

Language Policy, Language Teachers' Beliefs, and Classroom Practices

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The widespread use of a local variety of English, Singapore Colloquial English, or Singlish, has become somewhat of a controversial issue in Singapore especially in the eyes of the Singapore government. For example, in 2002 the Singapore government launched The 'Speak Good English Movement' (SGEM) with the objective of promoting the use of Standard English among Singaporeans. Furthermore, Singapore's newspapers have recently suggested that the responsibility for halting the deterioration (perceived or real) of the standards of English rests with Singapore's English language teachers. The case study presented in this paper offers one lens from which to view a policy-to-practice connection by outlining the impact of language policy on the beliefs and classroom practices of three primary school teachers concerning the use of Singlish in their classrooms. The results confirm those of previous studies that teachers' reactions to language policy is not a straightforward process and as such it is important to understand the role teachers play in the enactment of language policy.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1956, English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil have been designated as the four official languages in Singapore (Gopinathan 1980), and in 1987, English became the medium of instruction in the Singaporean school system, with one of the other official languages designated as a second school language (Bokhorst-Heng 1998). Over the years a local variety of Singapore English, known as Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) or Singlish, has also evolved but has become somewhat of a controversial topic especially from the government's point of view because, in terms of Haugen's (1987) model of language planning, they have 'deselected' Singlish in favor of a British/American model of English. Controversy followed because those who favor the use of Singlish (e.g. Rubdy 2001; Wee 2005) argue that it is a form of national identity and as such should not be discouraged, while those in the government, and more recently the press, suggest a language policy that promotes English as a language for international communication outside Singapore and they maintain that Singlish is not globally comprehensible (Fong *et al.* 2002). In fact, in a recent concerted effort to halt the use of Singlish, the Singapore government launched 'The Speak Good English Movement' (SGEM) in 2000 with the objective of promoting the use of 'good' English among Singaporeans but with the real intent, as Wee (2005)

has recently suggested, of eliminating Singlish altogether. Moreover, the Singapore press has also and specifically pointed an accusing finger at Singapore's English language teachers stating that they should play a more active role in halting the alleged deterioration of the standard of English in Singapore although they do not provide any evidence that this is in fact the case in Singapore's classrooms.

The purpose of this paper is to explore what is actually happening in English language classrooms in Singapore by investigating what English language teachers not only believe about the use of Singlish in their classes but also how they actually react (if they do) when students (and they themselves as teachers) use Singlish during English language lessons. Specifically, this paper details a case study that provides a 'lens from which to view a policy-to-practice connection' (Stritikus 2003: 34) by examining the actual impact of a top-down imposed English language policy on the beliefs and classroom practices of three primary school English language teachers. It should be noted that the focus of this paper is not to discuss the merits or demerits of such language policies in linguistic or political terms (see Wee 2005 for a full discussion of this matter); rather, the intent of the study is to examine teachers' perspectives in actual classrooms where various forms of English are used.

The English language in Singapore

In recent times, while increasing numbers of people around the world are now using English for international communication purposes, they are also beginning to emphasize their own local variety of English in order to protect their identity and values (Warschauer 2000). This recent recognition of new local varieties of English in many countries has, in turn, given rise to the birth of new varieties of English in the world such as Singlish in Singapore. Three models that have explained the variation in English in Singapore, and that have dominated much of the research on Singlish, are the *lectal continuum* (Platt 1977; Platt and Weber 1980), the *diglossia framework* (Gupta 1989, 1994), and the *expanding triangles* model (Pakir 1991).

In an early description of Singapore English, Platt and Weber (1980) suggested the idea of a speech continuum of Singapore English that ranges from the 'lowest' variety, the basilect, through the medium range, the mesolect, to the 'highest', the acrolect, maintaining that the acrolect is the variety closest to Standard British English while the basilect is a distinct non-British Standard English variety. Later, Gupta (1994) adopted Ferguson's (1959) use of diglossia as a framework in her description of Singapore English. Gupta (1994) suggested that the High (H) variety of English in Singapore is the same as Standard English used in the rest of the English-speaking world and explained that this H-variety is used in formal circumstances such as education, politics, and business. She described the Low (L) variety, or Singapore Colloquial English (SCE), as being distinct from

Standard English, especially in terms of syntax and morphology, and she also maintained that it is used outside most pedagogical situations such as the home and in casual conversations (Gupta 1994). Using yet a different approach, Pakir (1991) developed a model that synthesized the previous researchers' descriptions of Singapore English (the lectal continuum and the diglossic model) and explained a speaker's proficiency in terms of expanding triangles. According to Pakir's (1991) description, highly educated English speakers are placed at the apex of the triangle and have access to the greatest variety of styles, from the most formal to the most intimate, while those at the base of the triangle are described as less proficient English speakers who are usually restricted to using the colloquial forms of Singapore English. English in Singapore today is seen by the government as the key to economic success. The government has therefore entrusted the Ministry of Education to maintain an acceptable standard of English in the school system that does not include the use of Singlish.

As the medium of instruction in its schools, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Singapore has again recently emphasized that only Standard English, which they define as 'internationally acceptable English that is grammatical, fluent and appropriate for purpose, audience, context and culture' (Ministry of Education [MOE] 2001:3), should only (with the strong implication that it was not, Kramer-Dahl 2003) be used by Singapore's teachers. As Kramer-Dahl (2003: 172) has noted, MOE officials positioned 'their teachers guilty as charged' citing such comments as: 'some of them [primary school teachers] start talking like the children because they use very simple English' (head of a primary school's English department). Around this time, all teachers in Singapore were given a top-down directive by the MOE to attend grammar classes (mandatory), with many of these teachers 'finding out about it from the Sunday morning paper' (Kramer-Dahl 2003: 174).

Teacher beliefs and attitudes towards Singapore English

Research on teacher beliefs, defined by Kagan (1992: 65) as 'unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught,' shares three basic assumptions: (1) teachers' beliefs influence perception and judgement; (2) teachers' beliefs play a role in how information on teaching is translated into classroom practices; (3) understanding teachers' beliefs is essential to improving teaching practices and teacher education programs (Johnson 1994). A limited number of studies, mostly large surveys, have been conducted on teacher beliefs and the use of Singlish in Singapore school classrooms. For example, Saravanan and Poedjosoedarmo (1997) surveyed 326 Singaporean trainee teachers regarding their beliefs towards the use of Singlish in class and revealed that in general, many of the teachers believed that Standard English was the only appropriate model of English that should be used in classrooms although they noted that the occasional use of Singlish to establish rapport or to mark

solidarity was acceptable. Teh (2000) also surveyed the beliefs of twenty teachers concerning the use of Singlish in schools and indicated that, although these teachers felt that Singlish can be used for general communication, it should not be used for communication in the school context. The respondents also suggested that the use of Singlish in classrooms might have detrimental effects on the students' written work.

As illustrated by the findings of these two surveys, most educators believed that the use of Singlish should be discouraged in classrooms and schools. Because many of the previous studies on teacher beliefs of the use of Singlish only involved surveying Singaporean teachers' about their espoused beliefs on the use of Singlish in schools, they may not be a reliable guide as to what actually happens in the classrooms. Consequently, the study reported on in this paper not only sought to document and understand the stated beliefs of three English language teachers in Singapore but also sought to observe their actual classroom practices regarding the usage of Singlish to see if there was convergence or divergence between their beliefs and classroom practices.

THE STUDY

Context

The study was conducted in three Singapore Elementary schools (government-funded schools). The schools have a heterogeneous multi-ethnic make up that reflects the composition of Singapore's population of 3.44 million people, which is composed of 76.25 per cent Chinese, 13.78 per cent Malays, 8.26 per cent Indians, and 1.71 per cent of other racial groups (Singapore Department of Statistics 2003). The three participating Singaporean teachers in this study have been assigned pseudonyms, Jake, Ken, and Liv, to ensure their anonymity. The study focused on their primary (P3) English language lessons and they each only allowed observers access to two of their classes, because they considered any further observations to be disruptive.

Data collection

A qualitative, descriptive research case-study approach was adopted in this study to investigate the relation between the three teachers' beliefs about the use of Singlish in their classrooms and their actual classroom feedback practices—in terms of frequency, immediacy, and strategy—regarding their students' oral usage of Singlish in their English language classes (Patton 2002). The two initial research questions were:

- 1 What are the three primary (Elementary) School teachers' beliefs regarding their students' use of Singlish in English language classes?
- 2 What are the feedback practices (defined in terms of frequency, strategy, and immediacy (Lyster 1998)) exhibited by the teachers when dealing with their students' use of Singlish during English language lessons?

Two classroom observations were conducted over a 2-month period for each teacher and each observation was coded using a lesson observation checklist (see Appendix A) adapted from the work of Alsagoff and Ho (1998) who acknowledge the autonomy of Singlish as a separate code. Audio-recordings of the lesson observations were transcribed and also used to generate enquiries during the interviews, which took place directly after the lesson observations. The semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) were the primary research tool used to obtain information about the teachers' beliefs regarding their students' oral usage of Singlish in English classes. The interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed before they were returned to the teachers to verify the accuracy of the content and to check for misinterpretation of the teachers' views (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Data analysis

Data from the teachers' interviews and the classroom observations were compared for evidence of convergence or divergence between the teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices (Cohen and Manion 1989). The classroom data were transcribed using transcriptions adapted from Richards (2006) (see Appendix C) only for examples on Singlish and the reliability of the data analysis was enhanced by having two independent data coders (McDonough and McDonough 1997) as a check for inter-coder reliability. These coders also functioned as external audits to examine and assess the accuracy of both the process and product of the data collection (Creswell 1998). The classroom observation data was analyzed for frequency, strategy, and immediacy of feedback, that is the response provided by the teachers when attempting to modify a particular Singlish feature in their students' utterances. The following feedback strategies (adapted from Lyster (1998) and Leo (1986)) were used as coding categories for the different strategies the teachers used when giving feedback (see Appendix D for definitions of different feedback strategies): rephrasing, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, emphasis, and localization.

FINDINGS

Generally, the findings show that all three teachers seem to be very supportive of their students' learning of English and all three seem to use appropriate techniques for their students to develop appropriate skills in Standard English. The findings also indicate that all three teachers favor a philosophy of encouraging their students to learn rather than being punitive or paying attention to minor details. This was demonstrated through the infrequent correction of the students' oral usage of Singlish during most of the lesson observations and reflects their expressed belief that students should not be corrected each time a Singlish feature occurred in their speech.

We now report in more detail on the teachers' specific beliefs, classroom practices, and a comparison of these stated beliefs and classroom practices.

Teachers' beliefs

Table 1 provides a summary of all three teachers' beliefs concerning eighteen different aspects of Singlish. All three teachers seem to have similar ideas

Table 1: Summary of teachers' beliefs

Stated beliefs	Jake	Ken	Liv
1 Singlish is acceptable in informal situations.	✓	✓	✓
2 Singlish is acceptable in classroom situations.	✓	✓	×
3 Students' use of Singlish is due to insufficient exposure to Standard English.	✓	✓	✓
4 Students are aware of the differences between Singlish and Standard English.	×	×	×
5 Students are always expected to speak Standard English in class.	×	×	✓
6 Acceptability of the student's use of Singlish in class varies with their level of proficiency in English.	✓	✓	*
7 British English is the Standard English in Singapore.	✓	✓	✓
8 Students need to be proficient in Standard English because they are taking Cambridge papers in future.	✓	✓	*
9 Students need to be proficient in Standard English because they need to be able to speak and write well in English in order to do well in Singapore.	*	*	✓
10 Teachers are responsible for correcting students when they speak Singlish.	✓	✓	✓
11 Teachers are responsible for modeling the oral usage of Standard English.	✓	✓	✓
12 Feedback should always be provided whenever students speak Singlish.	×	×	×
13 Frequent correction of students' oral usage of Singlish affects students' confidence.	✓	✓	✓
14 Frequent correction of students' oral usage of Singlish affects the flow of the lesson.	*	*	✓
15 Rephrasing is the most appropriate feedback strategy to use when dealing with students' oral usage of Singlish.	✓	✓	✓
16 Students' standard of English can be improved by reading more English books.	✓	✓	✓
17 Singlish should be abolished.	×	×	×
18 Singlish is a form of Singaporean's identity.	✓	✓	✓

Key: ✓ Agree; × Not agree; * Not stated.

of what they perceived Singlish to be, as well as similar interpretations of what they perceive as Standard English. For example, Jake defined Singlish as a form of English that he said is ‘ungrammatical, with a lot of “lahs” and “lehhs”’ (Interview, 5 September). Jake also said that he regards British English as the Standard English, citing as his reason the fact that he was taught British English and that he assumes that he is expected to teach British English because his students will be taking ‘O’ Level Cambridge papers in the future. Jake remarked:

Perhaps Standard English is more like British English whereby it is more formal. We are taking ‘O’ Level Cambridge. So, I think the ministry would like us to follow British English although American English is acceptable. But perhaps our form of Standard English is British English. (Interview, 5 September)

Ken defined Singlish as ‘a combination of English and a bit of Hokkien, Malay, and other languages’ (Interview, 19 September). He added that for him a main feature of Singlish was the shortening of sentences; he explained, ‘Singaporeans are a bit “kiasu” so they want everything to be done in the shortest time. Singlish is carried out using that kind of attitude’ (Interview, 19 September). ‘Kiasu’, according to Brown (1999: 123), means ‘fear or dislike of losing out to others’ so Ken suggested that Singaporeans may shorten sentences in order to speed up oral communications. Like Jake, Ken asserted that for him British English is the Standard English because he was taught British English as a student and like Jake, Ken also suggested that because the examinations that the students would take would be administered by Cambridge, he said that he has the responsibility to follow the standards of British English. He continued:

Probably British English is the Standard English because we were under the British rule and I think my teachers taught using British English when I was young. Since they will be taking Cambridge papers in future, I think we should follow British English. (Interview, 19 September)

Liv defined Singlish as being ‘grammatically incorrect [English] but understandable by Singaporeans’ (Interview, 21 September). Similar to Jake and Ken, Liv also expressed her strong view that the only Standard English for her is British English. However, Liv went further and also proposed that the perceived deteriorating standards of English in Singapore might be due to the many influences from the students’ mother tongues, dialects, and even American English. The following interview segment suggests that, similar to the other two teachers, Liv may not be correctly informed about Standard English, and in fact may be biased against American English:

British English is Standard English. American English is not because our system is adopting British English. So if they spell colour as ‘c-o-l-o-r’, I think it’s wrong, but you see ‘c-o-l-o-r’

everywhere, even in Microsoft Word, they change it to 'c-o-l-o-r' when you write 'c-o-l-o-u-r'... I think the media is not exposing them to Standard English, they are exposed to American English. (Interview, 21 September)

All three teachers said that they also believed that most of their students might not be aware of the differences between Singlish and Standard English. Jake remarked that as most of his students come from non-English-speaking families, they have had very few opportunities to converse in English and as a result, Jake maintained: 'When they try to translate their thoughts into English, some features from their mother tongue can usually be observed in their sentences' (Interview, 5 September). Ken also said that he believes his students do not know the differences between Singlish and other types of English including Standard English. He explained:

I don't think they are aware of the differences... they are exposed to so many types of English like Singlish, British English, American English that they may not know which is the Standard English. As a result, they just mix here and there. (Interview, 19 September)

Liv also said she believes that her students might not be aware of the differences between Singlish and Standard English. She explained, 'You have to tell them what is right and what is wrong' (Interview, 21 September).

Regarding the acceptability of the use Singlish in their classes (by both students and the teacher), each teacher seems to exhibit contradictory beliefs. For example, Jake espouses both respect for Singlish and derision of the language as deficient, which is an interesting and contradictory combination that Braj Kachru (1996: 11) has referred to as 'linguistic schizophrenia', which can include a concern for the reimposition of the older standard British English norm used in the past in Singapore. Jake said that while Singlish would be acceptable to him in informal situations, it should not be used in formal situations. Jake considered lessons (including both lessons observed in this study) that involve 'lots of interactions among students and teachers' as informal and that his use of Singlish in such lessons helps him create rapport with the students. Jake explained:

[Singlish] may be appropriate when you want to bond with someone because when you use Singlish, it is very personal... when people are joking or having a relaxing moment with some close friends, I think this sort of situation can allow the usage of Singlish. In formal occasions, like business meetings, the situation requires more professional behavior [and] requires proper English to be spoken. (Interview, 5 September)

Although Jake said he felt that it was important for students to acquire Standard English, he said that he does not believe in correcting his students every time they use Singlish in class, because as he says, it is more important for students to develop their confidence in speaking. He maintains that 'It's

ok for them to speak Singlish in class as the main thing is for them to speak up in class and build confidence' (Interview, 5 September). He believes that Singlish should not be abolished, as he says it is a unique characteristic of Singaporeans. However, Jake added that he believes that there is still a need for students to be able to switch to the proper form of English when the situation arises. He continued:

I think Singlish is part of us. We shouldn't totally force everyone to follow the Standard English like British English or American English. We should know our own English but we should be able to switch from one Standard English to another form easily. (Interview, 5 September)

Jake agrees that he believes that he uses Singlish in class: 'Sometimes, it's a slip of the tongue, sometimes it's on purpose' (Interview, 5 September). He said that he uses Singlish occasionally in class to build rapport as he said he felt it was 'more intimate; it's like a bond between us' (Interview, 5 September). In addition, Jake said he believes that teachers should not be too obsessive in correcting their students' usage of Singlish. He explained:

I feel that we shouldn't be so obsessive in correcting their mistakes, we should allow them to speak so that they are more confident, then slowly as they get influenced by proper English, I think they will change slowly, so we should not force upon them. (Interview, 5 September)

He also expressed that students should learn about the differences between Singlish and Standard English in a more interesting way. Jake revealed that he had been adopting a reward system to encourage his students to speak better English. He explained this as follows:

I told them, if they can spot my mistakes, I'll add points to their groups. If they can catch me saying a particular Singlish phrase, I'll give them points and if they catch someone else speaking in Singlish, they will also get some points. (Interview, 5 September)

When asked how successful this strategy was, Jake replied that it was relatively effective and elaborated that, 'most of them have stopped saying "I finished, I finished", they are starting to say "I've completed my work" or "I'm done"' (Interview, 5 September). So, on the one hand, the interview data show that Jake does not feel it is important correct Singlish features every time (a claim corroborated by the classroom observation data). However, the interview data also show that he wants students to 'catch' him using Singlish, and to eventually make a transition to more standard language use in the classroom, thereby removing Singlish from the classroom context. Similarly, Liv revealed somewhat contradictory beliefs in that, although the use of Singlish is generally acceptable to her (although she did not mention if this was for the teacher and/or the students), its use should

not be encouraged in class. She said, 'Singlish is always not ok to me in class' (Interview, 21 September).

Ken said that he believed that English language teachers should assume the main responsibility to 'correct' their students when they speak in Singlish and explained that teachers 'are in a better position to correct them' (Interview, 19 September). He added that he would usually paraphrase his students' utterances immediately when there was a total loss of meaning. However, Ken expressed his view that teachers should not provide feedback on their students' use of Singlish too frequently as this may affect their confidence and they may eventually avoid the use of English. He explained:

If it has lost the total meaning, I'll try to paraphrase for them immediately. For example 'so and so, is this what you mean?' and hopefully, they'll learn from it. If I correct them, it'll be like 'the teacher is trying to scrutinize the way I speak, everything I say, he will analyze bit by bit.' As a result, he or she may be very withdrawn and dare not speak English. (Interview, 19 September)

Like Jake and Ken, Liv revealed that although she said she tries to model the use of Standard English while teaching, she believes that she uses Singlish but only when she joked with her students. She remarked, 'I use Singlish when I joke with them but I try to avoid using Singlish when I'm teaching.' (Interview, 21 September). Liv also said she does not believe in correcting her students' utterances every time they speak Singlish in favor of getting on with encouraging her students to learn. She explained:

In class, if you start correcting everyone, then when are you going to continue the lesson? Let's say, when we are having a discussion, you discover that they speak Singlish, but you cannot be correcting every one of them. If not, your discussion will not be flowing smoothly. (Interview, 21 September)

When Liv has to correct, similar to Jake and Ken, she said she prefers to promptly rephrase her students' sentences when they speak Singlish in class:

When they say 'I finish already, I'll rephrase their sentence at once by saying, 'You mean, I have finished my work?' When I rephrase, I'm correcting them in a subtle way. If I were to be more direct, some pupils may feel embarrassed that their friends will laugh at them when they are corrected. (Interview, 21 September)

Classroom practices

The following section reports the findings regarding the teachers' classroom practices and is summarized in Table 2.

Each of Jake's two observed lessons were interpreted as being learner-centered in that students were engaged mostly in 'interactive and communicative activities' (Ow and Ho 1993: 8), a similar observation for Liv's two lessons indicated that they were interactive; in contrast the two

Table 2: Summary of teachers' practices

Feedback practices	Jake	Ken	Liv
1 Feedback was provided whenever a Singlish feature was present in the students' utterances.	×	×	×
2 Whenever feedback was provided on students' oral usage of Singlish, it was always immediate.	✓	✓	✓
3 Rephrasing was the most frequently feedback strategy adopted.	✓	✓	✓
4 Singlish features were present in teacher's speech.	✓#	✓	✓

Key: ✓ Observed; × Not observed; # Less than three occurrences.

observed lessons conducted by Ken were interpreted as being more teacher-centered in nature. In the first observed lesson in Jake's class, it was noted that Jake provided feedback to students on five occurrences in which Singlish features occurred in utterances. Each time his feedback was immediate and he rephrased his students' sentences. For example, Jake responded promptly to his students' utterances twice when their sentences showed an absence of past tense marking as illustrated in the following (in all the examples S = student and T = teacher):

Example 1: Absence of past tense marking

S: > Then the crocodile *run* away.<

T: Then the crocodile *ran(?)* away?

S: Ya::, then *run* away.

T: After the noose was loosened, the crocodile *swam* away.

Jake also rephrased two of his students' sentences when their utterances showed subject deletion, as shown in the following examples (although it should be noted that the researchers recognize that the notion of 'deletion' is highly problematic as it conveys the notion that 'good speakers' speak only in complete and 'whole sentences' which is not acceptable in the study of spoken discourse):

Example 2: Subject deletion

S: Ya, then ^ run away.

T: After the noose was loosened (0.5), *the crocodile swam* away.

Example 3: Subject deletion

S: ^ Never die lah::.

T: No, *it* went into the sewage, then it went up the toilet bowl(!).

In the second observed lesson, Jake provided feedback for twelve of the forty-one instances in which Singlish features occurred in his students' utterances.

The Singlish feature that was most frequently responded to by Jake was subject deletion, followed by the use of 'got' as 'there is'. Jake attended to the use of the former four times and the latter three times respectively as outlined in the following examples:

Example 4: Subject deletion (and verb deletion)

- T: Why do you want to cut out this article?
 S: (1.0) ^ Very interesting.
 T: *This article(?)* is very interesting.

Example 5: Subject deletion

- T: How about the hair?
 S: >^ Brown color<
 T: Ok(.), tell me (..) so '*The hair...*'
 S: The hair is brown in color
 T: Ok

Example 6: Use of 'got' as 'there is'

- S: *Got* many meat_.
 T: *There are* shops that sell meat?

Example 7: Use of 'got' as 'there is'

- S: *Got* playground lah::, you don't anyhow say.
 T: Ok, so that means *there is* a playground somewhere in the neighborhood, right?

The two feedback strategies adopted by Jake in the second observed lesson were rephrasing and elicitation; he used rephrasing fifteen times and elicitation twice when he responded to his students' usage of Singlish (see Appendix C for definitions of feedback strategies). The only Singlish feature observed in Jake's speech during the observed lessons was the use of the generalized 'is it' tag. To illustrate, when a student could not answer a question in the first observed lesson, Jake asked, 'Cannot say anything, is it?'

In Ken's first observed lesson he provided feedback in only two out of the twenty-one instances in which his students used Singlish in their oral speech. He rephrased one student's sentence when the student failed to show past tense marking and later when another student used a borrowed word from another language such as Malay. The following examples illustrate the instances in which Ken provided immediate feedback in response to his students' usage of Singlish:

Example 8: Absence of past tense marking

- S: Teacher(?), just now (0.5) F come but K *ask* her to go home, then she *go* home.
 T: She went home? How come?

Example 9: Use of borrowings

- S: N always *kacau* her:.
 T: What does *kacau* mean?
 S: *Kacau* means disturb.

As shown in Example 9 above, Ken tried to elicit the appropriate English word when one of his students used the borrowing 'kacau', a Malay word for 'disturb' (Brown 1999: 120).

During the second lesson, Ken rephrased his students' sentences in two out of the eleven occasions in which Singlish features appeared in their speech. The two events included when a student's sentence demonstrated 'be' deletion, and another when a student used 'never' as 'did not', both outlined as follows:

Example 10: 'Be' deletion

- T: Who will be playing football after school?
 S: Teacher:., he ^ playing
 T: ((To H)) You are playing with A?

Example 11: Use of 'never' as 'did not'

- S: ((To P)) >Why you *never* bring your body? <
 T: ((To P)) Did you bring anything today?

As noted from the lesson observations, Ken seldom corrected his students when features of Singlish occurred in their speech but when he did, Ken either rephrased his students' utterance or tried to elicit the correct standard form from the students. Specifically, Ken only provided feedback (immediate) four times when Singlish features occurred in his students' speech in the two observed lessons. Several instances of absence of subject-verb agreement and an instance of the absence of past tense marker were noted in Ken's own classroom speech. His utterances also included a conditional clause without the subordinating conjunction 'if'. Some of the examples are illustrated in the following:

Example 12: Absence of subject-verb agreement

- T: He *do* not know.

Example 13: Absence of past tense marking

- T: So far, H *give* me one good way and one bad way.

Example 14: Conditional clauses without subordinating conjunction

- T: You give the answer... *you must support with reasons what.*

In Liv's first observed lesson, she provided feedback using the strategy of rephrasing on each occasion for the absence of subject-verb agreement in her

students' oral English, as she promptly rephrased two out of the three occurrences in her students' speech outlined as follows:

Example 15: Absence of subject–verb agreement

- S: The ghost want to eat the old man ((giggles)).
T: (0.5) The ghost wants to eat the old man?

Example 16: Absence of subject–verb agreement

- S: No::, teacher(?), I thought the skeleton *want* to eat the sausage(?).
T: The skeleton wants to eat the sausage?

Liv also provided immediate feedback when another Singlish feature, 'be' deletion, was present in one of her students' utterances as follows:

Example 17: 'Be' deletion

- T: Why do you think the boy wants another sausage?
S: Because he ^ still hungry::.
T: Because he is still hungry(?)?

In the second observed lesson, Liv provided immediate feedback in four instances when her students used Singlish in their utterances. Of the four, subject deletion occurred twice as in example 18:

Example 18: Subject deletion and use of particles

- S: >^ Like model *ah?*<
T: *It's* not model, something like that.

The other instance in which Liv provided immediate feedback was when there was 'be' deletion in one of her students' utterances as follows:

Example 19: 'Be' deletion

- S: Teacher(?), S ^ correct?
T: S *is* correct.

Liv's speech during her interactions with her class had few instances of Singlish; only two examples of conditional clauses without 'if' or 'when' and one occurrence of the use of particles were observed. The absence of subject–verb agreement and the use of the generalized 'is it' tag also occurred once each in Liv's speech. Some examples are outlined below:

Example 20: Conditional clauses without subordinating conjunction

- T: You open your mouth unnecessarily, you can leave the class.
You want to talk, you raise your hand.

Example 21: Absence of subject–verb agreement

T: Because the boy is not scared, so he *don't* talk?

Example 22: Use of particle

T: Where's Ali *ah*?

Comparison of beliefs and practices

On the face of it, the findings seem to reveal that most of the teachers' practices were in alignment with their stated beliefs. Jake's actual feedback practices in class regarding the oral usage of Singlish seem generally consistent with his stated beliefs. As observed from the two lessons, Jake seldom corrected his students' utterances, which contained Singlish features. This practice concurred with his belief that students should not be corrected every time they speak Singlish in English classes. Jake's stated preference for the feedback strategy of rephrasing the Singlish features in his students' sentences was also reflected in his actual classroom practices; as illustrated from the lesson observations, the feedback strategy that Jake used most frequently when he responded to his students' oral usage of Singlish was rephrasing.

Like Jake, Ken's actual classroom feedback practices regarding his students' oral use of Singlish were in line with his stated beliefs. As observed from the two lessons, the frequency of Ken providing feedback when his students used Singlish features was low. This practice corresponded with his belief that students should 'not be corrected' every time they spoke Singlish in class and could also be explained by Ken's teaching style, which is more teacher-centered than Jake's, that is, it is more likely to create a context in which less feedback would generally take place. Similar to Jake, whenever Ken provided feedback it was immediate. Moreover, observation of his classroom practices revealed they were in line with his claim that rephrasing his students' Singlish utterances was his preferred method of feedback.

Like Jake and Ken, Liv's actual classroom feedback practices regarding the oral usage of Singlish were also generally consistent with her stated beliefs. Liv's preference for the feedback strategy of rephrasing the Singlish features in her students' sentences was also reflected in her actual classroom practices. However, it is interesting to note that although all three expressed the belief that teachers should be responsible for correcting students' oral usage of Singlish, the frequency of their provision of feedback in response to the students' oral usage of Singlish was low. It can be suggested that the teachers' consideration of their students' confidence and the flow of the lessons have a substantial degree of influence on their beliefs about error correction, which consequently, direct the teachers' final instructional decision to avoid the frequent provision of feedback.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate how the many complex beliefs held by teachers can sometimes be in conflict with each other and how these beliefs exert different degrees of power and influence on the teachers' final classroom practices. For example, the conflict that Jake exhibited concerning teaching Standard English, and both his own use and his students' use of Singlish in class highlights a complexity that many educators experience when teaching students who speak a non-standardized variety (and who speak that variety themselves as well), and has implications for language policy makers not only in Singapore but also in other postcolonial settings. This dilemma was further enhanced by the tension the teachers in this study felt between 'solidarity' and rapport-building, and the pressures of academic contexts to produce academic language create a complex response. Although the three teachers in this study may not have talked much about the language policies of the MOE, the SGEM, or the Singapore government, results from the interviews suggest that all three teachers were somewhat confused about the language policies of not only the SGEM, but also the government policy of advocating a Standard Singapore English. For example, although all three teachers agreed that it is teachers who should bear the main responsibility of modeling the use of Standard English, it is also interesting to note that all three teachers unanimously named British English as their Standard English, citing the same reason that they were taught British English when they were young. This is in contrast to the Singapore government's view which promotes Singapore Standard English. The SGEM (2005) webpage clearly states that the Standard they aspire to is 'Singapore Standard English that follows the basic rules on international English in terms of grammar, and vocabulary while still maintaining its own identity such as accent and some distinctive vocabulary items as American and Australian English does.'

The results of this small case study also seem to confirm previous case study research on this topic (e.g. Jennings 1996; Stritikus 2003) in that teachers' reactions to language policy implementation can be 'a messy process' (Stritikus 2003: 50) at best, especially if the teachers themselves have not been consulted (as was shown through the study reported in this paper) as to how such policy should be implemented in classrooms, and even more so if such language policies are in conflict with the reality of its usage within communities. As such, one obvious but vitally important recommendation that stems from the study reported here is that language policy makers in Singapore (and elsewhere) should consult the very teachers who are entrusted to carry out language policy changes in their classes or, as Stritikus (2003: 33) has suggested, 'in a recursive relationship with the environments in which they work'. This consultation (possibly in the form of workshops) should, at the very least, provide clear guidelines to teachers in Singapore on exactly what Standard English is, what is acceptable and what is not,

why these examples are acceptable, and why other examples are not. Teacher training institutes in Singapore (which are controlled by the MOE for the most part) could also do more in the initial preparation of its future teachers (not only English language teachers, because the medium of instruction is English in all schools) by providing clear guidelines to trainee teachers on exactly how the SGEM can be realistically implemented in all Singapore classrooms. It should be said that the three teachers reported on in this case study are not failing to implement the language policies of the Singapore government in terms of the use of Standard English in their classes; far from it, if anything, they appear to have a stricter interpretation of the SGEM idea in part because they have been left to interpret these policies on their own. Although all three teachers are recent graduates from a teaching institute in Singapore, they do not seem to have had any training in how to implement the SGEM ideas in their classrooms. Clearly, a closer connection between top-down implemented language policies and the realities of the classroom in which such policies must be implemented needs to be made and a research priority undertaken concerning the reality of the Singapore classroom. As Kramer-Dahl (2003: 164) has observed:

What has remained grossly under researched and poorly understood, as a result, is the nature of the challenge that Singapore teachers, especially those in neighborhood schools, face when they have to provide English-medium instruction for students, most of whom live in a social world where English, especially in its standard form, is rarely used in the family and community.

In addition there may also be a need for the teachers themselves to communicate more clearly about their expectations of their students to speak in Standard English. As illustrated in the case study, although the teachers expressed the idea that the use of Singlish be discouraged in class, they seldom provided feedback in response to their students' usage of Singlish in the observed lessons perhaps, as was pointed out above, because they themselves are confused with what Standard English is and why Singlish has been deselected. Hence, it can be suggested that teachers increase not only their students' awareness but also their own knowledge about the differences between Standard English and Singlish. To do so, Fong *et al.* (2002) have suggested the use of a contrastive analysis approach to teach grammar by showing students the differences between the colloquial and the standard variety. According to Taylor (1989), the contrastive analysis approach will also enable students to make more informed choices about the appropriate variety to use given different contexts and interactions.

Another aspect of pedagogical consideration concerns the type of feedback strategies employed by the teachers in the observed lessons. As indicated in the case study, the three teachers preferred the use of rephrasing when dealing with their students' usage of Singlish as they felt that this strategy was subtler and less hurtful to the students' confidence. However, studies by

Allwright (1975), Chaudron (1988), and Lyster (1998) have shown that this implicit strategy is less effective than more explicit strategies as the students may have difficulties recognizing the strategy as a corrective feedback.

As with all forms of research, limitations are inherent in this present study. Serving a mainly descriptive function, it attempts to identify some of the primary English teachers' beliefs about their students' oral usage of Singlish in English lessons. Due to the nature of the study and time constraints, the study is limited in its scope as it investigates the beliefs and feedback practices of a small sample size of only three teachers of English language, in three Singapore neighborhood schools. The small sample size, in addition to the low number of permitted classroom observations indicates that the choice of teachers for this study may not have been optimal: they considered more observations to be disruptive, and this also implies that any generalization based on the results of the study may not be as reliable as it could have been. In addition, the teachers were only asked to comment on their students' use of Singlish during oral activities and not about their beliefs or feedback practices on student writing, where their views may have been very different. Future research in this context could include teachers' beliefs about student writing.

One final word related to limitations regarding the research methodology reported on in this paper is that when teachers attempt to articulate their beliefs and classroom practices, they may not be able to verbalize why they have made a particular decision partly because these beliefs are forever changing (Senior 2006), and even when these beliefs have been articulated, they may be an unreliable guide to the reality of their classroom actions (Pajares 1992). As such, when beliefs have been stated, future researchers (and teachers) should monitor classroom practices to see if there is evidence of these beliefs in actual classroom practices (deductive approach) or, alternatively, teachers can look at their teaching first and then stand back and examine what beliefs are being manifested through actual classroom practices (inductive approach). That said, all attempts have been made to minimize the effects of the limitations of the study to increase the validity, reliability, authenticity, as well as the ethics of the study.

CONCLUSION

The study presented in this paper discussed the impact of a top-down imposed language policy on the beliefs and practices of three Primary school teachers concerning the use of non-Standard English in their classrooms and confirmed those of previous studies that teachers' reactions to language policy is a complicated process. Although it was only a small scale study of three teachers in Singapore and, as such, may not provide the basis for prescription for all language policy makers, the point of the paper is not to discuss whether these language policies are correct or not. As illustrated, it can be speculated that the teachers' thoughts and decisions can be filtered

through their belief systems before the final observable instructional practices are manifest. Rather, our intent is to examine what is happening on the ground in the classrooms and to show how vitally important it is for language policy strategists to understand the crucial role that teachers play in the enactment of language policy and that therefore they should be recognized as an integral part of any government language policy efforts.

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APPENDIX A: LESSON OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Singlish features	Occurrence							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Absence of past tense marking								
2. Absence of subject–verb agreement								
3. Absence of singular–plural distinction								
4. Absence of possessive ‘-s’ inflection								
5. Be-deletion or copula deletion								
6. Subject deletion								
7. Object deletion								
8. Verbless sentences								
9. Conditional clauses without ‘if’ or ‘when’								
10. Use of ‘-ing’ forms as the finite verb								
11. Missing articles								
12. Inversion for questions with ‘can’								
13. Generalized ‘is it’ tag								
14. Wh-in situ questions								
15. Do-deletion in direct questions								
16. Comparison and intensification								
17. Use of aspectual marker ‘already’								
18. Use of ‘never’ as ‘did not’								
19. Use of particles like ‘lah’, ‘ha’ etc.								
20. Use of borrowings from other language								

Teacher’s feedback strategy

- A Absent
O Absent, P’s error overlooked

- S Supply the correct answer in its entirety, P to repeat
- M Modelling, rephrasing P's answers
- L Localizing P's error, providing explanation
- R Repeating P's answer, with emphasis on error in P's utterance
- E Elicitation
- T Metalinguistic feedback, use of technical language to refer to an error (e.g. incorrect tense)
- H Highlight common error to class
- C Peer correction

Promptness of feedback

- I Immediate
- D Delayed

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 What do you understand about the term 'Singlish'? Can you describe some features of Singlish?
- 2 How appropriate and acceptable is Singlish to you?
- 3 Which feature of Singlish is least acceptable to you?
- 4 What is Standard English to you?
- 5 Do you think students are aware of the differences between Singlish and Standard English?
- 6 How important do you think it is for students to speak Standard English in English classes? Why do you think so?
- 7 What do you think are the factors that contribute to your students' usage of Singlish in class?
 - Do you think the factors are related to one another or is there a major contributing factor to the pervasive use of Singlish?
- 8 Who do you think should model the speaking of Standard English? Why do you think so?
- 9 Who do you think should be responsible for correcting students when they speak Singlish? Why do you think so?
- 10 How do you think teachers should correct their students when they speak Singlish in class? (e.g. If they say 'I am very boring leh.' 'You go where?' or 'She so pretty'.)
- 11 What do you think is the most effective strategy to improve students' spoken English? Why do you think so?
- 12 How often do you think teachers should correct their students when they speak Singlish in class?
- 13 Do you correct your students every time they speak Singlish? Why?
- 14 Do you use Singlish in class?
 - If yes, why and when do you do so?
 - If no, why not?

APPENDIX C: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

.	falling intonation contour
,	'continuing' intonation contour
!	animated tone
?	rising intonation contour
:	lengthening of preceding syllable
-	abrupt cut-off
<i>italics</i>	emphasis
CAPS	louder than surrounding talk
> <	quicker than surrounding talk
(1.5)	Silence, timed in seconds and tenths of a second
(())	additional information, e.g. non-verbal actions
(XXXX)	Unclear talk
...	pauses of varying lengths
^	word deleted

(Adapted from Richards 2006)

APPENDIX D: TEACHER FEEDBACK STRATEGIES:
DEFINITIONS

Rephrasing

This strategy involves the teacher's provision of the grammatically correct form of the students' utterance without necessarily expecting it to be repeated.

Elicitation

This method refers to the teacher's use of prompts or questions to draw out the desired response from the students.

Metalinguistic feedback

This technique involves the teacher's use of technical language to refer to a Singlish feature.

Emphasis

When this method is adopted, the teacher repeats and emphasizes the inappropriate Singlish feature in the students' utterances. Students may be expected to provide the appropriate form.

Localization

In this feedback technique, students' use of Singlish features is identified immediately and the teacher explains its unacceptability to the particular student who produced the utterance.

Highlight Singlish feature to class

The teacher identifies a Singlish feature that is commonly used by the students and explains its unacceptability to the class. This strategy differs from 'Localization' in that the feedback is usually delayed and the explanation is addressed to the whole class.

Peer correction

This strategy is one in which the teacher asks the class or another student to identify and provide the correct form for the inappropriate Singlish feature in their peer's utterance.

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