

## Chapter 2

# The Linguistic Ecology of Singapore



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**Abstract** This chapter, which is divided into two parts, language in society and language in education, introduces the site of the research studies on which this book is based: Singapore. Since the book is on English language education, the colloquial variety of English spoken in Singapore, Singlish, is described and discussed. Thereafter, translanguaging, the main concept for this book, is elaborated on, given that Lin has already introduced it. This is followed by the main research questions for the book and a chapter by chapter breakdown of what the reader can expect.

### Introduction

Those who have travelled in the MRT or the local train in Singapore could not but have experienced the babble of languages surrounding them. They must have heard Chinese, Malay, some Indian languages, and also a plethora of South East Asian languages (Burmese, Tagalog) along with a smattering of European languages. Perhaps the linguistic experience in the MRT today is similar to that of the bazaars in this region in the 1820s when Sir Stamford Raffles, credited with the founding of Singapore, was in charge of the administration of Bencoolen. Though a lot has changed since the 1800s, Singapore has developed from a small trading port to one of the most prosperous countries in the world, the rich linguistic ecology of Singapore is still as vibrant today as it was in the 1800s.

The sociodemographic markers of Singapore, which currently has a population of 5.61 m, (as of June 2017 according to <https://www.strategygroup.gov.sg/media-centre/publications/article/details/statistic-booklet%2D%2D-population-in-brief>), show many of the attributes of a highly developed economy, one of them being literacy. According to Singapore Department of Statistics, in 2017, 98.8% of the males and 95.7% of the females above the age of 15 were literate. Among those in 2017 who were aged 25 or more, males had 11.3 and females had 10.4 mean years of schooling. These numbers point to a society where most young people have at least

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**Table 1** Resident population aged 5 years and over by language most frequently spoken at home

Ethnic group/language	2000 (% of speakers)	2010 (% of speakers)
Chinese		
<i>English</i>	23.9	32.6
<i>Mandarin</i>	45.1	47.7
<i>Chinese dialects</i>	30.7	19.2
<i>Others</i>	0.4	0.4
Malays		
<i>English</i>	7.9	17.0
<i>Malay</i>	91.6	82.7
<i>Others</i>	0.5	0.3
Indians		
<i>English</i>	35.6	41.6
<i>Malay</i>	11.6	7.9
<i>Tamil</i>	42.9	36.7
<i>Others</i>	9.9	13.8

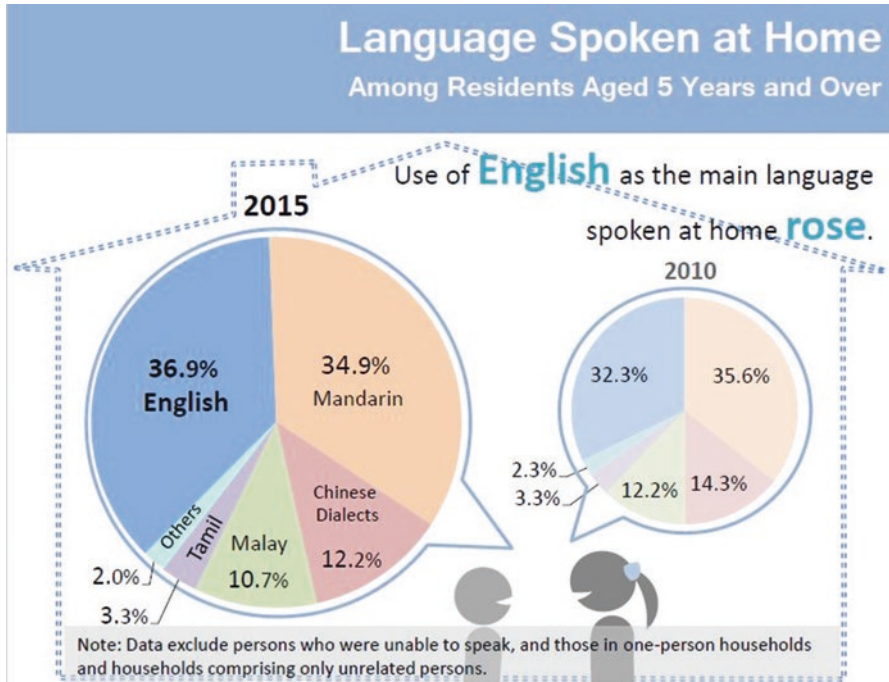
From Singapore, Department of Statistics

finished secondary school (<https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/search-by-theme/population/education-language-spoken-and-literacy/latest-data>).

In addition to being a highly literate society, Singapore is also extremely multi-lingual. Unlike in other global cities like New York and London, multilingualism in Singapore is the norm and monolingualism is the exception. Table 1 categorizes Singaporeans on the basis of the language they speak most frequently at home and shows the changes that have taken place in the last decade. The three groups of people in Table 1, Chinese, Malays, and Indians, are the main ethnic and linguistic groups in Singapore.

In this table, I want to draw the attention of the reader to the high numbers of people who do not speak English most frequently at home. In 2000 these numbers were 76.2% for the Chinese, 92.1% for the Malays, and 64.1% for the Indians. In 2010 67.3% of Chinese, 83% of Malays, and 58.4% of Indians aged 5 and above did not speak English most frequently at home. No doubt in the decade between 2000 and 2010, there has been an increase in English as the language most frequently spoken at home for all the three ethnic groups. In fact a more recent infographic released recently by Singstats shows that this trend is continuing (Fig. 1).

However, my focus is on young school going children who do not speak English at home as their dominant language. Though many speakers in Table 1 and the infographic are beyond school going age, there are definitely school going children in this group of speakers. Also, though most preschoolers are not included in these data as they are less than 5 years of age, it is reasonable to assume that these percentages are also true for preschoolers. In other words even in 2015, 63.1% of people did not speak English most frequently at home. This is, indeed, a large group of people. I want to emphasize the linguistic background of this cohort because in Singapore we overemphasize the cohort of children who increasingly come to



**Fig. 1** Infographic of resident population aged 5 years and over by language most frequently spoken at home. (From Singapore, Department of Statistics)

school from English dominant homes. This book is about all types of bilingual children: those who are not exposed to English as a dominant language at home, those who are, and those whose dominant language is in a state of flux. The point is that whatever may be the dominant language of bilingual children, they actively indulge in translanguaging to learn, express identity, and make meaning of the world around them.

The section of Singaporean youth who do not speak English as a dominant language is also of interest to Professor Goh Yeng Seng at the National Institute of Education in Singapore. This complex linguistic ecology, comprising English dominant and non-English dominant bilinguals, is well problematized by Yeng Seng (2017) in his study of Chinese language teaching, curriculum and language attitudes in Singapore. He writes that in addition to English dominant youth, “the bilingual education system has also produced a generation of bilinguals who possess greater competence in Mandarin than English....This group of bilingual teachers still displays greater affinity for Chinese than for English” (pg. 63). In fact, in his study of young Chinese language teachers in Singapore, Yeng Seng found that they attribute a higher value to Chinese as compared to English for being more aesthetically pleasing, intimate, and attuned to popular culture. Thus not only in terms of proficiency but also in terms of affiliation, Singapore is a unique and complex linguistic space.

This chapter is divided into two main parts: language in society and language in education. In the former, the national linguistic landscape of Singapore is discussed. Here I bring the reader up to date with the current language situation in Singapore and draw attention to the contested terrain of Singlish, the colloquial variety of English spoken in this country. The second half of this chapter is focused on the country's bilingual language in education policy and its outcomes. The bulk of the second half is on “translanguaging,” both a conceptual tool and a methodological approach that forms the central hook for the ideas in this book. Finally, the argument of the book is stated along with a chapter by chapter summary of what will follow.

## Language in Society

Article 153A in the Constitution of Singapore states that there will be four official languages in the country:

**“153A. Official languages and national language**

1. Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English shall be the 4 official languages in Singapore.
2. The national language shall be the Malay language and shall be in the Roman script:

Provided that -

- (a) no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using or from teaching or learning any other language; and,
- (b) nothing in this Article shall prejudice the right of the Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in Singapore.”

**“53. Use of languages in Parliament**

Until the Legislature otherwise provides, all debates and discussions in Parliament shall be conducted in Malay, English, Mandarin or Tamil.”

*Singapore's Constitution of 1959 with Amendments through 2010*

In keeping with the spirit of Article 153A, non-Tamil languages in the Indian community are allowed in the school system. As the numbers of children who study non-Tamil Mother Tongues are small, classes are held outside school, usually on weekends.

Though all four official languages are given equal status, in the experience of Singaporeans, English is de facto the most important language. Evidence for this experience is provided by studies on the linguistic landscape of Singapore like those conducted by Tan (2014), Tang (2018), and Shang and Guo (2017). In a study of the linguistic landscape of MRT signage (MRT is the local train system of Singapore, comparable to the London tube), Tang (2018) found that most of the signs were actually in English and did not adequately represent the other three languages. Tang collected 1554 signs from the circle line, one branch of the MRT, which covers the Central Business District and lies at the physical and commercial heart of Singapore. After dividing these signs into three categories, those created

by the government, corporations, and individuals, Tang coded them according to the presence of and order of languages used in these signs. He found that 42% of the signs by the government and 40.2% of signs by corporations were monolingual English signs. Only in the case of signs posted by individuals were there very few monolingual English signs. Though the next most commonly found sign from government, corporations, and individuals was bilingual, it still emphasized English. The least common sign was one which was bilingual and which emphasized a non-English language. Tang also found that in second place, Chinese and Malay often vied for positionality displaying a tension between the language of the majority ethnic group and the national language. Tamil had the least importance in all these signs in terms of presence and positionality.

This study by Tang (2018) corroborates many such smaller studies undertaken by my master's degree students in a course that I teach at the National Institute of Education: Theory and Practice of Bilingualism and Biliteracy. Students in this course often opt to write a research paper on the linguistic landscape of a specific part of Singapore. Even in the case of studies of a geospace like Chinatown, which is supposedly the most Chinese part of Singapore, my students have found that signage from corporations emphasizes English rather than Chinese. Thus there is evidence for Tang's (2018) conclusion that de facto "Singapore might be more monolingual than bilingual or multilingual-oriented" (pg. 20), though de jure it is multilingual.

Tan's (2014) study of official signs, or signs placed by government agencies in Singapore, and Shang and Guo's (2017) study on shop signs in Singapore's neighborhood markets draw similar conclusions. At the same time, both these studies contribute unique observations regarding the linguistic landscape of Singapore. For instance, Shang and Guo observe the ubiquity of Chinese-English signs in the markets of Singapore. They comment that though simplified Chinese characters have been adopted in the education system since 1969, the shop signs display traditional characters which could be because such shops are run by older Chinese Singaporeans who are not only well versed in the traditional writing system but also have a clientele of older customers who can read these characters. A unique observation made by Tan (2014) is that Singlish, or the colloquial variety of English spoken in Singapore, is not represented in the official signs that the author collected. It is to this aspect of language in Singapore that I now turn.

## *Singlish*

In the case of English, there are two varieties of English spoken in Singapore: Standard English and Singlish. This colloquial variety of English has a specific grammar, accent, and intonation. The most obvious grammatical features of Singlish are the use of pragmatic particles ("lah," "ah," "leh," "lor," "meh," and "what"), lack of subject-verb agreement and inflectional morphology (e.g., Singlish drops plurals, tenses, and verbs can be used without subject), simplification of word final conso-

nant clusters, and use of glottal stop in word final position instead of consonants or consonant clusters (e.g., “*expertee*” instead of “*expertise*”). Singlish also shows evidence of reduplication, use of loan words from ethnic languages, and widespread use of acronyms. Finally, syllabic stress in Singlish is very different from syllabic stress in Standard English. When all the features of Singlish are used together by a speaker, this register of English can become incomprehensible for a speaker of Standard English.

There is some scholarship on the grammatical and cultural properties of Singlish (Wong 2005; Wee 2002) in which scholars validate the legitimacy of Singlish. For instance, Wong (2005) provides evidence to show that most of the grammatical features of Singlish have been derived from either Mandarin, other Chinese dialects (Hokkien and Cantonese in particular), or Malay. Wong is correct in noticing that there are practically no attributes of Singlish which seem to be derived from Indian languages like Tamil. Wong’s (2005) article focuses on the use of the particle “one” in Singlish, which, he argues, is a feature derived from Mandarin Chinese. Wong comments that the lack of inflectional morphology in Singlish is derived from Chinese Mandarin. I agree with this statement because Tamil, which is an agglutinative language, has complex and rich inflectional morphology and had Singlish been influenced by Tamil it would have had inflectional morphology. Malay too has morphological patterns though this attribute of Malay is not as rich as it is in Tamil. Most importantly Wong (2005), like Wee (2002), validates the cultural value of Singlish: “...Unlike Anglo English, Singapore English does not reflect exclusively Anglo values. Rather, it is characterized by many words which originate from the Chinese languages and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Malay; and those words reflect values and speech norms from their cultures of origin” (Wong 2005, pg. 242).

Similarly studies like Zhiming and Min (2005) and Zhiming and Aye (2010) on the use of bare conditionals in Singapore Colloquial English assert that topic prominence and the omission of the conditional “if” in Singapore Colloquial English and Bazaar Malay are indications of substrate transfer from Chinese. More importantly Zhiming and Min (2005) consider Singapore Colloquial English, popularly called Singlish, to be a language. The stance that Singapore Colloquial English is a language just as Chinese, Malay, and Tamil is controversial, I believe, for two reasons. Firstly it is not included in the Singapore census. Secondly the study itself refers to this “language” as “Singapore Colloquial English” which suggests that this is a variety of Standard English and not a separate language, a position taken by other scholars in Singapore like Tan and Tan (2008) and Gupta (1986). My stance, as I will elaborate later in this chapter, is that Singapore Colloquial English is a variety of English that exists in a diglossic situation and is, indeed, an essential component of translanguaging along with other languages in the vibrant linguistic ecology of Singapore.

Two studies have investigated the attitudes of school going children and teachers in Singapore towards Singlish (Rubdy 2007; Starr et al. 2017). Rubdy surveyed 690 primary school children (10–12-year-olds) on their attitudes towards Singlish through a questionnaire. In the same study Rubdy also interviewed 57 teachers and compared the speech vs the written work of students to find out if primary school

students wrote the way they spoke. Results of the questionnaire revealed that 93% of the 10–12-year-olds disagreed that it is cool to speak Singlish and 92% of them agreed that they would like to learn to speak good English. At the same time, 83% of them spoke Singlish with their friends during recess in school. Comparison of the use of Singlish in written work with the speech of primary school students showed that very few grammatical aspects of Singlish occurred in the writing of primary school students. These results led Rubdy (2007) to conclude that “These primary school students have already internalized the separate domains of use for SSE (Standard Singapore English) and SCE (Singapore Colloquial English) in Singapore society, wherein their functional knowledge of language use tells them that Singlish is the most natural and spontaneous choice for informal talk among family and friends while SSE is reserved for educational, professional and formal contexts” (pg. 316).

As a gloss to Rubdy’s (2007) study, I would add that her cohort did not include children in the Learning Support Program (LSP), which is the cohort at the heart of this book. The LSP will be described in detail in the ensuing chapters. Here suffice it to say that if the children in the LSP are English dominant, it means that they are actually Singlish dominant. These children do not have access to the linguistic capital of Standard English in their homes and communities. The only Standard English they hear is in school. Though the children in Rubdy’s (2007) study were able to see the differences between Singlish and Standard English in prose, children in the LSP would not be able to translanguage in this way as they are weak in Standard English. This, in fact, is the reason they are in the LSP.

School going children are aware of the types of Englishes spoken in Singapore, and at an early age they develop attitudes about the status of these varieties of English. In a study of attitudes of 115 children aged 5–19 comprising local and expatriate children in Singapore, Starr et al. (2017) found that children had formed opinions about the occupations of English speakers based on their accents. The authors made the participants listen to four types of Englishes: Australian English, North Chinese accented English, Filipino English, and Singapore English. In a part of the study, the participants were asked to guess the occupational group of the speaker. For the Singapore English speaker, most of the local Singaporean children guessed that the speaker was most likely to be a teacher and least likely to be housemaid.

This result points to the acceptance of some features of Singlish by children and young adults in present-day Singapore. At the same time, since the actual audio of the speaker articulating the passage in Singapore English is not available, it is possible that the basilect version of Singlish was not used in the passage. Had a basilect variety been used, the children might not have thought that the speaker was a teacher.

In concluding this section of the chapter on Singlish, I want to reiterate that though the Singapore government collects data on English, these data are not differentiated on the basis of English vs Singlish. Thus the increasingly large numbers of children who come from “English”-speaking homes include children who actually speak only Singlish. Many of these children are also in the Learning Support



Program which will be described in detail in Chap. 3. These children are in the Learning Support Program despite the fact that they come from “English”-speaking homes. Thus there is immense diversity in the multilingual children who are placed in the Learning Support Program. The program includes children whose home language is not English, children whose home language is English though it is actually Singlish, and children who hear mainly Mother Tongue in their homes.

## Language in Education

Singapore has a bilingual language in education policy in which learning two languages is mandatory. Though English is the medium of instruction and all the subjects are taught in English, all school going children have to take a “Mother Tongue” which is typically the language of the ethnic group of the child. The three main ethnic groups in Singapore are Chinese, Malay, and Indian with Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil as their identifying languages, respectively. In 1989, due to the changing demography of the Indian community in Singapore, the Ministry of Education allowed Indian children who do not speak Tamil at home to choose from the following non-Tamil Mother Tongues: Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi, and Urdu (Singh, 2011). Though Singapore is a highly multilingual country, the school system is essentially bilingual in that each child is expected to master two languages. Thus throughout the book, I refer to bilingual classes because with each child only two languages are being used though each class is multilingual in that many bilingual pairs of languages are represented through a diverse student body, e.g., Malay-English, Tamil-English, and Chinese-English.

Numerous scholars have evaluated the outcomes of Singapore’s bilingual language in education policy. For instance, Curdt-Christiansen (2014) laments the outcomes for the Chinese community. She points out that a number of curricular aspects have created a landscape of overall low achievement in learning Chinese. Most importantly, the number of hours allotted to the learning of Mother Tongue is not adequate. In the basic stream, children spend 4–5 h per week, and in the higher stream 5–7.5 h per week learning Chinese. Though school children spend very few hours learning Chinese, and, as Curdt-Christiansen’s comments indicate, they are not learning the language well, it is a very important social and educational policy for the government. Curdt-Christiansen (2014) substantiates this opinion by analyzing advertisements for the annual Speak Mandarin Campaign. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, she points out that in the past decade this Campaign has been advertised and promoted by pushing Chinese as instrumental for business, cool, challenging, and culturally indispensable. Though there are no articles in scholarly journals for the outcomes of learning Tamil and Malay, I am aware that Singaporeans often remark on the low level of Malay and Tamil acquired by school going children.



The outcomes of English language education are different. Singapore has consistently been in the top 10 in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study conducted by the International Evaluation Association. The PIRLS, in which about 50 countries participate, is a test of reading achievement in grade 4 (<http://pirls2016.org/pirls/summary/>). In 2016 Singapore came 2nd in PIRLS after the Russian Federation. Since this test is conducted with a representative sample of school going children, and for Singapore the test is in English, it is reasonable to assume that the standard of English language education in Singapore is reasonably high.

Despite these stellar results, Singapore is aware that there are many children who come into grade 1 without the requisite skills in reading English, which is the impetus behind the Learning Support Program (LSP). The LSP is an early intervention in reading for struggling readers implemented in all primary schools in Singapore. The number of children registering for primary school in 2016 was 41,000 (<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/primary-1-registration-to/1923958.html>), which is similar to the cohort size in the last 5 years. Each year 12–14% of students entering grade 1 are identified as requiring learning support for math and English. Though most of these children attend either learning support classes in math or English, a few attend both. There is no data in the public domain about the background of the children who are in the LSP. However, from informal conversations with numerous teachers in the LSP, I gathered that many children in these classes come from lower-income homes where a substantial amount of Mother Tongue is spoken. Even in homes where English is spoken frequently, the quality of language is closer to Singlish rather than Standard English. Though in a few LSP classes we did encounter autistic boys or children with ADHD, most of the children would be classified as typically developing but weak readers.

The LSP has many similarities with both pull-out ESL and push-in ESL classes. Students are pulled out of their mainstream classes for half an hour per day and provided instruction in a separate room. Curriculum in the LSP classes closely follows what the mainstream English teacher is doing thus the program has features of a push-in ESL program. All the instruction is in English, and the approach of the teacher is that the children are monolinguals even though neither the students nor the teacher is monolingual. Though each school in Singapore has teachers who teach Chinese, Malay, and Tamil in the Mother Tongue classes, these teachers rarely interact with the LSP teacher, though they are language teachers for the same students. There is thus a lack of communication between the English and Mother Tongue teachers regarding the students they are teaching. Within the LSP program, there are three tiers: Tier 1, 2, and 3. Typically children enter the program in Tier 1 and exit in Tier 3. The program starts with a phonics-based approach to reading Ginn readers and goes on to a more whole language-based approach.

This book is based entirely on children in the Learning Support Program. Both the research projects, which will be described in detail in Chap. 3, were situated in the LSP.

## Translanguaging

Translanguaging has become a buzzword and a moot concept in the literature on bilingualism, as Lin has explicated in the introduction to this book. Here I will first explain it on the basis of my own experience and thereafter refer to the increasingly burgeoning literature on this topic.

Discussing the debate between translanguaging and the older buzzword “code-switching” is one way of establishing the definition of translanguaging. During my data collection in a government school in India, which had recently changed its medium of instruction from Hindi to English, I found that when the teacher was talking in English most of the students were taking notes in Hindi (Vaish 2008). Though at that time the word translanguaging was not prevalent and I was using the term code-switching, it occurred to me that the type of learning taking place in the cognitive space of the student was not merely code-switching. Technically no one was switching languages. The teacher was speaking in English and the students were silent. However, the students were translating and transliterating what the teacher was saying into Hindi as they wrote their notes in the English textbook. Today, this languaging practice is definitely translanguaging and not code-switching because it involves multiple modalities of listening, writing, and thinking spread across two languages with no efficient way of separating them.

In an interview with Professor Ofelia Garcia, who is at the forefront of research in translanguaging, the following question was posed:

But isn't translanguaging what others call “code-switching”?

Absolutely not! Notice that translanguaging is not simply going from one language code to another. The notion of code-switching assumes that the two languages of bilinguals are two separate monolingual codes that could be used without reference to each other. Instead, translanguaging posits that bilinguals have one linguistic repertoire from which they select features strategically to communicate effectively. ... Translanguaging takes as its starting point the language practices of bilingual people as the norm, and not the language of monolinguals.... (from Celic and Seltzer 2011, pg. 1)

A more recent example to distinguish between code-switching and translanguaging is provided by Li Wei (2018) from a corpus of New Chinglish words. For instance, the word “gunverment” has been created by mixing “gun” plus “government” and includes connotations of Mao’s statement that “Government comes out of the barrel of the gun.” Li Wei rightly comments that existing terms such as code-mixing and code-switching are unable to capture the nuances of such a word as they are still constrained by naming languages as different structural and cognitive entities. More importantly Li Wei reminds us that the origin of the word “translanguaging” is not so much theory as a specific language practice situated in pedagogy. “It was Baker’s (2001) English translation of Williams’ (Williams 1994) Welsh term *trawsieithu*, to describe pedagogical practices that Williams observed in Welsh revitalization programmes where the teacher would try and teach in Welsh and the pupils would respond largely in English” (Li Wei 2018, pg. 15).

It is to this pedagogical definition of translanguaging, which is also emphasized by Lin in her introduction to this book, that I now turn. Since this book is about translanguaging pedagogy, Hornberger and Link's (2012, pg. 262) definition is the most relevant here. They write that translanguaging is "the purposeful pedagogical alternation of languages in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes" (pg. 262). In the example above, the student is listening in one language and writing the same content in another; thus her receptive and productive parts of the brain are simultaneously processing two linguistic systems. Garcia (2009) and Baker (2006) document that the term was first used by Cen Williams in Wales and referred to a unique curriculum which involved "the hearing, signing, or reading of lessons in one language, and the development of the work (the oral discussion, the writing of passages, the development of projects and experiments) in another language" (Garcia 2009, p. 301). The example I have provided above of the government school classroom in India falls under translanguaging pedagogy.

Cenoz (2017) has recently added a further nuance to translanguaging:

In the context of multilingual education, a distinction can be made between pedagogical and spontaneous translanguaging. ...Spontaneous translanguaging refers to the reality of multilingual usage in naturally occurring contexts where boundaries between languages are fluid and constantly shifting. It can take place both inside and outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, it can have pedagogical value but it has not been planned in advance as a pedagogical strategy. (pg. 7)

This book is about a planned pedagogical strategy, called "Raise the BAR (Bilingual Approach to Reading)," inside the classroom. The term "translanguaging" was deliberately not used in the title of this strategy as this term is not familiar to teachers in Singapore, and using such an academic term might deter teachers and schools from participating in our research project. Though Raise the BAR was planned, there were many aspects regarding curriculum, nature of the student body, nature of student talk, etc. that were unknown to us when we started our research study. We resourcefully adapted to these aspects as we journeyed forward, as did the students and teachers, who had never encountered translanguaging pedagogy in their school. Thus Raise the BAR comprised both design and spontaneous elements.

No doubt the term "translanguaging" has precursors like "hybrid language practices" (Gutierrez 2008) and Spanglish (Zantella 1997); however the substantial theory and pedagogical practice that Garcia (2009) and Garcia and Wei (2014) have provided for this term have caught the imagination of the academic community. The large number of articles being written on this topic, a trend that Angel Lin also refers to in the introduction to this book, is testimony to this interest.

It is ironic that despite being one of the most multilingual countries in the world, and with bilingual education as its cornerstone, Singapore is not familiar with the use of translanguaging as a resource in the classroom either in the English or in the MT classes. Surprisingly, in Chinese Mother Tongue classes, despite the fact that the government has repeatedly acknowledged that increasingly children are coming to school from English dominant homes, English is not considered a resource to teach and learn Chinese. Li et al. (2012) analyze some recent changes in the Chinese language syllabus and the perceptions of teachers towards these changes. Specifically

the Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee (CLCPRC) in 2004 recommended a modular approach to learning Chinese in which oral communication skills in Chinese and the use of ICT for learning would be emphasized, especially for children whose dominant home language was not Chinese. Though oracy is emphasized in the new modular approach, the pedagogic strategy of systematically using English to teach Chinese is not mentioned.

In Vaish and Subhan (2015) and Vaish (2018), I have briefly described one of the two research projects on which this book is based. This book is an opportunity to describe and analyze in detail the sliver of data presented in the aforementioned articles. These articles showcase some of the interactional patterns in which Chinese and Malay were systematically used to teach vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension in English. In one of the teacher interviews, I discovered that even before our research team approached her, the teacher was using translanguaging in her class in an ad hoc manner to support children who came from Malay and Chinese dominant homes. She explained her pedagogy thus:

Because, I mean before the program actually started I've already been using some form of bilingualism inside my LSP classes. So I think it's actually a very good step, it's a very good approach, especially for these kids. Most of them are not from the English speaking family. Most of them are from, you know, Chinese, Tamil and Malay. And it really helps because not, now, not only are they able to read, they also able to understand what they are reading because some of these kids, yes they might, they are able to read but they don't understand what they are reading. So I think it's a very good approach.

Given that this teacher had 15 years of teaching experience in the Learning Support Program, her comment is noteworthy. Without knowledge of the term translanguaging, she had been experimenting with using translation as a resource in the class to teach vocabulary in English. This was one of the reasons she was keen to participate in our research project and learn a systematic way of using Mother Tongue in the classroom to teach English. Unfortunately in Singapore the experience and practices of teachers are not considered reason enough to introduce translanguaging in the LSP to support weak students. This comment is an application of translanguaging at a fundamental level. It is an example of “trans-system and trans-spaces; that is, ... fluid practices that go between and beyond socially constructed language and educational systems, structures and practices to engage diverse students' multiple meaning-making systems and subjectivities” (Garcia and Wei 2014, pg. 3). The teacher validates the use of Mother Tongue in the English classroom to reinforce meaning-making, which is at the core of the practice of reading. She also validates their “subjectivities” by bringing in their home language, in this case Malay, which, as she mentions, is their dominant language. In this way the teacher is going “beyond socially constructed language and educational systems” which keep languages apart and proscribe translanguaging.

The discussion above brings us to a fundamental aspect of pedagogic translanguaging: should it be spontaneous or planned? In this book both aspects are an integral part of the pedagogy. In the Proof of Concept, as I will describe in detail in Chap. 3, the pedagogy was carefully planned with the collaboration of the teachers down to which lexical items and grammatical forms would be taught

through translanguaging. Yet, the junctures at which the teacher would leave an English-only format and approach the task through translanguaging was completely improvised. Also, we had no idea what to expect from the students, and there was no plan as to how we would use their responses. In keeping with this idea of the spontaneous vs planned is the debate as to exactly what is translanguaging pedagogy and what is not. At the most basic level pedagogy where teaching and learning are taking place through one language is not translanguaging. It is my belief that where a second or third language, apart from the medium of instruction, is allowed into classroom with an affective, academic, or identity goal, the pedagogy is translanguaging pedagogy.

Finally, which languages are included in the translanguaging practices of the students and teachers in this book? The bilingual students in this book are speakers of either Malay and English or Chinese and English. Thus three languages form the core of this book: English, Malay, and Chinese. In the case of English, the sociolinguistic landscape is complicated by the presence of Singlish along with Standard English. My view regarding Singlish is that it exists along with Standard English in the linguistic ecology of Singapore in a diglossic situation. Ferguson (1959) in his seminal paper wrote:

For convenience of reference the superposed variety in diglossia will be called the H ('high') variety or simply H, and the regional dialects will be called L ('low') varieties or, collectively, simply L. (pg. 327)

Just as in other diglossic languages, e.g., Tamil and Arabic, these two versions or registers are still considered part of one language, I believe that Singlish and Standard English are components of one language, with Singlish as the "L" variety and Standard English as the "H" variety. Tan and Tan (2008) in their paper on the attitudes of upper secondary school students towards Singlish reinforce this view. They also point out that "Standard English operates together with Singlish, and disentangling the two might be more difficult than imagined" (pg. 469). This intermeshing is especially relevant while analyzing language learning in 6–7-year-olds, which is the cohort studied in this book, as children at this age are unable to articulate the differences between Singlish and Standard English. It is for this reason that agentive and deliberate switching between Singlish and English is not a languaging phenomenon that can be quantified for the cohort of students in this study. Gupta (1986) and Alsagoff (2007), though they point out that the diglossic view of Standard English and Singlish is simplistic, do acknowledge its relevance in the linguistic landscape of Singapore.

No doubt translanguaging can occur between the L and H varieties of one language, but for this to be executed successfully, the speaker must have a high level of proficiency in both the varieties. Unfortunately it is often the case that children in the lower SES groups do not have access to standard varieties of language and know only the L variety. This is the level of proficiency of the children in the LSP regarding English: they know only the L variety. For such children translanguaging is not yet an available languaging skill. In this book when I refer to English, it is English with elements of Singlish spoken by children in the LSP.

## Argument of the Book

Now that a working definition of translanguaging has been discussed, I move on to the central argument of this book. This book explores the following broad research questions:

1. What happens when translanguaging pedagogy is introduced into a traditionally monolingual English class?
2. How can interactions replete with translanguaging be analyzed to show the purpose of the teacher and the learning of the students?
3. What are the ways in which we can measure the changes in teacher talk and student talk that happen due to translanguaging? Given that there was no standardized testing of students in this research study, how can student talk provide evidence of whether or not students are benefiting from translanguaging pedagogy?

The following chapters attempt to answer these broad research questions and a few new ones which are specific to the chapter. Throughout the book I am cognizant of the Asian context within which this study is culturally and ecologically situated. According to Li Wei (2011), translanguaging is deeply transformative. It is the “multilingual speakers’ creative and critical use of the full range of their sociocultural resources” (Li Wei 2011, pg. 1222). For translanguaging space to be meaningful, the teacher and the students must collaborate as equals to create a democratic space where talk time can be shared not only between interlocutors but also between languages. Only when power is truly shared can the speakers be creative and critical. As the reader will see in the ensuing chapters, the culture of pedagogy in Singapore, which is teacher fronted and highly scripted, is at odds with the very philosophy of translanguaging. Thus implementing a translanguaging program was fundamentally disruptive not only at the level of pedagogy and curriculum, but it challenged the very culture of the classroom.

### *Introduction by Angel Lin: Translanguaging and Translanguaging Pedagogies*

This introduction by Professor Lin defines and problematizes the theory of practice of translanguaging. She starts by explicating the differences between code-switching and translanguaging. She then moves on to the juxtaposition of planned vs spontaneous translanguaging which is very important for this book. Lin’s definition of these terms sets the stage for how these terms will be explicated through the data from Singapore’s classrooms. Lin’s final point about the challenges that translanguaging presents for teachers who want to practice it finds resonance in this book.

### ***Chapter 3 Methodology: Translanguaging and the Classroom***

Chapters 3 and 4 are both on the methodology of this book. In the first instance, the two research projects on which the book is based, the baseline study of the LSP and the Proof of Concept, are described. Raise the BAR (Bilingual Approach to Reading) which is the design of the Proof of Concept or the research study in which translanguaging was used in the LSP classes is described in detail. I share with the reader the challenges we faced in implementing Raise the BAR as this was a bottom-up design in which we changed the procedures along the way in keeping with the concerns of the teachers.

### ***Chapter 4 Methodology: Coding Bilingual Transcripts***

Thereafter the coding methods used throughout the book are discussed. Specifically transcripts were coded for quantity and quality of talk. In the former category, the focus was amount of talk and Mean Length of Utterance. In quality of talk questioning patterns, storytelling and interaction were the foci. Finally I reflect on the challenges of coding transcripts with specific pairs of languages like Malay-English and Chinese-English.

### ***Chapter 5 Comparing Monolingual and Bilingual Classrooms***

Pedagogy in the Learning Support Program of two groups of schools is discussed: one group where there was no change in the pedagogy vs another where translanguaging was introduced into the LSP classes. The first broad research question of this book regarding what happens when translanguaging is introduced into a monolingual class is addressed in Chap. 5. The main finding is that though there was no change in questioning patterns in teacher and student talk, there was a substantial change in interactional patterns due to translanguaging.

### ***Chapter 6 Interactional Patterns in the Malay Group***

Findings regarding the Malay-English group are presented in this chapter. The main finding is that, contrary to my assumptions, the average MLU of the Malay-English group went down in the translanguaging classes. I reflect on the reason why this could have happened. The other important finding is the way the teacher evoked metalinguistic awareness. In the teaching of vocabulary, I demonstrate how the



teacher used Malay to teach the precise meaning of the English word and create cross-linguistic transfer between Malay and English.

### ***Chapter 7 Interactional Patterns in the Chinese Group***

Similarly, an important finding here is the way the teacher used Chinese to create cross-linguistic transfer and metalinguistic awareness. Specifically I analyze interaction in which the teacher explained the differences between Chinese and English grammar to help the children notice that grammatical rules for one language cannot be applied to the other. In both Chapters 6 and 7, the interactional patterns show that translanguaging did indeed trigger metalinguistic awareness in the students.

### ***Chapter 8 The Storytellers***

Did translanguaging improve English language acquisition and if so exactly what improved? Chapter 8 explores answers to this question through a discussion of 22 stories told by 8 students. After coding these stories for amount of talk, lexical density, and episodic structure, I argue that translanguaging did, indeed, contribute to the eagerness of the children to tell stories, learn new vocabulary, and comprehend the texts they were being taught in class. However, the children who benefited most from translanguaging pedagogy were those who came from Mother Tongue dominant homes.

### ***Chapter 9 Conclusions and Implications***

The chapter starts with a summary of the specific Asian contexts that have been discussed in this book. How translanguaging brought substantial changes into classroom discourse is summarized in this final chapter along with aspects of pedagogy that, surprisingly, did not change. The journey through this research project was remarkable in the challenges it presented to the research team. A discussion of these difficult moments, from persuading schools and policymakers to buy into the concept of translanguaging, to coding transcripts with such disparate languages like Malay, Chinese, and English, is offered here in the hope that future researchers will anticipate these problems. Finally, I reflect on the growth area for a concept like translanguaging which, though it has caught the imagination of the international academic community, is lagging behind in some methodological issues. Future graduate students could take note of these areas and try to address them in their projects to take translanguaging forward.

## Conclusion

Though I have written this book, neither the research projects on which it is based nor the presentation of this book would have been possible without the team of multilingual research assistants who have been working with me for the past decade. Some of these young people are students at the National Institute of Education in Singapore where I work, and others are students in NTU or NUS. Whether they worked on my projects for many years or just joined for a few months to transcribe the complex multilingual transcripts which make the bulk of our data sets, all these individuals have taught me about their languages and cultures.

Despite the obvious differences between English, Malay, Tamil, and Chinese (Tamil is not included in the two research projects analyzed in this book, but it is an integral part of my other research projects), I see words and stories in these disparate languages that bind us in one geography and cultural landscape. For instance, the word “duniya” means “the world” in Malay. It has the same meaning in Hindi and Urdu, two of the languages that I speak fluently. One of the reasons for this connection between Hindi and Malay is that the ancient language Sanskrit, which is my L3, is a source for a lot of the lexicon in Hindi and Malay language. For instance, the word “Budiman” in Malay is derived from the Sanskrit word “Buddhimaan,” meaning intelligent or a person with knowledge. In fact the word for “language” in Malay is “bahasa” derived from the Sanskrit “bhashaa.” Similarly the monkey king of the Hindu epic Ramayana, an integral part of my Indian culture, is not only part of Chinese mythology, he also makes an appearance in the legends of Bali in Indonesia. Reflecting on these words and myths that connect the disparate ethnic groups in South East Asia is my personal attempt at trying to make meaning about being in the world through translanguaging.

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