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**Student Teachers' Perception of Language Use and Their
Professional Image**

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Abstract

The use of English as the language of wider communication in post-colonial countries has resulted in different styles of English. In Singapore the two main varieties are Singapore Standard English (SSE) and Singapore Colloquial English (SCE). English medium education is one of the domains where Standard English is enforced by professional organizations and policy makers. Yet teachers may not see the need to use this formal style in their everyday communication, which creates a professional dilemma of language use.

This paper examines student teachers' views on the role of communication skills and language use in the construction of the professional image they would like to project as future teachers with particular reference to the use of SSE and SCE. In this regard, it draws on two theoretical models to explain how users of Singapore English adjust their language use to fit professional, cultural and social roles: a) Alsagoff's (2010) Cultural Orientation Model (COM) and b) Leung's (2009) model of sponsored and independent professionalism.

The findings suggest that student teachers are aware of the need to be a language role model and thus wish to use SSE in their professional capacity. However, they also understand the benefits and necessity of shifting between a local and global, or a personal and professional, orientation of language use to build rapport and project their cultural and national identity or when they wish to express authority and professionalism.

KEY WORDS: Standard English; student teachers; professionalism; communication skills; English varieties; Singapore

Introduction and background to the study

Recent studies in language teacher education and language teacher identity have pointed to the need to do further research in order to understand how student teachers and their more experienced peers form their professional identities through their actions and language use (Cross, 2006). Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005, p.35), for example, highlighted the need to investigate 'identity-in-discourse' and point to the role teacher education plays (or rather, should play) in forming the professional identity of future teachers. Yet, this paper does not set out to investigate the actual discourse of student teachers but focuses on how they would like to project themselves as competent professionals in terms of the language they use. We are not examining language in real use; the paper targets Singaporean student teachers' views on professional communication, i.e. how they imagine their language conduct in professional discourse situations. This reflexive exercise that uses both the imagination and personal educational experiences facilitates a process that 'transforms apprentices or peripheral members into legitimate participants' (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 253) of a professional community. Therefore, in this paper we seek to address future teachers' perception of both language use and professionalism in the education context in Singapore.

English in Singapore is one of the official languages and the medium of education. As the language of wider communication, over time, formal and informal varieties of English have emerged. In the educational context, the formal variety is prescribed by the Ministry of Education whereas the use of the informal variety is strongly discouraged (Rubdy, 2007). The institutions of government and indeed Singaporeans as well feel the need for Singapore to be an active participant in the global arena, hence the impetus for Singaporeans to be fluent in an

internationally intelligible variety of English that conforms to exonormative standards (Alsagoff, 2010). The social reality, however, is that the informal variety is the more widely used and is often regarded as a mark of identity and solidarity by Singaporeans (Alsagoff, 2010). Teachers are thus at a crucial point where these competing forces regarding language use collide.

Professionally, therefore, Singaporean teachers should examine their language use and reflect on how they can reconcile these two seemingly conflicting realities: the need to accept the institutionally endorsed version of linguistic behaviour which Leung (2009) calls 'sponsored professionalism' and the desire to embrace a more individually-oriented view, 'independent professionalism', which incorporates their values, beliefs, and personal theories. In the context of Singapore the reach and influence of sponsored professionalism is powerful so in this study of student teachers' reflections we seek to understand emerging independent professionalism. More specifically this study locates the tensions and interactions between these two aspects of professionalism in the highly controversial and at times contentious area of English language use.

We believe it is instructive to understand how student teachers try to realize their personal beliefs in teaching while operationalizing the imperatives of government. Since student teachers are at the stage of emerging professional consciousness, their reflections allow for insightful exploration as to how they work with and make sense of different standards and how their practice can be informed by both sponsored and independent professionalism.

The paper will first discuss the use of English in Singapore together with Alsagoff's (2010) Cultural Orientation Model to provide a better understanding of context for the research project. It then goes on to introduce Leung's (2009) model of professionalism as it offers further insights into the choices student teachers and more experienced teachers make in term of their language choices before presenting the findings of an empirical research study that was conducted to investigate what professional image would student teachers in the Singapore context would like to project about themselves in terms of their communicative skills. We are aware that the scope of the data is somewhat limited; it nonetheless provides valuable insight into how language use plays such a significant role in the formation of the professional image of teachers.

Singapore English

Singapore English comprises two varieties namely Singapore Standard English (SSE) and Singapore Colloquial English (SCE), or Singlish. Low & Brown (2005, p. 11) define SSE as 'the variety of English used by educated Singaporeans for formal purposes, that is for education, law and the media. Thus, it does not differ markedly... from Standard English but it is spoken with a Singaporean accent'. As far as the other variety of Singapore English is concerned, some authors do make a further distinction between SCE and Singlish (see for example Gupta, 1994b). However, for the purpose of this study, we adopt the stand by Low & Brown (2005, p. 12) that treats Singlish and SCE as essentially the same:

The informal, colloquial variety of Singapore English with its own unique linguistic features, used either by those who have limited proficiency in the language or by proficient speakers who choose to use it for informal purposes ... [is considered] a non-standard variety of Singapore English, in the sense that it may not contain the vocabulary ... or rules of grammar found in StdE.

The reason why we decided to use this broad definition for describing the local variety of English is because our student teachers (and the general public) are not necessarily familiar with minor linguistic differences between SCE and Singlish. Thus, the terms are used interchangeably, Singlish being the more common and popular term of the two.

Singapore English has been described and analyzed by many linguists and there are different models that attempt to account for its unique characteristics. The first such model is *lectal continuum* (Platt & Weber, 1980) which places the two varieties of Singapore English on a continuum of proficiency, education and socio-economic status. Whereas one end represents educated, proficient, middle or upper class users of standard English, the other stands for uneducated, low-proficiency, working class language users who speak the colloquial variety (if at all) of English. The second model is the *diglossia model* (Gupta, 1994a) which acknowledges that educated, proficient Singaporeans also use Singlish for certain linguistic purposes, but mainly to indicate social solidarity and mark informal language use. Gupta (1994a) argues that code-switching, i.e. the ability to decide which variety is appropriate in a given communicative situation is only possible for those who are native speakers or proficient language users. Similar to the diglossia model is Pakir's (1991) *expanding triangles* model but it expands the scope of analysis by including the educational background of speakers as a variable to explain language use. Pakir's (1991) model also addresses the issue of speakers who do not use English in their home contexts.

The use of different varieties is an issue of discussion not only for linguists, but also for politicians and educational decision makers. A standard variety of English, as opposed to

Singlish, is promoted and prescribed in schools in order to equip learners with language skills and competence necessary for a multitude of local and global contexts. An example of this can be found in the English Language Syllabus which points out that a proficient command of 'Internationally acceptable English (Standard English)' (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 10) is necessary 'to access, process and keep abreast of information and to engage with wider and more diverse communities outside of Singapore' (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 6). In this regard, education is seen as a vehicle for social mobility. Policy makers advocate that the use of a local variety would alienate users from participating in a global economy, depriving them of the benefits of socio-economic growth.

In Singapore the government has had a 'strong directive role' (Morris, 1996, p. 96) and created 'a robust bureaucracy that directed national education and its training systems towards economic viability, moral fortitude, and a sense of national identity and purpose' (Towndrow, 2005, p. 508) promoting prescribed values not only in formal educational settings but in nationwide campaigns. One such initiative has been directed at language use, claiming that it is critical to Singapore's success to speak 'internationally intelligible English' (Ministry of Education, 2006). The resulting campaign that is aimed at the general public is the *Speak Good English Movement*' (SGEM) which was launched in 2000 and meant to promote Standard English and to stem the widespread use of Singlish. The name of the campaign also indicates that in the Singapore context 'proper' or 'good' English is generally synonymous with Standard English or SSE as pointed out by numerous authors (e.g. Pakir, 1991; Rubdy, 2001; Wee, 2005).

The government's efforts to promote the use of SSE can also be seen in the preparation of teachers. The *National Institute of Education* (NIE), which is the sole teacher training institution in Singapore and is responsible for preparing teachers to teach at primary, secondary and junior college level, has devoted staff and resources to prepare future teachers who model the use of SSE for young Singaporeans. The Teachers' Language Development Centre, for example, is dedicated to improve student teachers' English language use and offers, among other things, a course titled 'Communication Skills for Teachers' to all student teachers at the institute. Other initiatives aim to raise student teachers' awareness of the role English plays in teaching other subjects such as mathematics (Silver, 2008).

Yet, besides all these efforts, Singlish remains very much alive in Singapore today with many Singaporeans regarding it as a mark of identity and solidarity (Farrell & Tan, 2007; Lim, 2009; Rubdy, 2007) and for teachers this creates both personal and professional dilemmas. On the one hand, there is a natural and understandable desire for them to fit in to the social and linguistic norms of the local community in which Singlish plays a dominant role. On the other hand, they are mindful of the need to comply with the decisions of educational policy makers and to align their professional practice with the official requirements. We believe, therefore, that it is instructive for researchers not only to understand and discover what teachers think about the perceived 'conflict' in language use, but also to investigate what future professionals, i.e. student teachers, think about language and their professional responsibility in a multilingual society.

In order to interpret the research data, a recent model of Singapore English is used as part of the research framework of this paper: Alsagoff's (2010) Cultural Orientation Model (COM). We

find that the COM allows for an effective explanation of the forces that shape the apparently conflicting views of teachers' language use in the Singaporean context. As Alsagoff (2010) explains, a focus on Singaporean speakers' identity, or in some cases multiple identities, offers a culturally fine-tuned explanation of language use that has not been captured by previous models.

Cultural Orientation Model of Singapore English

The COM, Alsagoff (2010, p. 337) explains, is based on the 'duality of the forces of the global and the local' which shapes communicative interactions in the Singapore context. She argues that two different orientations of the Singaporean culture contribute to the interesting amalgam and sometimes conflicting interpretation of what constitutes 'good English' in the city state; one of these is the localist and the other is the globalist orientation.

The localist orientation of language use stems from English being the lingua franca of multilingual and multicultural Singapore. It is a language that is referred to by the government in 'utilitarian, pragmatic terms, divorced from emotional ties' (Alsagoff, 2010, p. 341), a simple 'tool' that is not loaded with any cultural, religious, or even historical baggage. As such, English is often referred to as an international language which is owned by the whole world and which particularly does not belong to anyone or to any culture. However, it is impossible to view language as detached from culture as previous attempts at establishing a 'world language', like Esperanto, that lacks cultural ties have inevitably led to failure. This is also the case with English in Singapore when viewed as a culturally empty vessel.

The local community in their everyday use of English has transformed the language in both its form and structure, which renders English to have 'many voices' (Alsagoff, 2010, p. 342). The enculturation process has given way to a Singaporean variety known as Singlish; a language variety which many Singaporeans now see as a cultural marker, a part of their common Singaporean identity.

As opposed to the localist, the globalist orientation emphasises English as a means to transform Singaporeans into truly 'global citizens, able to live, work and succeed economically in other countries' (Alsagoff, 2010, p. 341). English as a global language is always referred to as an instrument which enables economic competitiveness, fosters attracting foreign talent and capital to Singapore, and as a necessity to the overall success of the country. Thus, it is not surprising that the government places emphasis on a standard, internationally eligible variety rather than its localized counterpart not only when communicating with foreigners but also as a means of communication among Singaporeans.

Singaporean speakers of English (and generally all speakers in Kachru's (1982) Inner and Outer Circles) thus negotiate between these two cultural perspectives in their everyday communication. They are not code-switching (Alsagoff, 2010); they are shifting the emphasis of their identities to adjust language use appropriate to the roles they are assuming. They move towards the localist orientation when they emphasize their community or individual identity, their cultural heritage as Singaporeans. At other times, they are inclined towards the globalist orientation when they take on roles that require formality, authority and economic power. As in the teaching context this

globalist orientation would indicate assimilation into the global teaching fraternity, the professional discourse community by speaking a language which is understood, recognised and spoken by other members regardless of their cultural or national backgrounds. The COM also allows another interpretation of language use; one that also embraces duality and allows speakers to place their communicative output anywhere in between two different positions: the personal and the professional. In order to explore this interpretation more thoroughly, the next section will expand the research framework to include Leung's (2009) model of language teacher professionalism.

Language teacher professionalism

If one tries to understand what student teachers think of the professional image they would like to project in terms of communication skills, then one needs to pay a close attention to and investigate what is meant by professional practice or professionalism. In order to help frame the research in this paper we will use Leung's (2009) discussion when we distinguish two types of professionalism: sponsored professionalism and independent professionalism.

Professionalism in education has always been a highly debated issue, especially since the 1980s with the development of a market-based, standards-oriented view of public service which demanded accountability and efficient systems (Leung, 2009). This movement understood teaching as a set of measurable skills, competence and knowledge (Kydd & Weir, 1993) and led to revoking some of the professional licenses, e.g. self-regulation and autonomy, education had enjoyed up until then (Fish, 1995). The loss of autonomy also means that professionalism and professional knowledge is being defined partly by educational decision makers, whose views on

'what counts as desirable professionalism to be sponsored' (Leung, 2009, p.50) is influenced by political and ideological agendas.

Sponsored professionalism thus usually promotes a set of politically correct, values, norms and practices that are contextualized locally but may be subject to global influences. Leung (2009, p. 49) argues that this kind of professionalism is 'usually proclaimed on behalf of teachers as a collectivity' and is upheld by regulatory bodies and professional associations. However, collective views of what professional action or behaviour is deemed adequate in certain educational scenarios may be in conflict with what practitioners in these particular settings consider appropriate. For this to happen teachers need to be engaged in a 'reflexive examination of their own beliefs and practice' (Leung, 2009, p. 53) which is an important contribution to developing their independent professionalism.

Independent professionalism thus entails making conscious decisions about whether to accept and support sponsored views, or to adapt and modify them in the light of one's beliefs, experience and professional expertise. What probably every teacher strives for is a balance between officially supported and accepted models and their own personal beliefs, values and attitudes to education. Leung (2009) explains that teachers' independent professional stance cannot be seen as belonging to one side only; it's not about choosing sides like left or right in politics, but it is 'having a high degree of professional consciousness that is informed by relevant specialist knowledge and explicit values (Leung, 2009, p. 55).

It is interesting to note that both Alsagoff's (2010) model of Singapore English and Leung's (2009) views of professionalism are built on very similar concepts of local vs. global, personal vs. professional. Both argue that their notions are not exclusive of each other, i.e. they do not offer an either/or interpretation of linguistic and professional behaviour, and urge to embrace the possibility of moving emphases along the continuum in order to meet the needs of unique situations. However, both Alsagoff (2010) and Leung (2009) point to the importance of being familiar and comfortable with using both perceptions as a prerequisite for making informed decisions that lead to competent actions.

This leads us to the immediate context of our current study which is set in Singapore, and more specifically at the National Institute of Education. We will focus on the *Communication Skills for Teachers* (CST) course that is taken by all student teachers pursuing their studies in the BA, the Diploma in Education (Dip.Ed.) and the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programmes. The next section of the paper will discuss how the duality of the localist and globalist orientations, and sponsored and independent professionalism is addressed at the sole teacher education institute in the country.

Communication skills for teachers

The Communication Skills for Teachers course was first offered in July 2005 in response to concerns by the Ministry of Education that teachers going into service lacked a sufficient command of Singapore Standard English. To indicate the relative significance of the course at NIE, it is worth noting that in the July 2009 semester approximately 1900 student teachers were

enrolled. The sheer number of student teachers means that both course designers and tutors need to deal with a rather heterogeneous group of learners. The fact that the student teachers differ in their subject specializations, educational background, age and life experiences presents continuous challenges for teacher trainers and calls for a continuous revision and adaptation of strategies and materials used (Kiss & Wilkinson, 2010).

The major aim of the course is to provide the necessary oral and written skills to communicate effectively in the classroom and in professional interactions with colleagues, parents, and the general public. Besides discussing the appropriacy and necessity of using SSE and the extent to which Singlish may be allowed in certain contexts, student teachers are provided with opportunities to work on proper voice production and understand the importance of vocal health, voice modulation, body language and cultural practices in communication develop a consideration of audience, purpose and context in communicating, and the various roles teachers take in classroom interaction (Kiss & Wilkinson, 2010).

The course is built upon a practical, hands-on approach and offers student teachers a several opportunities to practice what they learn about effective communication in the 'safe' environment of the tutorial room. Most tasks make use of scenario-based oral and written simulations which resemble real communicative situations in the Singapore context and ask student teachers to apply analytical, higher level thinking skills before they complete their assignments. For example, in one task, student teachers are provided with an e-mail written by a teacher to one of the level heads of a school. They are first asked to analyse the appropriacy of the letter's style, language and content. Then they need to provide feedback to the writer on how

she may improve the text, and finally they rewrite the e-mail in a more appropriate manner (Pelly, Tay, & Zhang, 2009, pp. 54-55). Student teachers may either work individually or in small groups on these tasks and receive both peer and tutor feedback on their performance.

Since most student teachers who take the CST course are familiar with both the colloquial and the standard varieties of Singapore English, it is important to offer them a chance to articulate and to reflect on their own beliefs with regard to how they speak. Such consideration is explicitly built into the course through a component with reflection questions. The purpose of using such reflection tasks are twofold: student teachers need to understand a) how the Singaporean government's views on language use impact the professional practice of educators, and b) how their own professional, social and cultural identities are shaped by their language use. We feel that it is in the process of interpreting and reinterpreting their experiences that pre-service teachers find their 'voice' and create their own professional identity and develop their own self-image as teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 2004; Southerland & Markauskaite, 2010). These reflection questions not only offer student teachers the opportunity to articulate their views on topics discussed in the course but also provide researchers with rich data to study what future teachers think about their professional identity and how they define it in terms of communication skills. The next section which will present a research project designed to make use of such data.

The study

Sixty eight student teachers took part in the study. They were students in a two-year diploma programme from three different specializations. The *Communication Skills for Teachers* course

(CST) was taken in the first semester of their second year. The distribution of the student teachers across the specializations is as follows:

Table 1. Student teacher groups according to their specializations

Group	Specialization	No. of student teachers
Group 1	English Track	19
Group 2	General Track	19
Group 3	Mother Tongue	30

All student teachers in this study will be teaching in primary schools. English Track student teachers i.e. Group 1 will teach Visual and Performing Arts in English as a subject. The student teachers on the General Track i.e. Group 2 will be teaching all subjects in English. On the other hand, mother tongue student teachers i.e. Group 3 will teach the mother tongue of their specialization (Tamil, Malay or Mandarin) but will be required to communicate in English in the context of work outside their teaching duties.

In order to safeguard the students' identity, a code system is used which consists of a letter that indicates the teaching track, and the number which identifies the student in the particular cohort (see Table 2 below):

Table 2. Legend for student codes used in the research

<i>Code</i>	<i>Description</i>
A	Student teachers majoring in Visual and Performing Arts. They are trained to teach in primary school using English as a medium of instruction.
B	Student teachers on the General Track. They are trained to teach all subjects, including English, in primary school.
C	Student teachers majoring in mother tongue subjects. They are trained to teach mother tongue as a subject in primary school.

Data collection

The data used in the project were collected from student teachers as part of their course work. During their studies, students are required to examine and re-examine their views on what constitutes effective communication and they are asked to reflect on how they see their strengths and weaknesses in communication as they progress through the course. Some of the individual written reflection tasks, like the one used as the basis for data in this research project, are repeated at different stages of the course to allow the participants to revisit some of their previous views and adjust them in light of what they have learnt.

The data were collected at the end of the course in response to the following reflection prompts:

1. What are your communicative strengths and weaknesses?
2. What are the essential features of the professional image you would like to project as a teacher in terms of speech and communicative ability? (Pelly et al., 2009, p. 117)

The student teachers' permission for the use of their reflections in this paper was sought and obtained.

Research questions and data analysis

This study is based on student teachers' written responses to the second reflection question, i.e. *What are the essential features of the professional image you would like to project as a teacher in terms of speech and communicative ability?* The question offered an insight into what Singaporean student teachers think about professionalism and how communication skills form an integral part of their professional image. In relation to the course objective of raising awareness of the importance of audience, purpose and context in communication, the team seeks to answer the following research questions on the use of standard and non-standard English:

- (1) What do Singapore student teachers think of the use of Singapore Standard English and Singlish in terms of the professional image they would like to project?
- (2) How do student teachers deal with the potential conflicting personal and professional views of language use in the multilingual and multicultural context of the Singapore educational system?

Although the data collected were qualitative in nature, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to analyse them in order to present the findings in a more meaningful and comprehensive manner. For the qualitative analysis a three-stage process was used: first open coding was employed followed by axial coding and finally selection coding. At the open coding stage raw data from the reflections were grouped according to some pre-defined and evolving

conceptual categories such as 'standard English', 'good English', 'Singlish', etc. The second stage of the analysis was axial coding which served to extend and elaborate the earlier process of identifying major concepts and allowed identifying connections between certain categories. Notes on certain concepts were prepared and used as the basis of comparison for similarities and differences with the purpose of generating tentative statements of relationships between phenomena, e.g. 'Singlish' and 'context'. The final stage of coding focused on the relationships between categories which were then integrated and grouped into more encompassing concepts.

The quantitative analysis relied on some basic descriptive statistics in order to provide a more comprehensive analysis and contributed to a better understanding of the qualitative data. The following sections provide the findings of this study.

Findings and discussion

Student teachers' perceptions of the use of Singapore Standard English (SSE) in their professional image

The use of SSE has been long promoted by the Singapore Government through the Ministry of Education and campaigns such as those organized by the *Speak Good English Movement*. Teachers are encouraged to use SSE in both their teaching and outside the classroom to provide a good model for young Singaporeans. This official stance is encapsulated in the following excerpt taken from a speech by the Minister for Education, Ng Eng Hen, at the Ministry of Education Work Plan Seminar 2009:

This is a sensitive subject and I raise it not to demoralize teachers and students, but to signal that we should begin concerted efforts to raise the standard of English ... I am also cheered that teachers recognise that they must be role models whether during teaching or conversing with other

teachers and students ... we do want the majority of our students to be able to speak proper English, express themselves clearly and be understood So, my first challenge today for our teaching service is - raise the standard of English. Just as we are renowned for high standards in Maths and Science, we should aim to be known for producing students who express themselves well in English (Ng, 2009).

It is thus instructive to examine what student teachers think about the use of SSE (or ‘proper English’ as it is generally referred to in the media or political speeches) and whether it is a part of the professional image they would like to project about themselves in terms of communicative abilities. In their reflections on the professional image, 80.88% of all student teachers indicated the importance of using SSE to project themselves as competent professionals either explicitly (i.e. using the terms *Singapore Standard English* or *Standard English*) or implicitly (i.e. pairing English with adjectives like *proper*, *good*, or *appropriate*). This high percentage reflects the values which are promoted by NIE and the Ministry of Education and it can be further broken down into 52.94% explicit mention and 27.94% implicit mention of SSE as summarised in Table 3:

Table 3. SSE as featured in student teachers’ reflections on the professional image they would like to project

Explicit mention of SSE	Implicit mention of SSE	No mention of SSE in reflections
52.94%	27.94%	19.12%

Note: N=68

The data show that student teachers align their practice with the concept Leung (2009) calls sponsored professionalism, a term which refers to ‘institutionally endorsed and publicly heralded definitions [of teacher professionalism]’ (Leung, 2009, p. 49). The high percentage of student

teachers who mention SSE in their reflections on their professional image is an indication of the extent to which student teachers have adopted the institutionally endorsed position of SSE as the appropriate form for teachers. The emphasis on using standard language forms and pronunciation as a sign of good professional conduct has become part of the student teachers' accepted norms and is seen as essential in their work as teachers. A further analysis of the data uncovers that the prime motivation behind this preponderance is to provide a role model for their learners, hence paying heed to the minister's call. The following excerpts exemplify this:

As a teacher, I understand that I am a role model to my students. Hence, I should speak Standard English at all times and articulate my words properly. (Student B13)

We have to present ourselves as good role models to promote speaking good English conscientiously. (Student A11)

I feel that you must be able to speak proper English. We being educators, at all times should set a good example to our students. (Student A14)

It is important for the teacher to speak good English in class since students pick up what they say quickly. (Student A10)

Another reason why student teachers consider the use of SSE important is to gain acceptance from fellow professionals, administrators and the public as competent professionals, as expressed in the examples below:

I believe vital features of such professionalism include the ability to communicate in proper English. This allows students and colleagues to note that you are educated. (Student A12)

It would spend a very bad image of the teacher if we are not able to speak well to the parents. (Student A13)

I would like to constantly speak Standard English as it will affect the way people look at you and the impressions they would have on you. (Student B6)

This urge to be accepted as a member of a professional community is not surprising. The professional literature talks extensively about the 'need to fit in' (Eisenman & Thornton, 1999; McNally, 2006; Olson & Osborne, 1991; Watkins, 2005; Wong, 2004), a concept which is very common not only among teachers but also among other young professionals.

When we further examine the data in terms of the two different student teacher groups, i.e. the ones who will teach Mother Tongue Languages and the ones who will teach either English or general subjects in English, a notable difference emerges. This is presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Student teachers' reflections on the use of SSE according to teaching tracks

Specialization	N	Explicit mention of SSE (%)	Implicit mention of SSE (%)	Total %
General and English Track	38	71.05	21.05	92.1
Mother Tongue Track	30	26.67	40	66.67

Note: N=68

Table 4 shows that only 66.67% of Mother Tongue Track student teachers mentioned SSE in their reflections as opposed to 92.1% of General and English Track student teachers. How can this disparity be reconciled? Is it possible that mother tongue student teachers value less the use of SSE as an important feature of their professional image compared to other student teachers? In order to better understand the complexity of the situation, we need to take a closer look at what professionalism means to these mother tongue student teachers.

One of the underlying reasons for not emphasizing the use of Standard English (or even Singlish) in these mother tongue student teachers' reflections can be attributed to the fact that they conduct their lessons mainly in Mother Tongues Languages such as Malay, Tamil or Mandarin. Nevertheless, they do emphasize the need for effective communication, albeit in Mother Tongue Languages, through the use of communication strategies which reinforce the teacher's authority in the class as shown in the following utterances:

In terms of the communicative ability, I would like to portray that I am fluent in my trained language, which is Chinese, as this is my profession. (Student C24)

....talk to them in ... a firm and assertive way. (Student C30)

....teachers should speak confidently but not arrogantly, passionately but not emotionally. (Student C18)

English for them is a means to communicate within the wider professional context of education, i.e. their colleagues, the principal, or the parents of their students.

I would like to project confidence, eloquent and professionalism when I deal with colleagues, supervisors, boss and the education stakeholders. (Student C10)

MT teachers are also taught with Basic English communication skill to enable successful communications among the other teachers. (Student C11)

Other reflections pointed to the necessity to 'grade' their language (Malay, Tamil or Mandarin) in order to make it comprehensible to their learners, hence showing sensitivity to and catering to the students' differing language proficiency levels. The following quotations serve to elucidate such observation:

We must be sensitive towards our intended audience (i.e. students) and where possible, attempt to adjust our language to pitch their level. (Student C28)

I am a Chinese teacher and I understand that if I use grammar or vocabulary that is too difficult to understand, my students may not understand [me]. I will have to be more direct and use simpler words when explaining or speaking to my students to ensure that they comprehend what I say. (Student C22)

It is also interesting to note that although Mother Tongue teachers do not necessarily emphasize or talk about using English in their reflections, when they do so they tend to align their position with the official and promoted view that considers Standard English the only acceptable variety in schools and would like to see Singlish disappear from the educational context. Leung (2009) notes that it is important to pay close attention to public statements on sponsored professionalism in English language teaching as educational decisions in this field can be closely connected to local political agenda and global perceptions of language use, thus such statements may influence how future teachers think about their professional responsibilities.

Earlier we quoted Dr. Ng, Minister of Education, as he addressed the participants of the 2009 MOE Workplan Seminar (Ng, 2009). In his speech he talks about how teachers should be a role model and use 'good English' "whether during teaching or conversing with other teachers and students." He also commends schools where special measures are taken to promote the Speak Good English Movement, and mentions one particular school where "taboo" phrases are highlighted so that pupils are aware of how they speak. The pupils catch on and look forward to new "taboo" words so that they can catch their friends or teachers using it' (Ng, 2009).

Such communication has its impact on Mother Tongue student teachers whose subject area does not require conscious reflexivity of English language use. These student teachers are more willing to adopt the 'official', sponsored professional view of language use since it does not influence their actions in the classroom, which is the immediate concern of beginner teachers. Therefore, not surprisingly, many elements of the official perspective are mirrored in their opinions when they do speak about using English:

The usage of Standard English in Singapore schools is prominent and more students this present are speaking proper English in class, in formal events and speaking with an adult. I believe that teachers are doing their best in enforcing proper communication skills on students. (Student C6)

To fit my job as a professional teacher, I must make it a point to try to speak standard English as far as possible. Being teachers, we are under constant emulation by our students. If we speak in colloquial English (or Singlish) frequently, the students may intentionally or unintentionally "copy" us. (Student C22)

... the use of Standard English simply means that we should eradicate the inappropriate use of Singlish and promote the use of good English by showing a good example of how Standard English is used. (Student C28)

When we examine the findings in the framework of COM (Alsagoff, 2010) it is interesting to note that the concepts of global vs. local orientations are not applicable, but can be refined - as

the author suggests - to the 'official vs. personal' domains. The official end of the continuum represents standard language use (SSE) whereas the personal end aligns with colloquial, non-standard forms (CSE or Singlish). Thus when student teachers wish to project the image of authority, they shift towards the use of a global/official code system. The extent to which they apply the standard forms is also influenced by the formality of the situation; the move towards the far end is noticeable in context when they deal with, or need to establish themselves as figures of authority, but they may choose to apply some colloquial elements (such as some particles, e.g. 'lah') in a less official context.

Having considered what student teachers think about the use of Singapore Standard English, we now direct our attention to the use of Singapore Colloquial English, or Singlish, as perceived by student teachers in their reflections. The next section will offer a discussion of how they see the role of Singlish in their professional practice.

Student teachers' perception of the use of Singlish in their professional image

Although the percentage of student teachers supporting the use of Singlish is significantly low i.e. 8.82%, it is important to note that these student teachers are not advocating the wholesale use of Singlish at the expense of Standard English. They see Singlish playing a supportive or ancillary role to Singapore Standard English in their communication with their students, parents, superiors and colleagues, citing a multiplicity of reasons which will be discussed in more detail below.

Such observation can be attributed to their awareness of the need to use Standard English that is 'internationally acceptable' in the classrooms and schools as stipulated in the new English Language Syllabus 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 9). Their qualified use of Singlish in certain circumstances bears testimony to their awareness of and sensitivity to the purpose, audience and context of any communication situation, aspects which are emphasized throughout their semester long *Communication Skills for Teachers* course. These circumstances can be generally divided into the classroom context and the broader educational context, both of which will be elucidated in the subsequent sections.

The use of Singlish in the Singapore classroom context

These student teachers' (8.82%) awareness of diverse communication situations mainly hinges on their desire to forestall any misunderstanding and communication breakdown in any interaction. This underscores their appreciation of function over form in communication and it does not point to their lack of English proficiency. On the contrary, their ability to consciously shift their language use from SSE to SCE is a demonstration of an awareness of audience and communicative purpose as observed in the following utterance by a student teacher:

I would like to project myself as a teacher that could speak [in] both formal and informal manner... sometimes, it is necessary to use Singlish. (Student A8)

The following paragraphs comprise a discussion of the various motivations behind the selective use of Singlish. High on the list is the need to provide the initial scaffold to weak students to aid their learning of the language; hence the use of Singlish has a clear pedagogical purpose:

... able to switch my styles ... be understood, especially by lower ability students
... my message could get across.... [also] show them the similarities between the
proper terms to their Singlish counterparts. (Student B12)

The teachers here play a role in providing guidance and support to the students in helping them make the connection between what is new and what is familiar to them.

Some employ the occasional use of Singlish to lower the affective filter of students to facilitate the learning process. This is very much predicated on the affective filter hypothesis according to the innatist view of language acquisition (as cited in Goh & Silver, 2006) which states that the affective component influences language acquisition indirectly, acting as a barrier if the affective filter is high or an open gate if the filter is low. The affective filter can be raised when learners are overly anxious, lack self-confidence and are poorly motivated, hence impeding the learning process. One way of lowering the affective filter is for the teacher to establish a good rapport with learners, a relationship that should be founded on trust, respect and a conducive classroom atmosphere which encourages risk taking and experimenting with the language. The attempt to create such an atmosphere is articulated by some student teachers in the following utterances:

Add a bit of Singlish ... to break the formality boundaries and making a connection
to the students. (Student A16)

... I can and should use SCE [i.e. Singlish] to aid my teaching ... to help me to bond with my students and help understanding. (Student B9)

Some student teachers' reflections on the use of Singlish here are also partly aligned with what is termed by Holmes (2001) as an identity and solidarity marker served by the use of a non-standard variety of English valued by a speech community. This view is echoed by Lim (2009) who refers to Singlish as the 'nativised, restructured variety of English, which serves much better as a marker of identity than a more standard – albeit “good” – English' (Lim, 2009, p. 66). She further observes that Singlish is in fact one of 'the real mother tongues' of Singaporeans which serve to express their identity. This resonates with the cultural and identity capital postulated by Alsagoff (2010) in her Cultural Orientation Model and also reflects the personal values, beliefs and attitudes that are connected to independent professionalism (Leung, 2009).

Both lowering the affective filter and creating a common identity highlight these student teachers' awareness that teachers' discursive classroom practices cannot be divorced from the humanistic aspect if meaningful and effective learning is to take place. This is very much in line with one of the core values promoted by the Ministry of Education Singapore (2006) namely 'People, our focus. We value people, seeking to bring out the best in everyone,' a value that places learners at the forefront of education.

The use of Singlish in the broader Singapore education context

As teachers' communication is not confined to classrooms, it is worth investigating student teachers' reasons for the use of Singlish with people other than students such as fellow colleagues, superiors and parents. When communicating with superiors and colleagues, they do not dispute the need to use the standard variety to project a respectable professional image as such standard variety is valued for its overt prestige that comes with high educational and occupational status (Holmes, 2001). On the other hand, to narrow and bridge the communication gap with their colleagues and superiors, some also find resonance in the view of the use of Singlish as an identity and solidarity marker as quoted below:

... important ... to speak Standard English [but] if we are on close terms with our superiors or colleagues ... a bit of Singlish ... to make it more light-hearted and to preserve Singapore's identity. (Student B7)

The above observation speaks of the localist orientation mentioned in the Cultural Orientation Model by Alsagoff (2010, p. 343) that captures English speakers' increasing 'allegiance to speaking Singlish' in Singapore as their desire to project their Singaporean culture and identity.

Contrary to the general belief that teachers should enforce the use of Standard English in their communication with parents without any compromise to safeguard their professional image, it is refreshing to note that some student teachers hold a divergent view on this matter as noted below:

... [use standard English] to maintain professionalism with management and pupils
... [but] this [the use of Standard English] may be difficult ... with parents as it depends on their level of education. (Student B11)

... being affluent [fluent] does not mean that teachers cannot speak Singlish,
With the principal [one should be]... mindful about speaking... [but can use Singlish to] signify respect and understanding towards parents. (Student B18)

Such views bear testimony to the student teachers' ability to shift their language use from a more formal and standardized variety to an informal and colloquial one out of respect for parents who may not be able to speak SSE so as not to come across as condescending and arrogant. Ultimately, their main intention is to facilitate effective communication in discharging their duties as teachers. Such commendable quality is indicative of an advanced stage of professional development in which teachers do not show any hesitation to transcend social boundaries and expected roles in breaking communication barriers. The following utterance by a student teacher bears such implication:

Speaking well is one [thing], but being able to execute it with social aptness is crucial as well. (Student B18)

The above examples clearly indicate that student teachers' decision to use Singlish, be it with their students, parents, colleagues or superiors, is predicated on sound pedagogical practices and communication principles that take account of the purpose, audience and context of the

situations. In relation to their professional image, these student teachers have progressed from sponsored professionalism as mentioned earlier to what Leung (2009) terms as independent professionalism that sees these student teachers engaging 'in reflexive examination of their own beliefs and action' (Leung, 2009, p. 53). Here, student teachers exercise more critical thinking in their examination of their approach and beliefs and they recognize the need for their professional conduct to transcend the classroom boundaries to the larger discourse community in school and society.

In the process of meaning making with their interlocutors, these student teachers are at the same time redefining and creating their own professional voice and identity, an image that is firmly grounded on the need to negotiate meaning with the audience as highlighted throughout the CST course. This is aptly summed up by Kumaravadivelu (2004, p. 182) in the following observation:

The primary responsibility of the teacher educator is not to provide the teacher with a borrowed voice, however enlightened it may be, but to provide opportunities for the dialogic construction of meaning out of which an identity or voice may emerge.

However, there is a general consensus among the student teachers on the importance of the use of Singapore Standard English that is ascribed with high intelligibility and economic value. This is in tandem with the government's efforts in building a workforce that promotes the country's economic competitiveness and one key factor is a workforce that is proficient in the use of an internationally acceptable variety of English. The various pronouncements and campaigns by the

government such as the *Speak Good English Movement* are clear testament of the government's seriousness in this respect.

It is interesting to note that only 8.82% of all the student teachers are prepared to use Singlish in certain situations. Why are the others silent on this issue? One possible reason is their tendency to see the situation as a dichotomy between the use of either standard or non-standard Singapore English, without considering Singlish as a resource that they can use to scaffold their students' learning. In other words, they may not consider code-shifting an option but insist on code-switching whereby they use either/or options for SSE and SCE. A further possibility is related to the fact that the use of SCE/Singlish in classrooms - or in schools in general - is a very sensitive issue. It runs counter to the official discourse of sponsored professionalism, thus it requires quite an amount of professional confidence to challenge it. Since the reflections were collected in a survey at the end of the *Communication Skills for Teachers* course and the prompts were related to professional image, it is not surprising that the majority of student teachers did not make any explicit reference to SCE and tended to give 'appropriate' answers instead by advocating the use of a Standard English only policy.

Conclusion

In this study, student teachers show that they recognize the use of Singapore Standard English as an essential component of the professional image they would like to project. At the same time, some, albeit just 8.82%, also take cognizance of the importance of assessing a communicative situation and code switching to Singapore Colloquial English (i.e. Singlish) in certain contexts. Yet it must be kept in mind that their reflections focused on what they imagine to be proper

professional conduct in a school setting and not their actual language use. As such, student teachers' language use at school might be more complex than we think it is, taking into consideration the different variables involved, but it is possible that the amount of SCE is higher than what the data indicate.

Student teachers' awareness of the importance of the use of standard English as shown in this study is aligned to the requirements of the Ministry of Education that prescribes an internationally intelligible variety of English - as opposed to requiring the use of a standard local variety in other contexts, e.g. UK National Curriculum (2007, p.64) - for teachers and students. At the same time, the study also reveals a more nuanced language awareness which reflects the complex communicative contexts at school, with particular reference to some student teachers' (8.82%) ability and readiness to adapt their use of English to the needs of their audience and contexts.

By according Singlish a proper place in certain communicative contexts at school, it shows that there are student teachers (8.82%) who recognize the reality of the linguistic landscape at school and such recognition reflects what Lim (2009) refers to as an 'enlightened consideration of the native "dialects" and nativised Singlish and the plurilingual practices in which they are used' (Lim, 2009, p. 52). This will stand them in good stead to function effectively in a complex plurilingual school context where the standard form of English is competing with the more ubiquitous use of its non-standard counterpart i.e. Singlish, which is clearly illustrated by the following quote from Poh (2011): ' "Cher! I talk like that, ok what. You understand me can already!" The things English Language and Literature teachers' nightmares are made of.'

Such awareness of the importance of audience and contexts can be partly attributed to the emphasis these concepts are given in the *Communication Skills for Teachers* course which the data are drawn from. As teachers play different roles at school in their interaction with students, colleagues, parents and superiors, the ability to exercise flexibility in the use of formal and informal varieties of English to negotiate meaning is certainly a reflection of the effective communication skills that teachers should have. This in turn enhances their professional image as teachers who are mindful of the needs of their audience. For a deeper analysis of student teachers' perceptions we look at the cultural orientation model of Singapore English.

As the sole teacher education institution of Singapore, the *National Institute of Education* is determined to align its philosophy and practices to standards and professional conduct promoted by national educational policy makers. Teacher education being a strategic asset in nation building, the programmes offered strive to build on a 'pedagogically responsible teacher professionalism' which needs to stem from social and political developments (Leung, 2009, p.53). At the same time, it also nurtures academic autonomy and critical thinking as reflected by its V³SK (Values, Skills, Knowledge) model where one of the values focuses on developing a teacher identity that embraces an enquiring nature, quest for learning, and professionalism at its heart (National Institute of Education, 2009, p.45). Thus, it encourages student teachers to engage in a reflexive investigation of the theories and policies they learn about and relate them to personal values, and probe their 'educational, pedagogic, and social validity' (Leung, 2009, p.53). In other words, student teachers are encouraged to build their own independent professionalism.

The descriptive framework provided by Alsagoff's (2010) cultural orientation model also allows for and affords a deeper understanding of perceptions of student teachers toward the varieties of English language in Singapore and the language policies that influence the professional space of teachers. There is as the COM contends a clear globalist and localist orientation in student teachers reflections regarding SSE and Singlish, where both SSE and Singlish are simultaneously seen as being an integral part of their role identity as teachers, an analysis in terms of cultural orientations aptly captures the ways in which student teachers make sense of their lives. The student teachers in this study see themselves as role models of SSE with a significant number (80.88%) mentioning the importance of SSE in projecting themselves as competent professionals. The language policies in Singapore stress the need for Singaporeans to speak in internationally intelligible English and student teachers have internalized the educational imperative for SSE in Singapore. In the acculturation process into the professional discourse community and in the globalist orientation they need to be understood by and relate to the teaching community beyond Singapore, and SSE is integral in this professional sphere of their lives.

The COM 'operates on the notion of language as a cultural resource' (Alsagoff, 2010, p. 344). The different styles of English are indeed used as a resource as contended by the student teachers in this study. Depending on the need for authority or the need to signal empathy and support they shift in style of speaking. When speaking with parents for example student reflections show that they may speak in SSE to show professional identity and at the same time incorporate certain Singlish features to show a membership in a shared community and empathy. This variation in

language style moving between globalist and localist orientations is often subtle and fluid and not an abrupt switching of codes.

We see language and varieties of language that have evolved in a society as an integral part of the living culture of that society. Teachers who see themselves as role models and use language not only to impart knowledge but teach that language are very powerful agents of culture. This study shows that as active agents of culture, teachers are indeed using the varieties of English in Singapore as a resource. Be it purposeful or instinctive in the interest of effective communication and projection of identity the way teachers use language gives us meaningful and powerful insight into the enculturation of English in Singapore.

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