Luke Lu*

Disaffiliation amongst academically elite students in Singapore: the role of a non-standard variety of English

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Abstract: This article seeks to examine whether and how a non-standard variety of English (i.e. Singlish) might contribute to (dis)affiliation amongst a multinational group of academically elite students in Singapore. Using interview data when informants expressed ideologies about Singlish and Standard English, I argue that informants tended to orient to two different social fields in interviews: a field of education where Standard English is consistently valued by them, and an informal field of socialisation where the value of Singlish is contested. Differences in valuation of Singlish suggest disaffiliation between two groups of academically elite students: (a) immigrants from China who arrived more recently and do not value Singlish; (b) localised peer groups (including immigrants and Singaporeans) who claim to value and practise Singlish in their informal interactions. There are implications for our understanding of the role of vernaculars in processes of transnational migration, and Singlish as a local marker of solidarity.

Keywords: immigration; language attitudes; language ideologies; Singapore; vernaculars

1 Introduction

There has been a cumulative tendency for research to point to the function of solidarity served by Colloquial Singapore English or Singlish[1] amongst

1 I henceforth use the term "Singlish" in this article, rather than "Colloquial Singapore English", as it is a label widely recognised and used by the general public, including my informants. It is also used by prominent local scholars in more recent times (e.g. Wee 2018). I use "Singlish" to refer to the *register* in Agha's (2004: 24) sense, where "Singlish" as a named entity has become "a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices".

***Corresponding author: Luke Lu**, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Singapore, E-mail: lujiqun@ntu.edu.sg. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9558-6408

Singaporean speakers, particularly younger students in the local populace. Pakir (1991) offered one of the first studies based on interactional data gathered from local students, situating Singlish use along a cline of expression indicating intimacy and informality for its speakers. That is, speakers often use Singlish with interlocutors to signal notions of rapport, familiarity and solidarity in domains including the home and school (Pakir 1991: 172). Significantly, Pakir (1991: 176) goes on to posit that Singlish is "… tied to the notion of the emerging identity of Singaporeans as Singaporeans using English for its iconic, indexical and symbolic values". Since then, larger scale language attitude surveys of students have converged on similar findings (e.g. Cavallaro et al. 2014; Leimgruber 2014; Tan and Tan 2008), even as scholars have recognised that there are conflicting expressed attitudes toward Singlish held by other segments of the population (Wee 2005: 2014).

It is this possibility that not everyone might value or use Singlish in the same way of expressing solidarity that forms the basis of this article. Pakir's (1991: 169) original informants were students at two primary and secondary schools who were enrolled in the state's Gifted Education Programme. These individuals were therefore presumably top-performing students at the national level, enrolled in one of the top-ranked schools in Singapore's elitist education system (cf. Lu 2016a: 146–150). However, the demographic of top-performing students in Singapore's schools has changed drastically since the 1990s, when the government began actively recruiting academically elite students from neighbouring countries by offering them scholarships. This is in a bid to counter the nation's flagging birth rates, hoping that some of these foreign students might settle in Singapore and augment the local talent pool (Yeoh 2007). Partly due to policies in Singapore, where the state officially recognises three races of Chinese-Malay-Indian[2] and seeks to maintain existing ethnic proportions (Tan 2003: 753; Yeoh and Lin 2013: 35), the vast majority of immigrant students recruited by the state are from China, followed by Vietnam. Thus, top-ranked secondary schools in Singapore currently have as much as 10% of their student enrolment made up of immigrants recruited by the state, mostly from China (Lu 2016a: 150). Separately, Yang (2014: 363) estimates that state scholarship schemes targeting students from China alone have brought up to 15,000 such individuals into Singapore's universities since the 1990s.[3] Despite the influx of immigrants, few studies – including the

2 Latest figures indicate that the population in Singapore comprises 76% Chinese, 15% Malay and 7.5% Indian (Singapore Department of Statistics 2019).

3 Yang's (2014) study of the recruitment process targeting students from China reckons that 200 15-year-olds enter Singapore's secondary schools annually, with around 30 secondary schools participating in this policy. Another 400–800 students are recruited from China to attend Singapore's universities each year (Yang 2014: 360).

aforementioned student surveys by Tan and Tan (2008) and Cavallaro et al. (2014) – have been concerned with whether and how Singlish might contribute to (dis)affiliation, particularly amongst an increasingly multinational student body sharing the same institutional spaces. If the scholarly consensus is that Singlish functions as a solidarity marker emblematic of local cultural identity for Singaporeans, then it is reasonable to assume that there might be individuals less embedded in local cultural practises (such as immigrants) who might not value nor use Singlish in the same way.

Consequently, besides the role of solidarity that has often been discussed, this article considers how contrasting attitudes toward Singlish might serve as a point of differentiation amongst academically elite students of different national origins and who regularly engage in transnational trajectories. To illustrate this, I offer a case study of a group of 20 students who attended a top-ranked secondary school in Singapore, including persons born and raised in Singapore, as well as individuals recruited on state scholarships from primarily China and Vietnam. Data is drawn from a qualitative study conducted amongst these informants in 2014. Partly conditioned by the secondary school they attended, many of these individuals harboured aspirations of and/or engaged in transnational trajectories in and out of Singapore in order to attend top-ranked universities in the world (Lu 2016a). In setting the stage for investigating the data, I explicate Bourdieu's (1991) notion of social *field*, aided by Agha's (2004) sense of *register*, in order to theorise how different valuations of a linguistic capital might lead to differentiation across social groupings. Next, I provide a précis of attitudes toward Singlish use in wider society. An account of this is important as it relates the existing ideologies about Singlish and presents implications for how my informants take up these wider circulating discourses (or not). I then summarise my informants' profiles before examining interview data when informants expressed ideologies pertaining to Singlish and Standard English. Invoking Bourdieu's (1991) theory on capitals and social fields, I explain through the data how differences in the valuation of Singlish possibly contribute to disaffiliation between two groups of academically elite students in Singapore.

To be clear, this article provides an empirical qualitative examination of how different and unequal social groupings might *emerge* as a reflection of expressed ideologies (claimed in interviews) regarding a local non-standard variety of English and Standard English, whilst providing a theoretical explanation (based on Bourdieu's notions of field and capitals) for this phenomenon. Beyond the research gap highlighted above, the study's findings and focus on academically elite students challenge prevalent narratives about the ease of transnational mobility such individuals supposedly enjoy (Ball and Nikita 2014). It provides a

more comprehensive understanding of the role of a vernacular in processes of migration, offering a glimpse into the formation of elite social classes in Singapore.

2 The role of linguistic capitals in a field contributing to social differentiation

In his introductory notes as editor to Bourdieu's (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*, John Thompson (Thompson 1991: 14) expresses the view that Bourdieu actually uses different terms to refer to social contexts or fields of individual action: "…'field' *(champ)* is his preferred technical term, but the terms 'market' and 'game' are also commonly used, in ways that are at least partly metaphorical".[4] Thompson also sets out what he believes to be how Bourdieu defines a field:

> A field or market may be seen as a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or 'capital'… A field is always the site of struggles in which individuals seek to maintain or alter the distribution of the forms of capital specific to it.
>
> (Thompson 1991: 14)

Hanks (2005) offers a similar take:

> A field is a form of social organization with two main aspects: (a) a configuration of social roles, agent positions, and the structures they fit into and (b) the historical process in which those positions are actually taken up, occupied by actors (individual or collective).
>
> (Hanks 2005: 72)

An example of a field is university education where there are positions such as lecturer and student. The field itself can therefore be understood as constituted by key actors, institutions, practises and discourses (Noble 2013: 352). Moreover, a field "is not simply an objective array of positions, but is a dynamic arrangement constituted by struggles and processes of differentiation between agents whose accumulations of forms of capital must, by their very nature, be variable" (Noble 2013: 352). What all these mean is that the existence of a field can be outlined by the way individuals take up exclusive positions in order to differentiate themselves from others. To Noble (2013: 352), it is the individuals' participation in the activities of a field and hence implied commitment to the values of capitals (i.e. Bourdieu's notion of *illusio*), that "maps" the field's borders. In other words, a field can be roughly defined by the practises of individuals that demonstrate recognition of the

4 The interchangeability of these metaphors, used by Bourdieu as explicatory concepts, is corroborated by Warde (2004:15).

value of certain resources, and differentiation of social positions by acquiring these resources.

Language can then be one form of capital that is contested or variably valued in a field. Such a phenomenon is denoted as *sociological fractionation* by Agha (2004), "where one group resists the scheme of values upheld by another (countervalorisation), or misrecognises, or ideologically distorts, such values in fashioning norms for itself" (Agha 2004: 27). The effect of contestation along lines of access to linguistic capitals, and how these linguistic capitals are valued, is depicted by Agha (2004)[5] as such:

> Thus, two members of a language community may both be acquainted with a linguistic register, but not have the same degree of competence in its use. Many speakers can recognise certain registers of their language but cannot fully use or interpret them. The existence of registers therefore results in the creation of social boundaries within society, partitioning off language users into groups distinguished by differential access to particular registers, and to the social practices which they mediate; and through the creation and maintenance of asymmetries of power, privilege, and rank, as effects dependent on the above processes.
>
> (Agha 2004: 29)

In this way, differences in competence and valuation of a linguistic capital are indicative of *competing* social positions (Thomson 1991: 14) in a field between the two groupings. Different valuations and access to the linguistic capital is therefore associated with different social positions for individuals who do not engage in the same social practise in the same way.

Having theorised how different valuations of a language might contribute to social differentiation, the next section will sketch the prevailing attitudes toward Standard English and Singlish in Singapore.

3 Contested ideologies about Singlish in Singapore

En passant, use of English in Singapore might be more accurately described as the use and reference to two *registers*, in Agha's (2004) sense, of Standard English and

5 While I cite Agha (2004) here, I am also aware of his criticisms (Agha 2007: 229–231) regarding Bourdieu's (1991: 51) claims that habitus is not transmitted through language. In contrast to Bourdieu's proposition, Agha (2007: 229) argues that it is through communicative events and metalinguistic discourse (such as those assigning valuations to Singlish by my informants in interviews) that habitus is produced. I am inclined toward Agha's (2007) account, while acknowledging Bourdieu's heuristic explanation for how social differentiation might occur through language.

Singlish, especially also when *register* as a notion is aligned with the highly ideologised ways in which the two codes are referred to in discourse by the public and state. Not just a language for inter-ethnic communication for Singaporeans (Vaish and Roslan 2011), Singlish has been described as being embedded in all aspects of life in Singapore (Cavallaro and Ng 2009: 156), including the home, playground and school (Ansaldo 2009: 138). Wee (2011: 77) provides some examples of prototypical Singlish features (reproduced below) including a lack of (a) inflectional morphology; (b) productive use of reduplication; (c) discourse particles and (d) lexical items borrowed from languages like Hokkien and Malay. In line with Agha's (2004: 24) notion of *register*, these features can also be characterised as "the repertoires of a register [that] are generally linked to systems of a speech style of which they are the most easily reportable fragments".

a. He eat here yesterday. [He ate here yesterday.]
b. I like hot–hot curries. [I like very hot curries.]
c. I won't get married, lor. [I have no choice but to not get married.] *lor* indicates a sense of resignation here.
d. Don't make me suay, ok? [Don't bring me bad luck, ok?]
suay is borrowed from Hokkien.

(Wee 2011: 77)

Within the World Englishes paradigm (Kachru 1997), Singlish would therefore be emblematic of the plurality of English varieties, with formal and functional diversities that reflect the different sociolinguistic contexts from which they emerged (Bhatt 2001). Though this is not to say that these Englishes are perceived by users in the same way. Indeed, as this section and the data in this study will show, Singlish and Standard English are "arranged, configured and contested" in unequal ways, so that we ought not to romanticise the sociopolitical legitimacy and equality of these Englishes (Tupas and Rubdy 2015: 3).

In this vein, despite the prevalence of its use, there are actually conflicting ideologies about Singlish amongst the public in Singapore, mostly regarding its legitimacy and desirability (Wee 2018 : 51). Common discourses supporting its use tend to claim it as a part of national identity, while those against Singlish are inclined to position it as ungrammatical "bad English" (Wee 2005: 56). Yet, these conflicting ideologies actually belie the fact that there are common assumptions shared by camps for and against Singlish. For example, both detractors and supporters of Singlish use often conflate an ungrammatical "uneducated variety" with Singlish (the colloquial variety), when the two are linguistically distinct (Wee 2018: 58). This point is to be significant when I consider local research on language attitudes.

Amongst attitudinal surveys juxtaposing Singlish with Standard English, it has been found that young people who have had higher levels of education are more inclined to see Singlish as a marker of cultural identity, without necessarily viewing it as "bad English". Cavallaro et al. (2014) combined a matched-guise study with interview data of 259 participants. Half of the participants were students in a local university, while the other half were adults in their 20s and 30s without university education. Reflecting the prevalent attitudes described by Wee (2005), amongst those who viewed Singlish positively, individuals often talked about Singlish as representative of Singaporean culture and identity. "Anti-Singlish" comments often described Singlish as not proper English, an impediment to learning Standard English, and to be avoided in daily use. About 53.1% of university students produced comments that were "pro-Singlish" about its use in informal contexts, and 26.1% of participants without tertiary education did the same. On the other hand, only 1.6% of university students expressed decidedly "anti-Singlish" comments, with 31.9% of those without university education who voiced similar opinions (Cavallaro et al. 2014: 391–392). By Cavallaro et al.'s (2014: 393) reckoning, these findings suggest a link between educational levels and attitudes toward Singlish and Standard English – individuals with lower levels of education and with fewer opportunities to acquire Standard English are more inclined to view Singlish negatively. Similarly, Leimgruber (2014) conducted a survey amongst 134 students at a local university. Fifty six percent of Leimgruber's (2014) respondents agreed that "Singlish is the only thing that makes [them] Singaporeans", while 30% disagree and 18% are neutral (Leimgruber 2014: 52). Both studies thus indicate a similar association between Singlish and cultural identity amongst students in university.

Tan and Tan's (2008) work then provide further evidence for how Singlish possesses covert prestige in informal domains amongst young students. They conducted a matched-guise test with a Standard questionnaire amongst 260 students from five mainstream secondary schools in Singapore. About 79.2% of respondents associated Singlish with Singapore, the highest rating amongst other items in the questionnaire. Over 80% of respondents reported using Singlish with friends and classmates outside classroom settings, as well as with family members. To Tan and Tan (2008), the results of their survey confirm that Singlish is valued and used by students in everyday life. It helps them "feel closer to friends" and makes the speaker sound "friendlier", that is, Singlish serves to establish affinity and reduce social distance (Tan and Tan 2008: 476). Like Cavallaro et al.'s (2014) research, participants indicated that Singlish is part of their culture. At the same time, the students clearly demonstrated an awareness that Singlish was only appropriate in particular contexts – outside of the classroom, with other students, etc. – while Standard English was deemed to be the preferred code in more formal

situations. In other words, individuals are seen to value how Singlish is crucial to establishing solidarity in informal domains, whilst recognising its inadequacy in formal settings.

All of these studies appear to show that the valuation of Singlish as a marker of Singaporean identity, as well as the acceptability of its use in informal domains is generally held by younger and more highly educated individuals in Singapore (cf. Wee 2018: 55). Importantly, as Cavallaro et al. (2014) suggest, individuals with lower levels of education were more likely to express negative evaluations of Singlish.

Even as the general public is divided about the status of Singlish, the co-existence of Singlish with Standard English in Singapore's linguistic milieu has always sat uneasily with the government. The state frames Standard English as crucial to Singapore's development in a global economy, so that Singlish is a problem that prevents Singaporeans from acquiring the standard form and is thus a threat to the nation's economic progress (Wee 2005: 57). The attitudes held by Singaporeans with higher levels of education are thus at odds with the state's official position toward Singlish use. Such conflicting positions between academically elite individuals and the state have at times been played out in the public sphere. Gwee Li Sui, a local poet and one-time Assistant Professor of Literature at the National University of Singapore, celebrated the rise of Singlish in an article for the New York Times (Gwee 2016). In the article, Gwee remarked that the government has reduced its antagonistic stance toward Singlish, observing that local politicians have begun employing Singlish in their speeches and campaigns. The article provoked an immediate rebuke from the Prime Minister's Office (Chang 2016), accusing Gwee of "making light" of the government's efforts to promote Standard English, and unequivocally repeating its stance that Singlish is a hindrance to economic development.

Surveys on attitudes (e.g. Cavallaro et al. 2014; Leimgruber 2014) toward Singlish amongst individuals with higher levels of education (i.e. at least attending university), as well as the clashes between highly educated Singaporeans and the government about the status of Singlish, both point to a common valuation of Singlish as integral to local culture and identity held by academically elite Singaporeans. Further, as Tan and Tan's (2008) study reminds us, attitudes that value Singlish in informal contexts need not be mutually exclusive from stances that recognise its inadequacy (while upholding the value of Standard English) in formal domains. In other words, it is entirely possible for an individual to value the use of Singlish with friends, while seeing it as a "bad" or ungrammatical form of English (cf. Wee 2018: 58). How might my own informants (including the immigrants among them) take up these circulating discourses? The next section

will provide some biographical information about my informants before I proceed to discuss the data.

4 Informants and method

The data I present in this article are drawn from a study I undertook in Singapore between March and December 2014. I was a former student (1994–1999) and then teacher (2007–2012) in a top-ranked secondary school, and remained in touch with students that I taught. I contacted 50 former students, of whom 20 agreed to be interviewed. These semi-structured interviews were focused on uncovering the educational pathways they undertook, as well as how they experienced life in each school they attended (from primary school to university). Informants comprise two individuals born in Singapore, six born in Vietnam, one born in Saipan,[6] one born in Taiwan, one born in India and nine born in China. I conducted 2–4 interview sessions with each individual, with each session lasting between 1 and 3 h (a total of 62.5 h of interview data with 20 individuals).

As part of Singapore's strategy to counter flagging birth rates, all six Vietnamese informants, and eight out of nine informants from China were recruited by the state on scholarships at age 15. Like Singapore, the secondary school landscapes in China and Vietnam are highly stratified, with an academically selective system for enrolment into top-ranked middle schools in each major city (cf. Pérez-Milans 2013; Yang 2016). My informants have been highly successful in such a system, enrolling in the top-ranked schools in their respective localities, before attending a top-ranked secondary school in Singapore. Ten out of 20 of them proceeded to top-ranked universities in the US and UK. By virtue of my informants' academic attainments and educational trajectory, it would be reasonable to consider them academic elites in the context of Singapore, though this is with the caveat that I am not treating them as a homogenous grouping with uniform practises and attitudes.

It must be reiterated that all informants were my former students who attended and graduated from the top-ranked secondary school in Singapore between 2007 and 2012. My position in the interviews is therefore not only one of researcher, but also someone familiar to the interviewees and an insider of the school. At the time of data collection, informants were all at least 21 years of age and not in a dependent relationship with the researcher. A summary of my informants' biographical profiles is presented in Table 1.

6 Saipan is the largest of the Northern Mariana Islands in the western Pacific, and a US commonwealth.

Table 1: Informant profiles and expressed ideologies.

Informant	Migration trajectory	Gender/ age	Occupation at time of data collection	Showed awareness of using Singlish in appropriate contexts	Linked Singlish to local culture and identity	Referred to Singlish as "bad" or "improper" English
Andy	Vietnam → S'pore → UK	M/23	Undergraduate student in UK	✓	✓	–
Bay	Vietnam → S'pore	M/22	Undergraduate student in S'pore	✓	✓	–
Cassandra	Taiwan → S'pore → US	F/24	Postgraduate student in US	✓	–	✓
Chang	China → S'pore	F/25	Postgraduate student in S'pore	✓	✓	–
Dong	China → S'pore	F/25	Working in S'pore	✓	✓	✓
Fang	China → S'pore → US	M/24	Postgraduate student in US	✓	–	–
Felicia	China → S'pore	F/25	Working in S'pore	✓	✓	–
Gabriel	S'pore → UK	M/23	Undergraduate student in UK	✓	✓	–
Gin	Vietnam → S'pore	M/23	Undergraduate student in S'pore	✓	✓	✓
Hans	Saipan → S'pore → Cambodia → S'pore → US	M/23	Undergraduate student in US	✓	–	–
Henry	Vietnam → S'pore	M/23	Undergraduate student in S'pore	✓	✓	–
Ling	China → S'pore	F/23	Undergraduate student in S'pore	✓	✓	–
Ming	China → S'pore → US	F/25	Working in US	–	–	–
Phey	Vietnam → S'pore	M/22	Undergraduate student in S'pore	✓	✓	✓

Table 1: (continued)

Informant	Migration trajectory	Gender/ age	Occupation at time of data collection	Showed awareness of using Singlish in appropriate contexts	Linked Singlish to local culture and identity	Referred to Singlish as "bad" or "improper" English
Quentin	Vietnam → S'pore	M/23	Undergraduate student in S'pore	✓	✓	–
Seng	S'pore → UK	M/21	Undergraduate student in UK	✓	✓	–
Vas	India → S'pore → US	M/23	Undergraduate student in US	✓	–	–
Xavier	China → S'pore → US	M/25	Working in US	✓	–	✓
Yang	China → S'pore	F/23	Undergraduate student in S'pore	✓	✓	–
Ying	China → S'pore → UK → S'pore	F/25	Working in S'pore	✓	✓	–

With regard to the purposes of this article, I formulated the following research questions that guided my analysis of the data:

1. How is Singlish positioned and valued in relation to other linguistic capitals by my informants?
2. Might there be differences in valuation of specific linguistic capitals? How might these differences be linked to circulating discourses in Singapore?

The data solicited in this article comes in a phase of interviews after I had asked informants to describe their experiences in school. I proceeded to find out what they spoke with whom, as well as what they thought about particular forms of language. I focus on bits when informants made reference to Singlish and Standard English, and the ideologies they expressed about them. I acknowledged the variation in accounts and was careful to let any differences amongst my informants emerge from the data, rather than impose them from the outset. I thought about how these regularities in accounts could co-relate with relevant biographical information, such as their migrant status, nationality and trajectories upon graduating from secondary school. In this, quantification of certain empirical observations in the data was helpful in demonstrating patterns of distribution and generalisability within the corpus (Erickson 1986: 108). I then postulated arguments that linked wider social structures to the way that my informants talked about Singlish and Standard English. The methodology I adopted was thus primarily qualitative but also aided by quantification at certain points of my analysis and argumentation.

In what follows, I make particular empirical observations from the data in relation to the research questions and provide excerpts to illustrate these observations.

5 Informants' accounts of Singlish and Standard English

In analysis of my informants' accounts, I summarise these observations (also see Table 1):

- Nineteen out of 20 informants claimed to use Singlish in their daily lives.
- Nineteen individuals showed awareness of using Singlish in appropriate contexts.
- Fourteen individuals mentioned a link between Singlish and Singaporean culture or identity.
- A much lower number (i.e. five individuals) referred to Singlish as "bad" or "improper" English, with only one informant claiming that he did not want to

speak it. No individual suggested that Singlish is "good" English, or that it is not "bad English".
- Also crucial: no informant suggested the use of any other linguistic code (e.g. Mandarin) besides Singlish amongst their Singaporean friends. This is despite the fact that 12 informants are ethnically Chinese.
- There was no discernible link between my informants' time of entry into and migrant status in Singapore, and their trajectory after leaving secondary school, to their evaluation of Singlish.

Note that Table 1 simply indicates an observation of the presence of certain expressed ideologies in informants' accounts. An absence of the account does not mean that the informant is unaware of how to use Singlish appropriately, or disagrees with the ideology. I now provide excerpts from my informants' accounts to illustrate these findings as well as delve deeper into some of them.

5.1 Using Singlish in appropriate contexts

I begin with an example from Fang in Extract (1). Fang had migrated to Singapore with his parents from China when he was about 10 years old. He had gained Permanent Resident status before giving it up and leaving for the US right after graduating from secondary school. At the point of data collection, he was reading Law in UC Berkeley as a postgraduate student.

Extract (1)

I:[7] So what would you speak with your friends and family?

Fang: I speak Singlish to my Singaporean friends **lor**, and Mandarin to my parents. But I would use American English with my American friends.

I: What do you mean by Singlish?

Fang: Like how we are speaking to each other now? With a Singaporean accent and the **lah**s and **lor**s. So I speak like that to Singaporeans in school now.

I: And so you would speak differently to American friends?

Fang: Yeah, like with more of an American accent and without Singlish words.

(Interview with Fang, from China residing in the US, 27 June 2014).

7 I: Interviewer.

Fang's comments are actually typical amongst informants, in that it indicated a clear sense of how Singlish is only used with "Singaporean friends" (line 3). Nineteen out of 20 informants made similar comments about using Singlish with Singaporean peers. Also notable is how he referred to the way he was speaking with me at that moment as an example of Singlish, with a clear link to a "Singaporean accent" and discourse particles such as "lahs and lors" (line 8).

Phey's comments in Extract (2) provides an example where the contexts for when certain forms of English are acceptable is more clearly defined.

Extract (2)

1	I:	So what do you speak with your friends in school?
2	Phey:	We use English usually. With my Vietnamese friends
3		we will speak Vietnamese and a mix of English.
4	I:	Besides your Vietnamese friends? What do you speak
5		with locals?
6	Phey:	English. I think it is very important to speak good
7		English **lah**. So I try to speak it.
8	I:	So we are speaking good English now?
9	Phey:	Now not so **lah**, I mean talking is ok, but in school
10		when in class must be more grammatical. Must be
11		proper English.
12	I:	So who do you speak like that to? [hand gestures
13		pointing to and motioning between Phey and I]
14	Phey:	With the guys in the soccer team? With close
15		Singaporean friends **lah**.
16	I:	But why do you speak differently with the soccer
17		guys?
18	Phey:	Cos we are friends what [laughs]. Locals must speak
19		like that.
20	I:	And what would you call this way that we speak?
21	Phey:	Singlish.

(Interview with Phey, from Vietnam residing in S'pore, 8 Aug 2014).

While Phey does not explicitly reference "Singlish" from the start, he talks about "good" (line 6) and "proper" English (line 11) that is "grammatical" (line 10), and to be used in formal classroom settings. The form of English he would use with his "Singaporean friends" in the soccer team is the form he was using with me in the interview, like Fang in Extract (1), peppered with discourse particles (words in bold in lines 7, 9 and 15). The implication is that the form of English used with his friends is not "good" and "proper". So Phey demonstrates an awareness that the form of English used in the interview is appropriate for more casual or informal settings (i.e. outside the classroom) and with a certain audience (i.e. Singaporean friends).

Eighteen out of 20 informants produced accounts that showed such an awareness, though only five informants explicitly stated that Singlish is not "good" English. But Phey's account also implies that Singlish is a marker of localisation (lines 18–19).

5.2 Singlish as linked to local culture

Seng's account in Extract (3) presents another instance when Singlish was explicitly linked to local culture (lines 10–11).

Extract (3)

1	I:	What do you speak in your family?
2	Seng:	English? I mean Singlish **lah**, like how we are talking
3		now. My Chinese damn *cui*.[8] My parents also don't
4		speak it.
5	I:	And with your friends?
6	Seng:	The same **lor**.
7	I:	What do you think about Singlish?
8	Seng:	What do you mean?
9	I:	Like err … do you think it's useful or valuable?
10	Seng:	oh, it's ok **lah**. I mean, it's representative of our culture
11		right. So long as we can switch to English when we
12		need to it's ok. Like when I go to the UK, obviously I
13		won't use Singlish with them. But here in Singapore
14		everyone speaks like that what. So there's nothing
15		wrong. Like seriously, the more important thing is we
16		can switch right. That's what I think.

(Interview with Seng, S'porean moving to the UK, 1 Aug 2014).

Seng here makes a distinction between English and Singlish (line 2). When asked about how he might evaluate Singlish (line 9), Seng adopts a somewhat neutral stance "it's ok lah" (line 10) at the start, and then proceeds to explain why he thinks Singlish "is ok". To Seng, the issue is not necessarily about how valuable Singlish is (which my question in line 9 suggested), but whether individuals are able to switch between English (the Standard form) and Singlish. Like Phey in Extract (2), Seng's account indicates his stance toward the importance of "switching" between these two forms depending on the context. He claims he would not use Singlish "with them" (line 13), presumably people who are British. So Seng appears

8 *Cui* – meaning fragile or weak; etymologically from Hokkien. In this case, Seng was using the word to describe his proficiency in Mandarin.

confident in his ability to "switch" between both forms when needed. While Seng was the only individual who explicitly displayed such an attitude, none of my 20 informants expressed anxieties about Singlish interfering with their use or learning of Standard English. Also important is how both Seng (born and raised in Singapore) and Phey (a Vietnamese who was recruited by the state at age 15) expressed similar stances toward Singlish as a marker of being local. In all, 14 individuals talked about Singlish in such a way.

5.3 Negative evaluations of Singlish

And yet, there is a clear exception to the accounts that we have seen thus far. Xavier was the only informant (out of 20) who claimed that he never acquired Singlish. Amongst the five informants who suggested that Singlish is not good English, his comments were also the most explicit in its negative evaluation.

Extract (4)

1	I:	What do you speak with your friends?
2	Xavier:	Basically like how I'm speaking with you now,
3		American English.
4	I:	So you don't use Singlish or Mandarin at all?
5	Xavier:	I only use Mandarin with my parents, I don't
6		really have friends from China, and even then I would
7		choose to use English with them.
8	I:	Oh, why is that? You don't use Mandarin with people
9		you meet from China?
10	Xavier:	Yeah, I mean I'm more comfortable using
11		English generally.
12	I:	I sort of remember you in class [in school]
13		already speaking with an American accent and all.
14		Why is that?
15	Xavier:	I never picked up Singlish you know. I
16		have always wanted to leave Singapore and possibly
17		head to the States. Singlish is like this provincial,
18		backward language. So I always thought it would be
19		better to learn and speak proper English.

(Interview with Xavier, from China residing in the US, 22 Aug 2014).

To Xavier, Singlish has always been "provincial" and "backward" (lines 17–18), and incongruous with his initial aims of moving to the US, even when he was

studying in Singapore. His account is seen to value American English over Singlish, associating American English with "proper English". The implication, of course, is that Singlish is not "proper". This is to the extent that he claims that he never did acquire Singlish (line 15). Also significant is how Xavier claims that he is more comfortable using English, even with peers who are immigrants from China whom he meets in the US (lines 10–11).

All five informants who evaluated Singlish as "bad" – either explicitly like Xavier in Extract (4) or implicitly like Phey in Extract (2) – did so by associating the forms of English with particular contexts of use. We saw this when Phey said "I mean talking is ok, but in school when in class must be more grammatical. Must be proper English" (Extract [2] lines 9–11). Xavier's evaluation of Singlish can also be linked to the context of the US, where he endeavoured to move. To demonstrate this similarity, I provide another example below by Cassandra.

Extract (5)

1	I:	What do you speak now with your friends from Singapore?
2	Cassandra:	We still use Singlish **lah**. We are all comfortable with it.
3	I:	Would you use it elsewhere with other people?
4	Cassandra:	Of course not! My American friends won't understand
5		us right? And it's not exactly proper English. I mean, sometimes
6		we use it amongst ourselves, and our American friends with us
7		will be curious and ask what we are speaking. So sometimes it
8		can be a bit embarrassing. So we try not to use it with other
9		people around.

(Interview with Cassandra, from Taiwan residing in the US, 26 June 2014).

Cassandra was born in Taiwan, but lived in Singapore from the age of 3–18 when she graduated from secondary school. She had described how she still has a group of close friends from Singapore while living in New York. In Extract (5), her evaluation of Singlish as "not exactly proper English" (line 5) is illustrated with and linked to a situation when she is with both Singaporean and American friends. So these negative evaluations by the five individuals, including Cassandra, Phey and Xavier, are not discussing Singlish in purely abstract terms or its innate properties, but about the acceptability of Singlish in particular situations. Such accounts are also in line with Wee's (2018: 58) claim that highly educated supporters of Singlish use often also ontologically conflate Singlish with ungrammatical English.

Overall, individuals who had moved out of Singapore also tended to refer to Singlish less in their accounts. Thus, five out of 10 informants who moved abroad (i.e. Cassandra, Fang, Hans, Ming, Vas) did not express ideologies that linked Singlish to Singaporean culture. This is unsurprising, given that the focus of the interviews was about their life experiences in schools they attended, rather than language use per se, so they would have had less opportunity to discuss their use of Singlish. Nonetheless, the data shows no discernible link between my informants' time of entry into and migrant status in Singapore, and their trajectories after leaving secondary school, to their explicit evaluation of Singlish (see Table 1). There is no clear difference in the valuation of Singlish when comparing Gabriel's and Seng's accounts (the two Singaporean informants) with those by immigrants. Also, talk about Singlish being appropriate for certain contexts is distributed across all informants, regardless of when they arrived in Singapore (i.e. either recruited by the state at age 15 like Phey, or immigrating at an earlier age like Cassandra). Amongst the five individuals who talked about Singlish as "bad" or "improper", Cassandra and Xavier moved to the US, while Phey, Dong and Gin remained in Singapore. So there does not seem to be a pattern here either.

The consistent expressed awareness of Singlish and Standard English as acceptable in different contexts is then significant. There is a general sense that Singlish is a marker of Singaporean-ness, to be used only amongst other Singaporeans. This is even as informants acknowledge the acceptability of only Standard English in formal domains such as the classroom, e.g. Phey in Extract (1), or in foreign contexts where there are non-Singaporean interlocutors, e.g. Cassandra in Extract (5). In fact, these consistently expressed ideologies by my immigrant informants (sans Xavier) parallel those of Korean "study abroad" students in Singapore, where Standard English was recognised as the prestigious and valuable economic tool on the global stage, while Singlish was claimed to be acquired solely for building friendships and solidarity with local Singaporeans (Kang 2012: 179). Park and Bae (2009) and Bae (2013) also found the same scalar valuations accorded to Standard English and Singlish, that guided how Korean students and their families positioned themselves toward the two language forms.

However, the ideologies in favour of Singlish expressed by my informants are to be contrasted with the views expressed by more recent immigrants recruited from China (i.e. those recruited at age 18 and 19 respectively)[9] in Yang's (2016) ethnography. Yang (2016) describes how these more recent immigrants were

9 Recall that my immigrant informants recruited on state scholarships would have arrived in Singapore at age 15.

subject to being excluded from local peer groups in university precisely because of their language practises.[10] It is important to note that all 10 of my immigrant informants (five of whom were from China), who proceeded to universities in Singapore, also reported that they did not affiliate with more recent immigrants from China in these institutions, and culturally differentiated themselves as being more proficient in forms of English (Lu 2018).

I reproduce Yang's (2016) summary of his informants' reactions to being excluded:

> What is noteworthy here is that those PRC scholars in Singapore who experienced such discriminations or feelings of insult found themselves in a position to resist or even launch counter-insults by mobilising certain cultural and symbolic resources available to them. For example, the PRC students' most typical counter-strategy is to belittle Singlish or Singapore-accented English, and implicitly those who speak them, by appealing to a symbolic hierarchy of Englishes which valorises the more authoritative British or American accents….
>
> I also came across not a small number of PRC scholars who actively resisted adopting the Singaporean English accent, convinced that the latter lacked aesthetic quality and international prestige…. A not uncommon observation made by my interlocutors about Singaporeans' linguistic abilities is that (Chinese) Singaporeans are 'half buckets of water' (*bantong shui*, Chinese colloquial idiom meaning half-baked) in both English and Chinese, and therefore they have no legitimacy in laughing at the Chinese on the point of language incompetence. One cynical and grumpy informant once remarked thus regarding Singaporeans — 'They speak *Singlish* as if it's *English*' and that 'They can't even speak a complete sentence in *proper* Mandarin!'
>
> (Yang 2016: 83–84)

Yang's (2016) informants are thus individuals who lack Singlish as a linguistic capital due to an undervaluation of and refusal to acquire it (like Xavier), instead, attaching more value to American and British English ("by appealing to a symbolic hierarchy of Englishes"); or because they have not been sufficiently socialised into Singlish as a practise. These accounts by Yang's (2016) informants can be further made sense of when seen in the light of the motivations of immigrant students when moving to Singapore, and also their aspired trajectories. These student immigrants recruited on scholarships often talked about moving to Singapore to acquire Standard English, so as to potentially move on to universities in the US and UK (Lu 2016b).

There is therefore a consistent stance shared by my informants and Yang's (2016) more recent immigrants toward Standard forms of English in contexts outside

10 The reasons for disaffiliation are multi-layered, and include the prevalence of xenophobic sentiment targeting immigrants from China (Yang 2014: 365; Yeoh and Lin 2013: 32–33). A discussion of these other discourses is beyond the scope of this article, which is focused on the role of Singlish.

of Singapore. The key difference lies in my informants' valuation of Singlish as preferred amongst their academically elite peers locally, versus the devaluation of Singlish by these more recent immigrants. But how are these differences in the valuation of Singlish between my informants and more recent immigrants connected to the creation of different social positions and disaffiliation?

6 Explaining disaffiliation through Bourdieu

The ideologies expressed in interviews in the previous section suggest that my informants are generally orienting to two *social fields* (Bourdieu 1991) in their accounts, where the *social field* denotes a context in which individuals take up various positions based on their accumulation of and competition for different resources (Thompson 1991: 14). There is the field of education in Singapore, at times linked with their transnational trajectories to universities in the US and UK (e.g. Seng's account of "switching" in Extract [3]) – this is a field where only Standard English is recognised to be acceptable by my informants, not Singlish. At the same time, my informants also orient to a local field of informal socialisation with their Singaporean peers – a local market where only Singlish is preferred. Xavier's rejection of Singlish (Extract 4) can be explained by his anticipation of conditions in a field of education where Singlish is presumed by him to be worthless. It is American English that is valued by Xavier and which he acquired from the outset in accordance with his aspiration of attending university in the US. Xavier had no wish to remain and participate in the local market, and so saw no need for acquiring Singlish as a linguistic capital.

In what follows, I situate my informants' expressed ideologies amongst circulating discourses about Standard English and Singlish in Singapore discussed previously. Related to the two social fields outlined above, I provide a theoretical explanation for how the devaluation of Singlish by more recent immigrants might be linked to their exclusion (and hence disaffiliation), not just differentiation, from the peer groups of localised academic elites.

6.1 A transnational field of education

As suggested by Cavallaro et al. (2014) and my discussion of circulating discourses in a previous section, the orthodox position toward Singlish – as valuable in situations of informality, as a marker of Singaporean-ness, to be used only amongst other Singaporeans – is particularly prevalent amongst highly educated and younger individuals. This is even as the government and less educated

individuals tend to hold a more negative view of Singlish. Yet, just as Bourdieu's original formulation of field[11] was critiqued as a "static economy" by Ong (1999) that does not address transnational movement of peoples, Singapore's linguistic economy is seen to be destabilised by processes of immigration. The recruitment of immigrant students by the state brings in people at various institutional stages (e.g. my informants at age 15 vs. Yang's [2016] informants at age 18/19), who would have lived in Singapore for different lengths of time, have acquired different cultural and linguistic capitals, and different valuations of existing capitals in Singapore.

At the national level for Singapore, there appears to be a linguistic market in the field of education where Standard English is promoted by the state and (mis) recognised by all social actors as a pre-eminent linguistic capital symbolic of educational attainment. All social actors in Singapore, regardless of educational level and migrant status, recognise the value of Standard English in official domains. Even academically elite individuals who value Singlish as a marker of cultural identity do not seek to valorise Singlish as a replacement for Standard forms. This field of education in Singapore is folded into a wider transnational field. It is demonstrated by the state's rhetoric regarding the economic value of Standard English in a global economy and concomitant fear that citizens might only be proficient in Singlish. It is also seen in the way my informants (e.g. Seng in Extract [3]; Xavier in Extract [4]) and Yang's (2016) research participants orient to linguistic markets in the US and UK, where American and British Englishes afford the greatest symbolic power. This theorisation of a transnational field of education is in line with Kenway and Koh's (2013) analysis in their work on elite schooling in Singapore, where students acquire particular capitals of international currency that enable them to move overseas to top universities. Similar observations have been made by Heller (2003) and Cameron (2012) regarding the status of English as a valuable commodity in the global labour market, as well as the motives of economic rationalism undertaken by individuals who prefer linguistic capitals that can be more readily converted into economic capital. For my informants, Standard English is one such crucial linguistic capital.

Theoretically, Bourdieu's (1991) original account of Standard language in a linguistic economy (i.e. Standard French in France) is positively co-related with

11 Bourdieu's (1991) original formulation of field was not concerned with transnational phenomena. According to Vertovec (2001: 24), the concept of a "transnational social field" was first introduced in migration literature by Glick-Schiller et al. (1992). They argue for the importance of studying social fields by reformulating the concept of society, casting it as one that is not bounded by the limits of the nation-state (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004: 1003). Also see Park and Wee (2012) for a theorisation of English and its transnational linguistic markets.

social positions of power and prestige amongst academic elites for anyone who possesses the right linguistic capital. In Singapore, Standard English affords this symbolic power in the field of education. Yet, as mentioned, Yang's (2016) account suggests that his recent immigrant informants are excluded from local peer groups due to a devaluation and lack of Singlish. How can I explain this disaffiliation amongst academically elite students through their different valuations of Singlish?

6.2 The local field of informal socialisation

Taking into account the previous discussion on conflicting attitudes toward Singlish in wider society, the local linguistic market pertaining to Singlish appears to be contested by at least three groups of social actors: (i) localised academic elites (both Singaporean and immigrant) who uphold and claim to practise it as a marker of local cultural identity; (ii) recent immigrants from China who see it as a less valuable form of English compared to American and British forms; (iii) lower educated Singaporeans who see it as an impediment to acquiring Standard English. The effect of such contestation in Singapore is the plausible disaffiliation between these three groups along the lines of access to Standard English and Singlish, and how they value these linguistic capitals.

In Bourdieu's terms, the disaffiliation between localised academic elites like my informants from more recent immigrants like Yang's (2016) informants might occur in two coterminous ways. First, my informants' claimed competence in both Singlish and Standard English registers, coupled with their understanding of the appropriate linguistic codes in certain contexts are crucial in the embodiment of their embeddedness in local culture and as academic elites in Singapore. In Bourdieu's (1991) own words,

> … competence, which is acquired in a social context and through practice, is inseparable from the practical mastery of a usage of language and the practical mastery of situations in which this usage of language is *socially acceptable*. The sense of the value of one's own linguistic products is a fundamental dimension of the sense of knowing the place which one occupies in the social space.
>
> (Bourdieu 1991: 82)

That is, my informants' claim that they value and use Singlish amongst Singaporean peers is a sign of their alignment and sense of affiliation with other localised academically elite students.

Second, the differences in claimed competence and valuation of Singlish between my informants and more recent immigrants is indicative of *competing*

social positions (Thomson 1991: 14) in a field between the two groupings ala Agha's (2004) sociological fractionation.

Consequently, *both* Standard English and Singlish are crucial linguistic capitals linked to being an insider of localised academically elite students in Singapore. Besides the field of education, there is another local field of private, informal socialisation. It is Singlish that is the valued linguistic capital in this field of informal socialisation amongst academic elites, more so than Standard English. It is Singlish that is linked to and reflective of solidarity and friendship networks with local Singaporeans. Similar to Snell's (2018) Teeside study, the suggestion here is that Singlish is a vernacular that can index both status and solidarity in private spheres of informal socialisation. In Snell's (2018) study of interaction amongst students in two primary schools in Teeside, northeast England, children used dialect forms (i.e. *howay* and pronoun tags) that lacked status in the dominant sociolinguistic economy to assert status in local micro-level interactions within their peer groups. This is even as the local vernacular they use is already a marker of group solidarity.

That Singlish can index both status (as evaluated by my informants) and solidarity (as demonstrated in previous surveys like Tan and Tan 2008) in informal interaction is important. Without Singlish, academically elite individuals (such as Yang's 2016 informants) are liable to be positioned as outsiders by localised academic elites and continue to have low social status associated with being an immigrant (as seen in Yang's 2016 account), less able to participate in the field of informal socialisation. The borders of this field of informal socialisation can therefore be roughly demarcated by the differences in valuation of Singlish held by localised academic elites (like my informants) juxtaposed against those held by more recent immigrants (like Yang's 2016 informants). This point to disaffiliation between the two groupings.

6.3 Why would local academic elites value Singlish the vernacular?

This then leads us to consider a peculiar phenomenon – localised academic elites in Singapore (such as Dr Gwee Li Sui and my informants) are the ones who value Singlish the *patois* as marker of Singaporean-ness, while less educated Singaporeans tend to view it negatively. This is incongruent with Bourdieu's (1991) characterisation of the linguistic market in France, where Standard French is symbolic of French national identity at the expense of the valuation of the *patois*. To be sure, Bourdieu (1991: 18–19) also describes how French elites were able to use the *patois* when it suited them to do so (e.g. the Mayor of Pau using the local

vernacular in his public speech in order to gain the political trust and goodwill of local villagers). Bourdieu (1991) calls this a strategy of *condescension*, "reserved for those who are sufficiently confident of their position in the objective hierarchies to be able to deny them without appearing to be ignorant or incapable […]" Bourdieu (1991: 69). Yet, the situation in Singapore is different in the sense that localised academic elites would use Singlish amongst themselves in an unmarked manner (like in my interviews with informants), not just to condescend to the level of individuals less proficient in Standard English. How might one explain such a different situation in Singapore?

Since gaining independence in 1965, the Singapore state has tried to harness the advantages of a global economy, yet define a local cultural identity tied to its concept of an equal multi-racial nation (Chua 1998). This led the government to establish an ideological position regarding Standard English. The state positions Standard English as a racially-neutral language that allows inter-ethnic communication within the nation, as well as of utility in the global economy. At the same time, the state defines English as unsuitable for expressing the heritage and culture of Singapore's official racial groupings. This is why government rhetoric has often distinguished English from official mother tongues as a dichotomy of economic tool and cultural tie (Wee 2003).

Conceivably, it is the absence of a state imposed national language – an ideological vacuum in nation-building – coupled with the massive shift toward English use amongst all citizens regardless of race (Lu 2020), that has allowed room for academic elites (like Dr Gwee Li Sui) to champion the value and status of Singlish the *patois* as a marker of national identity. As already discussed, the ideological position of academic elites is that Singlish is preferred in the field of informal socialisation, and no one is clamouring to valorise Singlish at the expense of Standard English in the field of education. Such an ideological stance held by academic elites thus actually serves to affirm, not undermine, existing hegemonic nation-building ideologies: (i) regarding the economic value of Standard English in the field of education, enabling citizens (including the academic elites themselves) to plug into a global economy; (ii) regarding the need for a racially-neutral language to unite the various linguistic and ethnic groups in Singapore. It maintains the exclusive position of academic elites in contrast to the less educated with less access to Standard English. In the context of increasing immigration of talented individuals, this ideological position also serves as an act of *distinction* (Bourdieu 1991: 18), excluding recent immigrants from participating in the local field of informal socialisation, potentially relegating talented immigrants who gain Standard English without Singlish to a lower social status. In Bourdieu's (1991: 18) terms, the unequal distribution of Singlish amongst academically elite students in Singapore points to the ability of those who possess Singlish to exploit this system

of differences in order to secure a "*profit of distinction*". Accordingly, the state's balancing act of engaging in the globalised economy, while managing localised racial identity politics, might have unintentionally culminated in these parallel social fields and linguistic markets pertaining to Standard English and Singlish.

7 Conclusion

The aim of this article is to examine the role of a local non-standard variety of English in the (dis)affiliation amongst a multinational group of academically elite students in Singapore. To do this, I investigated my informants' expressed ideologies about Singlish in interviews. I uncovered that they generally reported a consistent valuation of Standard English in scholastic domains, while claiming to prefer Singlish as a marker of Singaporean-ness when interacting with Singaporean peers. This is in contrast to more recent immigrants (i.e. Yang's 2016 informants from China) who devalue Singlish. I situated these discourses among wider attitudes held by segments of Singapore society, and posited that these ideologies point to two social fields in Bourdieu's (1991) sense: a field of education where Standard English is uniformly valued by social actors in Singapore, and a field of informal socialisation amongst academically elite students where the value of Singlish is contested. It is through differential access to and valuation of Singlish that might explain how the vernacular contributes to disaffiliation between localised academic elites (such as my informants) and recently recruited academically elite immigrant students (such as Yang's 2016 informants). Rather than a straightforward account of accruing power and prestige through attaining Standard English in the field of education, the existence of another field of informal socialisation points to the role of Singlish in: (i) localisation vis a vis the transnational mobilities of academically elite students; and (ii) distinction within the national sphere. I suggest two implications from these findings.

First, this article draws attention to the central role of Singlish in the development of disaffiliation amongst academically elite individuals in Singapore. The state's promotion of Standard English and official mother tongues (including Mandarin) would, prima facie, suit the linguistic practises and valuations of recruited immigrants from China who value Standard English and are already highly proficient in Mandarin. Yet, the migration of academically elite students into Singapore is not as straightforward as highlighted by scholars who have focused on the field of education (e.g. Igarashi and Saito 2014; Kenway and Koh 2013), where top-performing migrant students appear most likely to possess the cultural capitals in order to be highly successful and well-integrated. In actuality, while these immigrants might be successful in the field of education, they might

face obstacles to participating in the field of informal socialisation amongst academic elites. However much the state might view Singlish with disdain, the vernacular is a crucial resource facilitating my immigrant informants' participation in local peer groups.

Second, while the theoretical notion of multiple social fields may not be new (cf. Park and Wee 2012), there is, as yet, little interactional evidence of participants negotiating relations of status *and* solidarity, and constructing peer group hierarchies in Singapore. The proposal is for future research to consider approaches that study how status relates to patterns of power at the micro-level, and how it is achieved in interaction via Singlish, even as Singlish is widely assumed to be a local marker of solidarity. As Snell (2018: 686) asserts, it is worth considering how vernaculars like Singlish are intimately linked to classed subjectivities, to better understand why local vernaculars remain strong in the face of overt stigmatisation.

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