilingual speakers would then have greater economic value than the monolingual 'native-speakers' of English in the US and UK. He noted that employers were already looking for people who could speak other languages, such as Mandarin in the case of Asia, as well as English.

Given this prediction, it is interesting that Fang (2011) raised fears that English had assumed such an importance as a business tool even in China that people there were willing to spend more time learning English than perfecting their Chinese. He was concerned that the dominance of English (even in China) might result in the impoverishment of the local language and the knowledge Chinese speakers might have of their own culture. Wei and Su (2012) estimated some figures using the 2000 Census data as a base and a representative sample to add detail. They estimated that, out of a population of 1.27 billion, 415.95 million (32.96%) had studied a foreign language, which was a big jump from the number of between 200 and 300 million reported by Lee-Wong (2001) for 1990. Of this group, 93.8% (390.16 million) had studied English. However, only 7.3% used it often and 23.3% used it sometimes. Only 5.33% felt they could converse quite fluently and 15.93% could read with the help of a dictionary or better. Thus, although the number of learners was huge, the proportion that was fluent and used the language regularly was relatively small.

Bolton and Graddol (2012) found that one important reason why people studied English was

that they felt it gave them a competitive edge in the job market. This might not necessarily mean they would actually use it. They went on to note that the Chinese university sector was now the biggest in the world with over 25 million students, most of whom were required to study English. Bolton and Graddol (2012) reported that these students learnt English well and many then went overseas to study for higher degrees.

Despite some doubts then, the evidence seemed to indeed point to a greater need for English. Graddol (1998) reported that more and more people needed to communicate transnationally as a result of growing world trade. A growing number of jobs demanded a common language for transnational communication and so competence in English had become a growing need. Even as impressive as available data seemed, he suspected that this phenomenon was actually underreported. As economies developed, they moved from the primary sector (resource extraction and agriculture), through the secondary sector (manufacturing, etc.) to the tertiary sector (service industries). The latter sector was dominated by Transnational Companies (TNCs) that used English as their main language of transnational communication. However, as this communication was internal to the TNCs, it was not included in the data open for study thus hiding the amount of English being used.

Further to the growth in the service industry sector, Graddol (1998) pointed out that there appeared to be a growing global English-speaking market in the knowledge-intensive industries from which English-speaking countries, whether first or second language, could benefit as the work required a high level of competence in the English language. The products – documents, recordings, etc. – were light and thus easily transportable around the world at little cost. As they were distributed, they carried the language they used with them, increasing the number of people who needed to acquire proficiency in English.

As Graddol (1998) noted, related to the use of English in science and technology was the need

for students to learn in English, rather than the national language, some subjects at school or university, simply because the latest information in these areas was almost exclusively written in English.

However, the current advantage that English enjoyed in this area might not last. Dor (2004) reported that more multinationals were looking for ways of moving into local markets using the local language. Also, Graddol (1998) suggested that as more countries moved into the tertiary sector and rose in economic status, they themselves might begin to export their skills and technology to their less expensive neighbours. As they did so, they were likely to ‘export’ their language and culture at the same time.

The result of these developments might again be the growing importance of regional languages. School programmes might become more diversified,

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Graddol (1998) described three possible scenarios for the future for Asia. The first was that English could remain the preferred language of international communication, partly because the investment that had already been made in the language had been too costly to lightly throw away. Moreover, those elites that had benefited from the role of English in the past would be loath to lose that advantage.

A second possibility would be that the strength and size of the Chinese economy and the appeal of its related culture would ensure that Mandarin would become the regional lingua franca.

A third possibility was that there would be a multiplicity of regional languages and each country would promote in their schools a different array of foreign languages depending on the economic and political strength of its near neighbours. For the Southeast Asian region, he suggested that the

languages most likely to grow in importance and numbers were Mandarin, Malay and Tok Pisin.

Graddol (1998) pointed out there were, of course, other possible scenarios. For example, right or wrong, English might become associated in the minds of many with industrialization, the loss of local minority languages and cultures, the failure to provide for young learners to learn in their own native languages and the increasing economic and social differences. Ke (2015) noted, for example, that some blamed the spread of English for the death of some of the world's languages. As a result, people might turn against the language seeing it as a tool of colonial aggression and this would lead to a loss in its usefulness as a global language. Graddol (2006) thought that this might happen even though English was not the cause of, for example, the loss of minority languages, which were often lost due to pressure from national languages. Indeed, House (2003) claimed that English as a lingua franca did not pose a threat to local languages of identity as much as national and regional languages.

Dor (2004) raised a further issue suggesting that the spread of English to new markets could not be as easy as the spread of technologies such as the mobile phone. As Ke (2015) pointed out, it could take years to learn a language as against weeks or months to learn to use communication tools. To learn a language, people needed to have time and exposure. Language learning was not a simple matter of passive exposure to vocabulary through television and films. That seemed to work only for an already learnt language where the passive exposure allowed the learner to extend an already existing vocabulary. Dor (2004) thus felt that, for English to take root in any area, it would need to be taken up by the education system and take over some of the social functions of the community and thus become part of the local language structure. This could take decades, even with the full support of the state. The likelihood of a language being taken up in this way would depend on its communication value, i.e. how far it would help in allowing different national groups to communicate with each other when otherwise they would not be able to (Dor, 2004).

Dor (2004) went on to propose that pulling against the adoption of a global language would be other factors such as the tendency of nation

states to promote their own national language in defence of their own politics and culture. This would include the standardization of the national language, giving it greater prestige. Also, there would be competition from other regional languages that could perhaps work as a tool for regional communication. Finally, the learners would tend to come only from the higher social groups putting a limit on the numbers likely to take up the language. All these factors would militate against English spreading to large numbers of people.

Below is a list of the more relevant trends predicted by Graddol (2006):

1. It was likely that the current tremendous growth in learners would peak at two billion in 10 or so years and then begin to fall. This would not affect the established base of speakers but might limit further growth.
2. The types of learners outside schools would vary widely. The proportion of older learners would grow as more young people learnt English in school as a basic educational skill.
3. The 'native-speaker' would no longer be a requirement as native-speaker norms became less relevant to countries where English was a basic educational requirement along with the national language, numeracy and ICT skills. (See also Suárez, 2005)
4. Knowing English would not be enough for a person to compete. Bilingual and multilingual speakers would be required for business as English became a basic skill requirement everywhere.
5. Other languages would compete with English on the Internet. Languages, such as Mandarin and Spanish, would also compete for the world's attention.
6. Asia would become the key to the long-term future of English as a global language with a lot depending on China and India.

Maintaining standards

There has been a lot of discussion regarding whether the growth in the use of English worldwide would result in the splintering of the language into mutually incomprehensible varieties. (See, for example, Bhatt, 2001.) Graddol (1998) highlighted the tension between, on the one hand, the global use of English as a means of wider

communication, which would demand global uniformity and lead to worries about individuals or groups not meeting those standards, and, on the other, the increasing number of people using English as a second language within their own communities, which was likely to lead to a growing number of local varieties or standards. (See also Pakir, 2010, regarding the opposing forces of conservation and innovation.) This flow and counter-flow between the demands on English as it relates to Singapore was also discussed by Alsagoff (2010b).

Widdowson (1997) made a similar point. He believed that a language did not just ‘spread’ to other communities. In the process of spreading, the new communities appropriated the potential of that language, changing it to suit their particular needs. As a result, a new language developed that was ‘endonormative’, i.e. the norms or rules of the language were set within that community, rather than ‘exonormative’ where the norms were set by an outside group of so-called native speakers. The new communities would come to see the new variety as an expression of their identity so that they felt they spoke American, Nigerian or Singaporean, i.e. that the language they spoke was their own rather than that of the English. These were language varieties according to users.

Widdowson (1997) felt that, for English as an International Language, there was a further influence – language according to use. Scientists needed to communicate at the global level, a level that cut across national communities, and thus they needed a variety that cut across national boundaries and that was understood by other scientists. This was mainly a written language learnt within education systems. Even when speaking, scientists tended to use the forms of that written language. Similarly, other professions had their special language varieties all drawing on the potentials of the English language. Again, these varieties were endonormative with norms and rules set by the communities (of scientists, engineers, doctors, etc.) that used them. Because they were based on written language, these varieties were slower to change.

The written language could be a brake on any process of change. A study by Bao and Hong (2006) based on corpora of British and Singapore English language samples indicated very few differences between British and Singapore written language although there were distinguishing differences in certain aspects of the spoken language.

Carter and Nunan (2001) argued that the use of ‘native speaker’ standards of language and pedagogy was not relevant to contexts where the learners of the language were not likely to use it with ‘native speakers’ and might find certain teaching approaches to be inappropriate. In contrast to the definition given by Gupta (1998), they appeared to be using the term ‘native speaker’ to refer only to people coming from specific countries but this did not detract from their main point that language and teaching were specific to context.

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Canagarajah (2006) discussed the idea that, if the pull to global uniformity was particularly strong, one possibility might be that the national standards of English that currently compete for world recognition might be replaced by some new

unitary world standard of English that would be used for purposes of global communication and teaching. Dor (2004) suggested that, in fact, the computer industry was already taking over the central control of language standards. Microsoft Windows 10, for example, offers users 16 different standards of English covering countries from Australia through Malaysia to Zimbabwe. The list includes standards for the UK, the USA and, of course, Singapore.

Graddol (1998, 2006) conjectured that one mechanism that might enforce any standards once set was that English was often used as a gatekeeper to further education, employment, or even to the acceptance of submissions to academic journals, especially as most journals were published in English. For the candidates or applicants not to have the correct certification or to show indications, however small, that they were not proficient speakers or even ‘native-speakers’ of English might bar them from further consideration.

Graddol (2006) added that one of the reasons for the global growth of English had been that English proficiency was generally a requirement for university entry, with the majority of the top universities being in English-speaking countries. Even many of those in non-English-speaking countries were offering their courses in English. This had become particularly important over the last few decades as universities began to compete for recognition at the global level to attract the best students, academics and researchers. As the academics needed to move around the globe to establish their credentials, English had become the main language of academic communication and this was reinforced by the fact that most academic journals, even those published in non-English-speaking countries, were in English.

Graddol (2006) added that the trend might, however, be limited. While currently general standards in some local universities were questionable (with only one quarter of the 2.5 million Indian graduates currently suitable for employment by MNCs, for example), the steady rise in quality would eventually make these universities more attractive based on the cost of education and their relevance to the local context.

A further issue working against the global uniformity of English was the growth of communications technology. Graddol (2004) pointed out that global languages such as English no longer had the control mechanisms to ensure that only the 'standard' language approved by the social elite could reach the public. New technology that allowed anyone to set up their own webpage or magazine, and new attitudes to language correctness were bringing about what Graddol (2004) called 'destandardization'. Dor (2004) also points to the relaxation of attitudes towards standards.

The role of English in independent Singapore

For convenience, in this issue, Mother Tongue (with capital letters) will be used to refer to the official languages of the three main ethnic groups of Singapore – Chinese, Indians and Malays. Where the expression is used with small letters, 'mother tongue', it will be to mean 'the predominant language used by parents to the child during infancy' (MacDougall & Foon, 1976, p. 297). These may not always be the same language in all cases.

Alsagoff (2012) explained the history of language policy in Singapore as it relates to English from the time Raffles first set up his administration to the growth of English in today's education system. The discussion here is limited by space and readers are recommended to turn to Alsagoff (2012) for greater detail.

Graddol (1998) declared that few states had been as bold as Singapore in its adoption of a multilingual system reflecting its ethnic makeup while also adopting a language to give it presence in the world economy. Suárez (2005) pointed out that a multilingual policy had existed before self-rule but, after independence, the policy had been enforced to assure all that their cultures and languages would be protected even while the use of English, as the main language of global business, was encouraged for economic reasons (Alsagoff, 2010a; Pakir, 2000). While bilingualism was the policy and any of the four official languages could be used to interact with the government, in practice English remained the dominant language of government and the civil service, with all records being kept in English (Dixon, 2005; MacDougall & Foon, 1976). It is also worth noting, as explained by Richards and Tay (1977), that, at that time, Mandarin and Tamil were the home languages of a relatively small percentage of the ethnic groups that they officially represented with Hokkien being the dominant Chinese language and Bazaar Malay being the main interethnic lingua franca. Tay (2016) gives a useful history of Singapore's educational approach to English from the 1950's to the present. In the Monograph on 50 years of developments in English language teaching and learning in Singapore, she outlines that the design and development of the English language syllabuses since the 1950s have taken into account global and national considerations.

MacDougall and Foon (1976) reported that, in the early years, to meet the needs of the population, an independent Singapore focused on building schools for all four language streams with English language stream schools receiving the most attention as they were oversubscribed (Dixon, 2005; Hornberger & Vaish, 2009). Despite this, Dixon (2005) reported that Singapore's bilingual education policy did not result in high levels of English language proficiency overnight. A 1975 study found that 33% of English-medium and 25% of Chinese-medium Primary 6 pupils did not meet mini-

mum literacy standards at that time. (Also see Alsagoff, 2012.) Gopinathan (1980) reported on the many problems that faced Singapore in enforcing its visions of a bilingual population (English plus the Mother Tongue). One of his concerns was that in those early days the push to develop the policy had taken place without sufficient attention to pedagogic principles and research-supported measures.

The final adaptation to the bilingual policy took place in 1987 when English was made the language of instruction in all schools as a result of falling enrolment in the Mother Tongue schools. Tay (2016) noted that the 1991 Syllabus stated that English had the status of a first language in the national school curriculum. Gupta and Siew (1995) felt that it was important to note that the shift to English-medium education was the result of the government responding to popular choice and was not a decision imposed by the government.

The learning of the Mother Tongue, however, continued to be a requirement and, as Dixon (2005) noted, this meant that some children had to learn two new school languages because they spoke neither the official 'Mother Tongue' nor English at home. Suárez (2005) reported that the three official languages of the ethnic groups were then seen as the custodians of the culture of each group and Rubdy (2005) also noted the role they were given in guarding 'Asian values' against the possibility of 'Western decadent values' being brought in through the use of English. English was for new knowledge and economic growth; the other three official languages were for old knowledge to act as an anchor to tradition. However, English also served as a neutral language that could be used for interethnic communication as well as the language of government and business (Alsagoff, 2012; Rubdy, 2005; Silver, 2005).

Hornberger and Vaish (2009) reported that there was some disquiet among the Chinese community over the focus on English but that this was overcome to some extent by the designation of Special Assistance Plan schools, which taught both Mandarin and English as first languages, and the launch of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. In fact,

the resultant language loss due to the bilingual policy did not involve Mandarin, which actually grew in terms of the number of speakers at that time. The languages affected were the other Chinese languages (or dialects), such as Hokkien, as well as Tamil and other Indian languages (Gupta & Siew, 1995).

Rubdy (2005) pointed out that, of the four official languages, English, as the only one not associated with any of the dominant ethnic groups, was destined to become the one that represented the Singaporean identity. However, Rubdy added, the language was not entirely neutral as it tended to have a class bias as the difficulties of those who lacked proficiency to rise in the job market demonstrated. Canagarajah (2006) suggested that English was not a democratizing force but served the interests of the elite, a fact that could have created some resistance to its acquisition by certain communities.

MacDougall and Foon (1976) reported that the public quickly learnt that, to rise above being a basic labourer, it was necessary to be proficient in English even with investors from non-English speaking-countries. (This was also reported by Dixon, 2005; Zhao & Liu, 2010.) MacDougall and Foon pointed out that there were some social costs as those without English skills had difficulties finding work beyond the basic. However, they suggested, these social costs grew less with time.

In her analysis, Silver (2005) stressed that English was presented as having only economic capital; it had no social capital except as a networking language between the ethnic groups. Other than that, the social capital was the domain of the other three official languages. Bokhorst-Heng, Rubdy, McKay, and Alsagoff (2010) illustrated similar attitudes to English built into the Speak Good English Movement that emphasized the role of English as a link to the world economy. Silver (2005) explained that the 1970's saw steady moves towards a unified curriculum in the schools with 'bilingualism' coming to mean English as the first language in the schools, being used to teach most subjects, with one of the Mother Tongues (the official languages of the three ethnic groups), by default,

It was important to note that the shift to English-medium education was the result of the government responding to popular choice and was not a decision imposed by the government.

becoming the second language used to instil in students their traditional cultures. (See also Rubdy, 2005.) However, more recently, there had been some suggestions that linked the Mother Tongues, as well as English, to economic capital with the growing economic clout of China and the growth of Malay as the latter replaced many of the indigenous languages in neighbouring countries.

In Singapore, all university education was done through English and English was required for entry. As a university education was generally required for professional and technical jobs, this had given English a gate-keeper role for these types of work. At the same time, an English educated workforce helped to keep Singapore competitive in the international market. This had given English extra prestige as the language that helped to make Singaporeans competitive global citizens (Alsagoff, 2010a; Silver, 2005).

Singapore was thus moving from a situation where English was the prestige language of the elite to one where it had become the lingua franca of all Singaporeans (Kachru, 1998; MacDougall & Foon, 1976). The success of Singapore's education system was doubly commendable considering that, when the bilingual policy had been implemented, English had been the first language at home for very few Singaporeans (Dixon, 2005). In a short period of 20-30 years, Singaporeans had learnt English (and Mandarin in the case of the Chinese) to a level where they could then use it as a home language with their children. This rapid change was achieved, as Dixon (2005) pointed out, at the same time as Singaporeans topped the international measures of academic success, calling into question the claims that schooling in a child's L1 was an important factor affecting their learning.

Dixon (2005) reported that virtually all Singaporean students who made it into the regular and elite tracks of upper primary school (as the vast majority did) passed their English exam regardless of ethnicity. This data, he believed, was evidence that English was a 'neutral' language, giving no ethnic group an advantage, at least at the primary level.

Dixon (2005) also pointed to the success of the Singapore education system, and, in particular, its language programme as evidenced by the success

of its students in international tests. Despite the test language (English for Singapore) not being the home language of more than half the students, Singapore's scores compared well with those of countries where the majority of students spoke the language of instruction at home. Even in reading in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Reading Literacy Study (RLS), Singapore students achieved a mean score above the international mean and above what had been predicted based on socio-economic and linguistic factors.

Dixon (2005) also reported on a study that indicated that elite students from a Chinese background had greater oral skills in Mandarin but were significantly more literate in English.

The growth of English as a home language

The current English Language Syllabus 2010 (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2008) makes clear the objectives and aims of the English language teaching in schools. It points out that bilingualism is the aim, with each student learning English and their Mother Tongue. It notes that, in Singapore, English has a number of roles. It is the language used to bring together the different ethnic groups. At the same time, it allows Singaporeans to operate within the global market for goods, technology and information. This, together with other factors such as the growing tendency for English to be the language used at home, makes proficiency in English essential for students.

The Syllabus (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2008, p. 6) lists the following desired outcomes (bold lettering from the original):

1. All our pupils will be able to use English to express themselves. **All should attain foundational skills, particularly in grammar, spelling and basic pronunciation.**
2. **The majority of our pupils will attain a good level of competence in English, in both speech and writing.**
3. **At least 20% will attain a high degree of proficiency in English.**

The Syllabus mentions the shift in the language used at home. The Census (2000 and 2010) and

General Household Survey (2005 and 2015) figures clearly show this shift. Figure 1 shows the growth in the percentage use of English at home for each of the three main ethnic groups for the whole resident population (i.e. Singapore citizens and permanent residents but not work pass holders). As can be seen from the graph, the percentage using English as a home language has consistently grown for all three groups over the 25 years covered. As a group, the Indians started out with a larger percentage using English. However, their lead has been reduced. The gap between them and the Chinese has gone from 13.0% in 1990 to 6.9% in 2015 while the gap between them and the Malays has gone from 26.2% to 22.8%.

The graph seems to suggest that the growth of English as a home language has speeded up since around 2000, as also noted by Silver (2005). The possibility is that the growth will follow the standard 'S' shaped curve described by Graddol (2006). Often a change starts slowly, builds up momentum and then tails off once those able to accept the innovation have done so. The difficulty is predicting when the tailing off will happen in this case.

Zhao and Liu (2010) noted the growth in the percentage of the Chinese ethnic group using English at home. They believed that the decline in the use of Chinese was a result of parents encouraging the use of English at home to give an advantage in future employment to their children. Zhao and Liu (2010) felt this would continue unless action was taken to prevent further loss of prestige for the Chinese language.

Figure 1 looks at all ages of the resident population. Looking at the younger group might give a clearer picture of the changes that are taking place. Figure 2 presents the data from the Censuses 2000 and 2010 and the General Household Survey 2015 only in relation to those aged 5 to 14. (The data in the General Household Survey 2005 was not grouped in the same way so cannot be used in this graph.) The graph shows a strong growth in the percentage for the Chinese group from 1990 to 2015. In fact by 2010, the group had just overtaken the Indian group and by 2015 were ahead by 7.4 percentage points. Furthermore, the

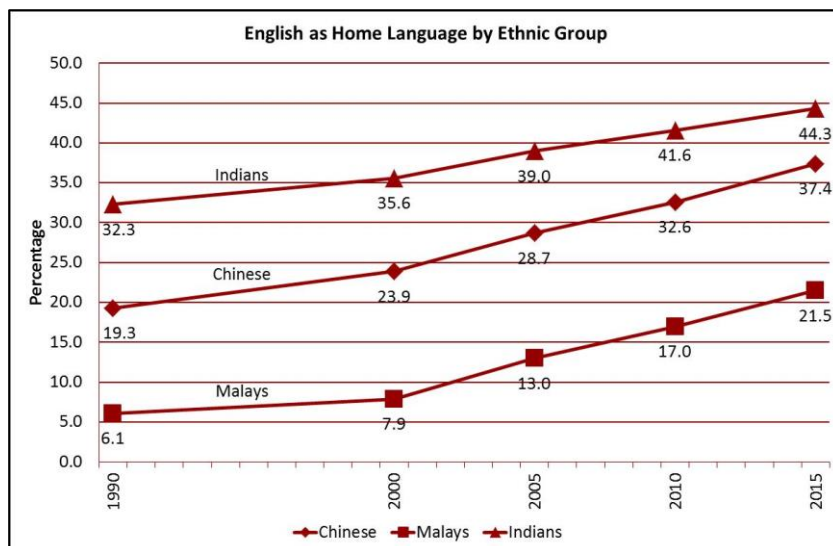


Figure 1. Growth of English as a home language by total ethnic group. Data from Censuses 2000 and 2010 and General Household Survey 2005 and 2015. (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016)

growth in the percentage for the Malay group seems to have equalled that for the Chinese in the years from 2000 to 2015. The other point of interest is that, by 2015, over half of the Chinese and Indians in this age group indicate that their home language is English.

Considering that, at independence in 1965, there were almost no native speakers of English or Mandarin as reported by Dixon (2005) and that Gopinathan (1980) reported figures for 1979 that indicated that only 1.3% used Mandarin as the main home language and 5.2% used English, this seems to be a major language shift especially towards English. Rubdy (2005) noted that this shift (and the related potential language loss of the other Chinese languages) had not been questioned by Singaporeans so long as there had been some clear economic benefit. The longer term effect, however, might be a reduction in multilingualism as people focused more on developing their two official languages (English and their Mother Tongue) in contrast to the use of many different vernaculars of earlier days. This might reduce Singapore's competitiveness in the future as today's postmodern citizens needed to move among many different communities for which they would need a number of languages (Canagarajah, 2005; Graddol, 2006; Ke, 2015).

It is possible this data could be exaggerating the language shift as the numbers refer to the dominant home language for individuals. It is quite likely that most individuals use more than one lan-

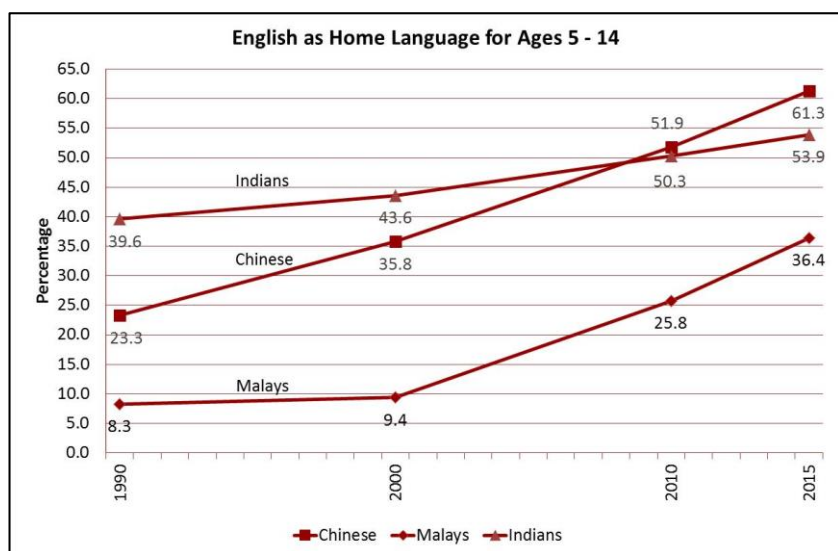


Figure 2. Growth of English as a home language for 5-14 year old by ethnic group. Data from Censuses 2000 and 2010 and General Household Survey 2015 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2001, 2011, 2016)

guage at home. Zhao and Liu (2010) reported that as few as 5% of Singapore children were exposed to only one language at home.

Normally, the kind of language shift that Singapore is experiencing takes two to three generations (Graddol, 1998). In Singapore's case, it has taken place in approximately 40 years or close to one generation. In some families, in particular Chinese families, there has been only one bilingual generation bridging the gap caused by the language shift, resulting in grandparents having difficulty talking directly to their grandchildren (Gupta & Siew, 1995).

According to Gupta and Siew (1995), in the past, the main target of the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' had been the Chinese 'dialects'. However, more recently the government became concerned about the number of Chinese families that were switching to English so the target of the 1993 campaign changed its focus to persuading English-speaking Chinese to speak more Mandarin.

The debate about standards

The *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (Richards & Schmidt, 2002) defines a 'standard variety' as the variety 'which has the highest status in a community or nation and which is based on the speech and writing of educated native speakers of the language'. It is generally: a) used in the news media and in literature; b) described in dictionaries and grammars; c)

taught in schools and taught to non-native speakers when they learn English as a foreign language. This definition requires us to know what is meant by 'native speaker'. Richards and Schmidt (2002) give a definition close to that of Gupta (1998), i.e. that a native speaker of a language is someone who learnt it as their first language as a child. They do, however, add one condition – that the person continues to use the language fluently as a dominant language.

Given this definition, in Singapore, English as used by the media such as the main newspapers can presumably be recognized as a standard English variety. Moreover, it also has high status and is spoken by an elite, many of whom would meet the definition of 'native speaker' as given by Richards and Schmidt (2002) and Gupta (1998). It is also used in the government service (C. L. Ho & Alsagoff, 1994; Lee-Wong, 2001).

However, in many instances, the reference to standards within Singapore has been made to a British or American standard or a 'native speaker' from one of those countries (Gupta, 1994; Silver, 2005). See, for example, Lee-Wong (2001) who seemed to consider Singapore English to be approximately the same as Singlish and Standard English to be something shared by countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the UK where it was the 'native' language. Lee-Wong (2001) went on to suggest that it was possible to improve standards in schools but, in the end, the language used would remain the choice of individuals!

With an eye on the global market, the official emphasis is naturally on a variety of English that is recognized internationally. As a result, the norm that is promoted is actually exonormative (i.e. language standards are based on those from a different community or country), traditionally what is seen as a British standard (Bokhorst-Heng et al., 2010). Cavallaro and Ng (2009) noted, however, that there was now a stable formal variety, Singapore Standard English (SSE), which was close to other national standards of English with some phonological, morphological and syntactic features specific to Singapore. Even so, as Lim, Pakir, and Wee (2010) pointed out, the situation remained ambivalent with many not sure if there

was a Singapore standard that could be used. Alsagoff (2010a) and Silver (2005) noted that the English Language Syllabus 2001 looked towards an international standard for English. Furthermore, the English Language Syllabus 2010 (Curriculum Planning & Development Division, 2008, p. 7) 'continue[s] to emphasise the teaching of internationally acceptable English (Standard English) to our pupils'. Indeed, some Singapore national examinations are still graded in the UK.

Cavallaro and Ng (2009) noted that English was promoted as the language of progress and commerce, while the Mother Tongues were presented as the languages of traditions and culture. In this scenario, a form of English that did not meet the need for a tool of international communication would be redundant. However, Rubdy (2005) explained that Singapore's unique brand of colloquial English (SCE or Singlish) had meanwhile developed as a means of interethnic communication within Singapore. Gupta (1994) preferred to make a distinction between SCE, which she saw as a variety of English used for certain social functions, and Singlish, which she felt was a term that was associated with a lack of English proficiency. SCE became the mark of something special, a mark of being Singaporean, for many younger Singaporeans, much to the disapproval of many (Gupta, 1994, 1998; C. L. Ho & Alsagoff, 1994). As a result, the Speak Good English Movement was launched in 2000 to persuade Singaporeans to speak Standard English.

Hornberger and Vaish (2009) noted that it was reported in June 2006 that the Ministry was looking into ways to improve the teaching of English as, it was said, the standards of English were deteriorating. They noted that Singlish was often blamed for causing the low standards in English and its use was not officially condoned. Despite that, they also suggested, the language variety remained popular as it was felt to represent the identity of Singaporeans.

Canagarajah (2005, 2006) believed that these kinds of tensions were normal in a language planning process. Inevitably there would be different beliefs regarding standards within the population, further complicated by the changes taking place and the wants and needs of different social groups. On one side, there would be national concerns regarding the use of the language for

broader communication; on the other, there would be a local and individual need related to identity. While, in Singapore, SSE was the language that was officially preferred, SCE was the language for informal gatherings and day-to-day communication (Cavallaro & Ng, 2009).

Gupta (1998) reported that SCE or Singlish was believed to have developed in the English medium schools in the Straits Settlements (Dinding, Malacca, Penang and Singapore) where teachers and students came from a mixed language background. Since then, there had been a number of different approaches to categorizing SCE (as an interlanguage or imperfectly learnt Standard English or as an alternative language standard with its own vocabulary and grammar rules, for example) (Cavallaro & Ng, 2009; Gupta, 1998; Low, 2012; Silver, 2005). Alsagoff (2010a, 2010b) provided an analysis of the change in the roles of English in Singapore and related that to the change in the theoretical descriptions that had been presented. While there is not room here to present the details, it is worth noting her glocalization model that emphasized the possibility of a speaker presenting the two aspects, global and local, together by using 'standard' features such as inversion for questions together with 'local' features such as adding a particle to the question. Alsagoff (2010b) suggested the speaker could thus shift styles, combining formality and collaboration, global and local, to achieve particular social ends in particular contexts.

Cavallaro and Ng (2009) reported that Singaporeans were generally ambivalent about the 'Singapore accent'. While they were fond, even proud of their accent and felt the accent friendlier, they did admit to considering the exonormative standard more prestigious. Interestingly, they rated SSE friendlier than SCE (or Singlish).

In independent Singapore, SCE has often been perceived as a threat to one of the main purposes of the adoption of English as one of the official languages – to build global communication ties. For example, Gupta (1998) quotes from a speech of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew to students from the National University of Singapore on 29 July 1994 in which he exhorted them not to speak Singlish (or SCE) as this would detract from their message in the global market place. However, at the same time, he suggested that there was no need for

them to speak with 'an English upper-class accent'.

C. L. Ho and Alsagoff (1994) reported on a public debate in 1993 when the use of SCE in local television drama produced a strong reaction resulting in calls for the government to move in and ban the use of Singlish on radio and television. Others supported the use of Singlish as something that ordinary people could relate to as part of the identity of Singaporeans. The debate was brought to a close when the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (the predecessor to today's MediaCorp) announced guidelines that drew distinctions between 'Standard English', 'Local English' and Singlish. Local English was seen to be the same as Standard English but with some special vocabulary such as *durian* and was acceptable. However, it was decided that Singlish was *ungrammatical* and should therefore not be used in broadcasting. C. L. Ho and Alsagoff (1994) suggested that, when a lay person declared that Singlish was ungrammatical, they were really commenting on its low social status. When linguists pointed out that Singlish did indeed have a grammar, it was because they recognized the syntactic rules that speakers of Singlish employed while still being aware of the low social status of Singlish.

Lim et al. (2010) illustrated how the use of SSE might mark individuals as coming from a high socio-economic background. They described how every Singaporean male had to do military National Service for two years. This brought together a wide range of young men to live and work together in a situation where differences in socio-economic status could cause friction. The result was that SSE was generally avoided by all levels and communication was in SCE or Singlish. (Mandarin was similarly avoided in favour of one of the other Chinese 'dialects'.)

Cavallaro and Ng (2009) explained that identity and language had a reciprocal relationship and that one reinforced the other. The use of a particular language built up group identity and group identity helped to support the use of that language. As a special vehicle of a Singaporean identity that went across ethnic groups, Singlish might thus prove to be enduring.

Canagarajah (2006) pointed out that, in various countries, such as South Africa, Brunei and Hong Kong, where English had been adopted in schools,

the teachers and students often developed ways in which local varieties could be used in order to represent local values and identities. Rubdy (2007) reported that the general view was that Singlish was a 'corrupt' version of English. However, Rubdy reported on findings from studies done by a group of teachers as part of their degree course that showed teachers and students continued to code-switch between SSE and SCE just as they might between English and Mandarin or English and Malay. This was particularly so in content subject classrooms, where maths, science and other subjects were taught in English. Interestingly, the students overwhelmingly rejected the idea that using SCE (or Singlish) was 'cool' (83%) although they agreed they used it to talk to siblings, which does not seem to fit with the point that Canagarajah (2006) made that Singlish represented the language of the younger generation of Singaporeans. Many of the students (69%) felt that it was unnecessary to use SCE to explain ideas although their teachers thought it was useful to do so at times. The few students who did feel that it was okay for teachers to use SCE thought it helped to add humour. Only a small number thought it helped the weaker students to understand concepts. At the same time, only a handful of teachers thought that SCE should never be used in the classroom. A majority felt that SCE helped to create a friendlier classroom atmosphere and build a sense of inclusiveness.

The students and teachers did seem to draw a clear distinction between the spoken and written. There was a sharp reduction in the instances of SCE in students' work when they were writing, showing that students already had a clear understanding of the different domains of SCE and SSE. They reported that they felt SCE did not allow them to clearly express their ideas in writing. Moreover, they were aware that the use of SCE in writing would have serious consequences on their grades. Rubdy (2007) felt that this called into question the argument that students' use of SSE would suffer if they were not completely dissuaded from using SCE even in speech.

Rubdy (2007) argued that the data described above and the results of studies of the use of local varieties to support learning elsewhere in the world, such as in the States and Hong Kong, supported the idea that the use of SCE in class could help learning rather than detract from it. The pos-

sibilities included using SCE to explain concepts that students seemed to have problems understanding, to develop in students a clear awareness of the appropriate situations in which to use different varieties, to motivate students and to build rapport.

Cavallaro and Ng (2009) suggested it was too early to know the likely fate of SCE. However, with the rising level of education in Singapore, it seemed probable that a greater proportion of the population would be able to switch appropriately between SCE and SSE, assuring a place, no matter how limited, for SCE in the future. Pakir (2010) corroborated this view with examples of language use of university students showing their adeptness at moving from SCE and SSE according to the context.

Future directions

The earlier sections of this issue have looked at some of the predictions for the English language globally and looked at the present situation in Singapore. This section will deal with the issues and the questions that need to be asked about the role of English in the Singapore of the future. While it is not possible to answer the questions here, it is hoped that, once expressed, they may provide a basis for the appropriate debate.

Effects of the global role of English

One of the roles given to English in Singapore was to act as the communication link between Singapore and the rest of the world with the three Mother Tongues providing links to the cultural backgrounds of the different ethnic groups (Alsagoff, 2010a; Suárez, 2005).

Graddol (1998, 2006) suggested that the role of English worldwide would not change much in the near future but in the longer term Malay and Mandarin might assume important regional roles leaving English with a reduced regional role. Moreover, Graddol (1998, 2006) predicted that in this situation, the bilingual and multilingual individuals would have an advantage over the monolingual individuals who spoke only English. The winners would be those who could adapt quickly

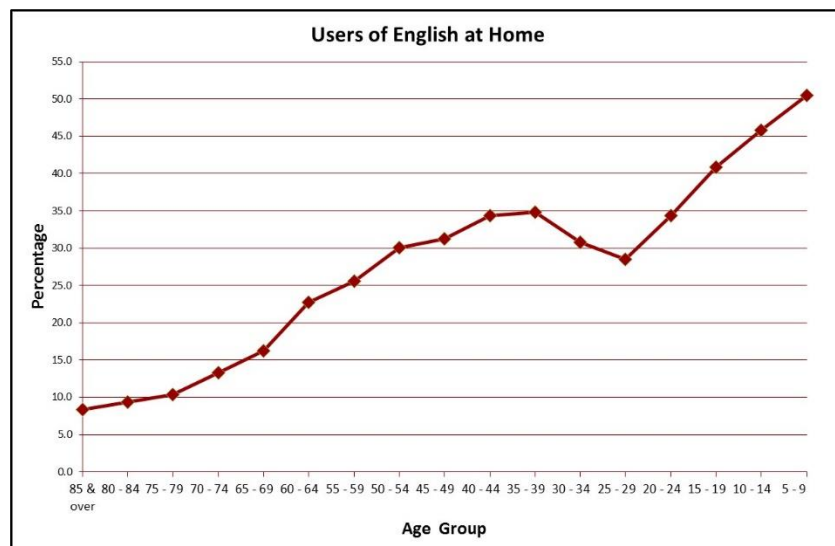


Figure 3. Data from the 2010 Census showing percentage using English as a home language for each age group. (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011)

to the new situation as it developed.

In theory, Singapore is well prepared as, from independence, the policy has been that all students should become bilingual (minimally) or multilingual (preferably). Moreover, the official languages include, as well as English, languages that will have important regional roles if Graddol's prediction comes to pass. This, at least in theory, puts Singapore in a strong position to deal with or even to benefit from the different scenarios that Graddol presented. The one difficulty might be that the focus on bilingualism (English plus the Mother Tongue) might have resulted in a reduction in the number of multilinguals. (See Canagarajah, 2005; Graddol, 2006.)

Tan (2003) noted that the 'Chineseness' of the Chinese in Singapore put them in an especially strong position to work with a China growing in economic and cultural importance. To take advantage of this cultural link, Singaporean Chinese needed to retain their ability to communicate easily with the Chinese, with Singapore, straddling, as it did, the East and West, having a particular advantage in the global economy.

Graddol (2006), however, did talk about a further less likely possibility of English being forced completely aside worldwide as it became associated with what might be seen as negative factors such as the loss of languages, and the growing gap between the rich and poor. In this scenario, how would Singapore respond? As the growth in the number of households using English

demonstrates, Singaporeans are adopting English as their first language more and more. This is highlighted even more strongly in Figure 3, which uses data from the 2010 census on the use of English as a home language by age group to represent the growth of English use at home. The graph shows that English as a home language has reached 50% for the 5 to 9 group across all residents. Can we expect then that this (50%) will be the average percentage for Singapore in 30 years when these children will be in their late 30's? Will then the investment in English be too much to be reversed? Will the other role of English in Singapore as an interethnic language mean that it is here to stay no matter what occurs in the world outside?

Singapore Standard English

Microsoft Windows already offers 'English (Singapore)' as one of the language standards. Recently, it has also been reported (Lee, 2016) that the *Oxford English Dictionary* has been revised to include 'Singlish' vocabulary. The report in *The Straits Times*, Singapore's best known national paper, caused controversy in Singapore and was quickly followed by letters to the newspapers for and against the inclusion. For some, it was seen as a threat to standards (Koh, 2016; A. U. Tan, 2016; E. K. B. Tan, 2016; K. H. Tan, 2016). Others argued that Singlish would not go away and it should be recognized and, instead of rebuking students for its use, schools should help students see the appropriate contexts in which to use Standard Singapore English (SSE) and Singlish (or SCE) (K. L. Ho, 2016; Lu, 2016). *The Straits Times* editorial of 22 June 2016 ("English to help us connect to the world," 2016) took a middle road, celebrating the existence of Singlish as something distinctly Singaporean (albeit associating it with 'linguistic latitude') while, at the same time, emphasizing that the education system should ensure that young Singaporeans learn to switch to standard English for communication in formal situations in international situations. This, it warned, would take time and effort.

The ideas Widdowson (1997) suggested regarding language choices being dependent on two factors, user and use, could be useful here. As Singaporeans adopt English, it is inevitable that they will adapt it to make it their own, to make it part of their identity, particularly in speech. However, as they learn the sciences and other subjects in

school, they will also need to learn the appropriate language, largely written. Thus, each individual will need the language of Singapore (local) and the language of their profession (global).

Pakir (1994) felt that the codification of standards was a complex issue. One problem was that attitudes to standards changed over time and thus the question needed to be reviewed regularly. She reported that studies had shown that Singaporeans had ambivalent attitudes. While they admired British/American accents, they tended to find Singaporeans using such accents to be affected. There was general agreement that written English should use the standard form but there was not complete agreement on what the standard was. This would be a difficult question for the teacher in the classroom who felt a need to know the correct model to use. One possible approach is the suggestion by Pakir (2000) that teaching could have a grammatical focus for reading and writing (emphasizing SSE) and a communicative focus for listening and speaking (allowing for the use of SCE).

It is worth remembering, however, that the language of the professions, being written, will be more formal and less subject to change. Being the language of the professions and, therefore, education, it will be more prestigious and thus likely to be seen as the standard to be met.

Yang (2016) reported that the Ministry, in response to a query from *The Straits Times*, stated that, while students should be encouraged to use standard English, they should not be penalized for using Singlish (or SCE) if it was used appropriately. Examples of appropriate use in the report showed the Singlish words included in quotation remarks. One parent that was interviewed by the paper felt it would be necessary for students to take into account the audience and whether they would understand the terms being used.

Chen (2016) argued that it was time to break with the idea that Singaporeans were not competent enough in English, pointing out that English had become the most common home language in Singapore quoting data from the General Household Survey 2015. The survey showed that English was the home language for 36.9% of the resident population in 2015. (See Figure 1 for details of the growth in the use of English as a home language

by the main ethnic groups.) Does then the English of Singapore now meet the criteria for being considered a standard language? Is it possible for Singapore to define that standard for itself rather than leave it to Microsoft Windows or the *Oxford English Dictionary*? As Lim et al. (2010) pointed out, this is an issue for Singapore to consider and one on which the final decision might have important consequences on how Singapore and others see the cultural affinities of Singapore.

There are no quick answers to any of these questions but Singapore may want to consider the possibilities in order to be ready to take advantage of the changes in the world situation as they unroll. Perhaps the last word can go to the

editorial in *The Straits Times* of 23 March 2016 ("From tribes to a nation of bilinguals," 2016). The editorial noted the increasing use of English as the home language as illustrated in the data summarized in the General Household Survey 2015. However, it suggested that the most important statistic to note was the increase to 73% (from 56% in 2000) of the population who were able to read and write in at least two languages demonstrating the growing language skills of Singaporeans. Rather than having a competition between languages to attract users, the editorial suggested, all the languages of Singapore should be tapped into together as resources to tell a common Singaporean story.

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