

Simultaneous Indexicalities: Linguistic Variation in Political Speech in Singapore

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1 Introduction

A linguistic story about Singapore is never complete without first understanding its history and the regulatory forces that have made the languages that are spoken there what they are today. It was the people from all around the region, attracted to a British trading settlement in the 1800s growing rapidly out of an unsettled island in the South China Sea, who brought to Singapore a variety of different languages and created a multilingual situation which had to be managed in the name of nation building. During Singapore's struggles towards self-governance and independence in the late 1950s and 60s, students were put in bilingual education programs. By 1979, 91% of primary one (1st grade) Singaporeans were enrolled in English stream education (Goh & Gopinathan, 2006), where the main language of education was English. Students also learnt an additional officially assigned 'mother tongue', a language determined by parental ethnicity, the system still used today. The coexistence of early immigrant languages and official mother tongues with English led to the development of Singlish, a creole-like variety bearing substratum traces of older dialects and language varieties, among them Southern Min languages like Hokkien and Cantonese, as well as Malay and Tamil. It has been argued that it is through the use of Singlish that Singaporeans remain uniquely and identifiably Singaporean (Alsagoff, 2010; Leimgruber, 2013).

Official language attitudes surrounding English and Singlish are strongly antithetical; years of language awareness campaigns have positioned Singlish as 'broken, ungrammatical English' that speakers 'outside of Singapore have difficulties (...) understanding' (Goh, 1999). While the space Standard Singapore English¹ (SSE, or just English) occupies can be easily defined as what appears on a governmental document or speech, anything outside of this official domain is harder to pin down. Because of that, Singapore English² has been described as anything from a post-creole continuum (Platt, 1975), a 'leaky' diglossia (Gupta, 1994), to a 'culturally oriented' system (Alsagoff, 2010). The dynamic between Singlish and English, as well as their interaction with the other languages in Singapore, is reflected in the substantial inter- and intra-speaker variability present in spoken interaction. Previous work looking at code-switching between English and another language like Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese, Hokkien and Teochew (see Tay, 1989; Kwan-Terry, 1992; Ong, Zhang & Martin, 2013) have taken unproblematically the English present in their data as one distinct code, and research that do make the distinction between Singlish and SSE often do not question the line they draw between one variety and the next. For this study, I also find that taking a comprehensive definition of code-switching that incorporates types and subtypes of language alternation that have been talked about in relation to code-switching³ (cf. Hall & Níleap, 2015) is crucial, as the goal is to focus on the motivations and language ideologies surrounding the variation.

¹ Here, I use Standard Singapore English (SSE) as both a grammatical and ideological descriptor. Pakir (1991) calls SSE an 'International Standard English' and categorizes SSE speakers as having 'advanced proficiency' in English. Because of the relatively few spaces in which SSE is used, the speakers who use SSE are perhaps more ideologically bound to these contexts.

² Singapore English here is taken as an umbrella term that encompasses both SSE (English) and Singlish and any varieties in between without making any distinction between any one code.

³ These include but are not limited to *borrowing, diglossia, code-mixing, style-shifting, language crossing and hybridity*.

The questions that this paper will attempt to answer are: Can the line between English and Singlish be drawn? What language ideologies emerge in spoken language in Singapore? What motivates code-switching, and how do speakers construct identity through linguistic variation? The political setting is where language is often delicately negotiated, and having linguistic capital is central to a politician's public image. I believe that exploring how politicians manage ideologically-separate linguistic varieties would provide insight and help answer the questions above. By looking at language ideologies and indexicalities in moment-by-moment data from political rallies, this paper will tackle continuing issues in the analysis of sociolinguistic variation.

2 Politics and language in Singapore

2.1 Political blooper

In 2006 at his annual National Day Rally broadcasted to Singaporeans, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, while urging his government to adapt to new approaches to reach out to Singaporeans, referenced a popular podcast from one of Singapore's most prolific bloggers, *mrbrown*.

'I give you an example. You put out a funny podcast, you talk about bak chor mee. I will say... **mee siam mai hum**. Then we compete.'

- Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 2006, emphasis added

mrbrown's podcast satirized the Prime Minister and his People's Action Party (PAP), and their actions during the 2006 General Elections. PAP members repeatedly criticized and hounded an opposition party member who made the mistake of not submitting his election forms and instead accused the Elections Department of losing them. The podcast features a *bak chor mee* ('minced pork noodles') vendor arguing with his customer who confused his own order, implicitly referencing the PAP's petty fight with the opposition. Prime Minister Lee, in this quote above, brings up *bak chor mee* as an allusion to *mrbrown*, and cautions that while the government should start using novel ways like podcasting to reach out to Singaporeans, politics in Singapore should not be reduced to competitions of who can be funnier than the other, as this would lower the standard of public debate (Lim, 2006).

Both bak chor mee and mee siam are popular national dishes, instantly recognized by Singaporeans. Lee, however, made a political blooper by using the Hokkien term *mai hum* ('without cockles/saltwater clams') with mee siam, something that does not originally contain any cockles at all. This error was caught by many Singaporeans immediately, and the incident precipitated weeks of discussion on social media. The slip-up was seen by many as the country's rulers losing touch with the ground, seeing that no Singaporean who has ever eaten mee siam would order the dish with cockles. Online netizens berated the Prime Minister for 'trying too hard' and subsequently tripping over his own feet.

What to make of this? Surely it is unintended mistake on our dear PM's (Prime Minister) part. I think he was meant to say "mee siam mai hiam", which means "mee siam with no chilli please". However, his poor command of basic singlish let him down. Well, maybe it is partly because his English is so perfect, so Standard Queen English that he would have grave difficulties in understanding the local slang. [...] Beside, a lowly dish like mee siam would not consist of any part of his regular diet and so his unfamiliarity with the local dish is understandable.

- comment from blogger *wert*⁴, 23 August 2006

Here, blogger *wert* explicitly criticizes the politician's mistake, sarcastically pointing out that Lee's mistake was due to 'his poor command of basic Singlish' compared to his 'perfect' English, as well as how mee siam is too 'lowly' a dish for him. Lee's affiliated political party, the PAP, hold 79 out of 99 seats in Parliament after the 2011 General Election and since self-governance in 1959, have not been seriously challenged by any other political party. To many Singaporeans, the PAP name is synonymous with government (Agence France-Presse, 2001); PAP politicians coming from a well-established farm system of Singaporeans who receive government scholarships and graduate from brand name universities around the world. A PAP member is seen as highly educated and is ascribed

⁴ Retrieved from <http://wert-sg.blogspot.com/2006/08/mee-siam-mai-hum.html>

certain qualities of elitism. Adding to that, Singapore's elected leaders are the highest paid in the world⁵. Through this incident, the Prime Minister's ignorance of local cuisine threw this longstanding perceived divide between Singaporeans and their politicians into the spotlight. His press secretary later clarified in a statement that Lee had meant to say *laksa mai hum* ('laksa (noodles in a spicy coconut broth) without cockles') (The Straits Times, 2006), and had effectively mistaken one noodle dish for another.

Something else to note is that this blunder was made as Lee conceded that the government needed to move with the times, and is paralleled by his choice of language. In a speech that had been almost completely delivered in SSE, Lee deviates from the standard code when broaching the issue of trying new methods to reach out to its electorate, using the Hokkien phrase *mai hum*. Hokkien, a vernacular Chinese language spoken and understood by many Chinese Singaporeans, is one of the substrate languages that contributes to Singlish. We see here hints of ideologies associated with linguistic choice, and how a disconnect between a seemingly elite politician and a common Singaporean is partly marked by language. Further in this paper, we will see how these pre-existing ideologies play a part in the creation of new language ideologies in Singapore.

2.2 *Language in politics*

Sociolinguistic work in Singapore has traditionally centered on studying Singlish in relation to English, and exploring other linguistic varieties as separated by the ethnic groups who speak them (see work by Alsagoff, 2007, 2010; Bokhorst-Heng, Alsagoff, McKay & Rubdy, 2007; Gupta, 2010; Lim, 2010 etc. for contemporary examples). These studies use as their base the constant production and reproduction of ideologies through official language policy implementation. Because the state separates 'mother tongues' as languages carrying cultural information and English as carrying economic capital, it creates 'sites of institutionalized ritualization' (Silverstein 1998:138, as cited in Wee, 2006) and provides a space where ideology is articulated and performed (Wee, 2006). In this reading, English, the official language used in government administrative and educational domains, has legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1977) over Singlish or any other mother tongue and other linguistic vernaculars. For politicians like Lee, the ability to use Standard Singapore English is crucial. There are persisting ideologies left over from the 1970s where English and Singlish exist on opposite ends of a post-creole continuum, and being able to speak an acrolect of Singlish is often correlated with a high level of education (Platt, 1975). In the political domain, a primary 'site of institutionalized ritualization', speaking English indexes one as educated, and at a basic level, able to represent Singaporeans to a higher level of government.

Yet institutionalized macrosociological forces working on English are also paralleled with alternative forces that uphold the existence of spoken Singlish and other languages. Woolard (1985) argues that nonstandard linguistic codes may be alternative and not oppositional. Non-standard language practices are also productive. Instead of resulting from a bending to the legitimacy of the dominant code, they may be certain responses that enact solidarity. The mere existence of spoken Singlish, for example, and its proliferation within Singaporean society, hints at a different attitude speakers have towards the vernacular. Acknowledging these forces at work, Wee writes that speakers 'show greater and greater departures from the earlier signs, leading to changes in prevailing ideologies' (2006:358). These 'departures' have been studied by other linguists as variation in linguistic patterns across various speech communities.

Political speeches, being public performances, are agitative: there are deliberate considerations behind a politician's (or his speechwriter's) decision behind choice of code. It is difficult for politicians to 'un-brand' themselves from professional marketing and electoral strategies and be 'convincing' to the electorate (Lempert and Silverstein, 2012). This conscious and metalinguistic use of speech variation is an insight into attitudes towards language and uncovers strategies of how the tensions between standardization and variability are managed (Heller, 2010).

2.3 *Variation in Singaporean speech (models of Singapore English)*

Variation within Singaporean speech, like in the Prime Minister's example given above, has been studied as a shift of cultural orientation, most often as competing ideologies between English and Singlish. Alsagoff's (2007)

⁵ Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, after receiving a 36% pay cut in 2012, is still the world's highest paid political leader with his annual salary at 1.69 million USD (rediff.com, 2012).

culture orientation model (COM) proposes that Singaporeans have at their disposal both Singlish and English, both indexing different orientations (SSE 'doing being globalist' and Singlish 'doing being local(ist)'). COM sees the switch from one language to the other as speaker choice and resource; thus the degree to which a speaker uses Singlish features in his speech indicates a symbolic shift towards a more local orientation or stance. Leimgruber (2011) proposes a combined approach with COM that brings in the concepts of *orders of indexicality* (Silverstein 2003) to also consider social meaning in the choice between Singlish and English. By seeing Singaporean speech as a repertoire of language variables that can be more or less associated with either Singlish or English, the reason for using one variable instead of another can index particular social meanings, or a particular range of social meanings in an indexical field (Eckert, 2008). By using the indexicality framework, Leimgruber says we essentially do away with classifying a code switch; instead of identifying two (or more) different subvarieties as choices speakers have when speaking, we can explain that the use of 'the features of one of two codes [...] as fulfilling the task of indexing a particular stance' (2013:108). His definition argues for stance-taking as the integral reason for variation, and for a high level of metapragmatic awareness of the social meanings between the linguistic form or feature that is used. The conscious use of Singlish features, then, according to Leimgruber (2013), can index a speaker as taking 'a stance of community membership' (2013:108), for example.

Leimgruber's 'features as variables' approach stems from an attempt to sidestep the problems researchers have had in the past dealing with the identification and the differentiation of subvarieties within natural Singaporean speech itself. This paper will, in the same vein, see multilingualism as a 'complex of specific semiotic resources' (Blommaert 2010:102), yet also attend to the ideological borders of socially-identifiable 'languages'. As touched upon earlier in the paper, one other complication is that Singlish itself, being a constantly changing creole vernacular, has its own fuzzy boundaries with regards to influence from English, and borrowed lexicon from substrate languages which are themselves still alive and spoken by Singaporeans. The semiotic map of a particular feature cannot be seen as fixed and permanent, and in its unsettled, shifting state can be *bivalent* (cf. Woolard, 1998), i.e., not have a one-to-one correspondence with one code. Thus, in talking about a switch from 'English' to 'Singlish', features or otherwise, both Alsagoff and Leimgruber have not recognized that attaching features to ideologically bound varieties might sometimes be problematic.

2.3.1 Language ideologies and indexical fields

The concept of indexical order was first introduced by Michael Silverstein in 2003, who writes that indexicalities are essentialized individual projections on a macro-level, and can be layered one on top of another, creating sites that are identified by their constant movement and change. Eckert (2008) builds on this notion and introduces the *indexical field*, which she says is crucial in the interpretation and subsequent reinterpretation of a form. Instead of positing a fixed social meaning for a linguistic variable, there should be a field of different meanings that are then situationally and contextually activated. The emphasis is on the fluidity of the field, where meanings are all connected ideologically, and each new activation of the field could potentially change its landscape.

I give here a quote from Blommaert (2007, emphasis added), who lays out the challenges for researchers working in the social meaning of variation and indexical order:

'Orders of indexicality is a sensitising concept that should point a finger to (index!) important aspects of power and inequality in the field of semiosis. [...] The concept invites different questions - sociolinguistic questions on indexicality - and should open empirical analyses of indexicality to higher-level considerations *about relations within sociolinguistic repertoires*, the (non-)exchangeability of particular linguistic or semiotic resources across places, situations and groups, and so forth. It invites, in sum, *different questions of authority, access and power in this field.*'

In other words, in order to understand how indexicalities are linked in indexical fields, and how new ideologies emerge, we take as our starting point the fluidity of these indexical links, that can and will shift in different contexts. These shifts, then open up more questions about the relationships between ideologies about languages within speakers, and uncover power dynamics in society through language use. We will now look at rally speech data from opposition party politicians in Singapore, and see how they gain access to the political field by influencing and changing the indexical landscape.

3 Data

3.1 The opposition party in Singapore

In the past decade or so, the PAP's stranglehold on Singapore politics has been weakening as other political parties have started gaining support from younger Singaporeans who have been voicing opposing opinions towards a one-party leadership. Among them, the Worker's Party (WP) has emerged as the strongest contender against the PAP⁶. Most of WP's members are not government scholarship awardees, and are sometimes marketed as 'self-made' men who are fighting their way through life (Saad, 2002), now fighting through the political landscape as an opposition party member in Singapore. The unique position of the WP creates additional constraints on how they market themselves linguistically – SSE points to elitism and invokes the PAP politician they do not want to be, yet is also indexical of the education required to lead a nation. In order to bridge a disconnect between politicians and the common Singaporean, WP politicians utilize several recurring strategies.

3.2 Simultaneous indexicalities

Below, I introduce an excerpt by WP member Pritam Singh, then-candidate running for a parliament seat in 2011. Singh in his speech is addressing public concerns about how voting opposition politicians into parliament might mean kicking out good PAP ministers

Excerpt 1

- 1 Singh: My fellow Singaporeans, are the ministers gods (.) who
- 2 cannot be replaced?
- 3 Rally crowd: No:!
- 4 Singh: Senior Minister S Jayakumar, Speaker of Parliament Abdullah
- 5 Tarmugi, and PAP Chairman Lim Boon Heng, have already
- 6 said 'bye-bye'.
- 7 ((laughter from crowd))
- 8 Singh: Did they ask the voters of Singapore for permission to step
- 9 down?
- 10 Rally crowd: No:!
- 11 Singh: Voters of Aljunied GRC in particular (0.5) the answer is
- 12 obvious. ((spreads arms wide)) *Another PAP man will take*
- 13 *over (.) as minister lor!*
- 14 ((laughter from crowd))

From lines 1 to 12, Singh uses SSE as he questions the rally crowd in his lead-up to a sarcastic joke about the PAP. Halfway into line 12 (italicized in transcript), he starts delivering the punchline, spreading his arms wide and saying, 'Another PAP man will take over as minister *lor!*' He punctuates his utterance with the Singlish particle *lor*, which has the pragmatic function of expressing resignation (Wee, 2002), and achieves the desired response of laughter from the crowd. Because of the association of PAP with SSE speakers and elitism at the other end of the pole, the Singlish indexical field allows for ideological connections between Singlish and other vernacular languages as languages of the people. This helps Singh take an 'interactional stance' (Lempert and Silverstein, 2012), where he orients to his audience with the use of Singlish here to index himself as Singaporean and non-elite. With the sarcasm of the *lor* punchline utterance, he also tacitly reminds the audience that PAP politicians all originate within the same farm system, and one PAP politician cannot really be distinguished from next.

What is important to note is that the use of both English and Singlish is strategically managed; Singh does not deliver his whole speech in Singlish, and only deviates from SSE in jocular moments when he is pitting himself against the PAP. In promoting the WP's manifesto in the rest of his speech, Singh speaks entirely in SSE, the overtly prestigious language. In a space where language-as-skill and language-as-identity are both highly valorized and commodified, for opposition politicians like Singh, variation seems to be the only management strategy (Heller,

⁶ As of 2015, the WP is the only opposition party in Singapore to have popularly elected Members of Parliament in sitting, with 9 seats (out of a total 99).

2010), and the tension between ideologies of both codes at the poles is highlighted. Growing unease in Singapore over a one-party leadership has allowed the WP bigger access into Singaporean politics, but this forces WP members no choice but to manage the tension.

The *lor* particle in line 12 works across the whole utterance and does not stand on its own. It is hard to make the argument that only at the point where ‘lor’ is uttered is ‘Singaporean-ness’ indexed, and disacknowledge the effect of the whole sentence in the sequence. Here, Singh switches seamlessly from an SSE performance to an utterance with elements that can belong to both SSE and Singlish indexical fields. The lines between SSE and Singlish are blurred, and it seems that the features of speech in question are *bivalent* (Woolard, 1998) or even *multivalent* i.e., have concurrent membership in more than one linguistic system. This language play can give rise to ‘fundamentally undecidable texts and messages’ (1998:21) due to the multifunctionality of said elements. This gives Singh the ability to draw *simultaneously* from both indexical fields as he delivers his rally speech. Consider a second example, of Low Thia Khiang, the secretary general of the WP. This is an excerpt of his rally speech given at a 2013 by-election, where he responds to Deputy Prime Minister and PAP politician Teo Chee Hean.

Excerpt 2

- 1 Low: After the rally last night. Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee
 2 Hean,
 3 (5.0) ((boos from crowd))
 4 Low: Posted on his Facebook. And I quote. WP has avoided talking
 5 a stand- taking a stand, on major issues, for example,
 6 population of foreign workers, where tough (.) trade-offs (.) are
 7 needed. Have they offered credible alternatives on the way best
 8 forward, unquote.
 9 (1.0)
 10 Low: Best way forward? *VOTE WORKER’S PARTY LAH!*
 11 (5.9) ((cheers from crowd; drum beats))
 12 Low: In fact, (1.5) I did state my stand on foreign workers. I said in
 13 Parliament, (1.1) I agree (.) we should not be over reliant on
 14 foreign workers, We should not allow foreign workers to take
 15 away Singaporeans’ rice bowl.

Low starts with introducing the PAP minister, pausing for effect in line 2 as he anticipates the boos from his audience. He goes on to read Teo’s Facebook post in lines 4–8, and then takes a one-second pause before giving his response in line 10. Low then asks a hypophoric question that he immediately answers, raising his voice with ‘Vote Worker’s Party *lah!*’ Here, Low uses the utterance-final Singlish particle *lah*, a particle that is said to add ‘assertiveness’ to the utterance while appealing to the listener to accommodate with the speaker’s mood (Gupta, 1992). It is therefore a marker of solidarity (Wee, 2004), and is symbolic of a Singlish speaker. By incorporating the rally crowd into his pro-WP exclamation, Low positions himself as on the same side as the audience, and them as separate from the party Teo belongs to, the PAP. His response also plays off Teo’s comment as foolish and redundant, his tone indicating that it should be obvious that the ‘best way forward’ for Singapore is to vote for the Worker’s Party. In the next lines, after appreciative cheers from the audience, he reinforces the absurdity of Teo’s comment by informing the audience in SSE that ‘in fact’, he *had* stated his stand on the issue of foreign workers in Parliament before, implicitly accusing Teo of not checking his facts before making statements like that.

Similarly to Singh in Excerpt 1, Low exploits the bivalencies of English and Singlish features of speech in his appeal to the audience. If we see the utterance ‘Vote Worker’s Party *lah!*’ as a stand-alone one, we would be unable to understand the effect of using Singlish features in this particular context. Put simply, Low is not using Singlish only to appeal to the audience at a particular point in line 10, but rather, complimenting the SSE he is using in the rest of the speech. The stance of ‘community membership’ Leimgruber (2013) talks about does not exist in isolation from the authoritative stance the speaker might be taking (Alsagoff, 2007). According to Leimgruber, SSE features and Singlish features ‘can combine to accommodate several orientations in the same utterance’ (2013:112). While enlightening, this explanation just reformulates the variation question. The question then becomes: how do speakers utilize these features, *in what combination and to what degree*, in the adoption of varying stances and orientations? As an interaction unfolds, what does each different combination tell us about language ideology?

Excerpt 3

A last example shows Singh again at another rally as he addresses public unease over overcrowding due to immigration policies in Singapore.

- 1 Singh: So far the government has interpreted these trade-offs in
 2 economic terms. This is a relevant consideration, but there are
 3 many other considerations that the government looks to- needs
 4 to look into, because they are related to the quality of our life.
 5 Especially (.) if the government has some plan (.) to increase
 6 the population to seven (.) or eight (.) or *don't know how many*
 7 *million*.
 8 (7.2) ((jeers from crowd))
 9 Singh: Our elites (1.4) may enjoy themselves, in the gardens of their
 10 landed properties but the rest of us rely on public spaces to
 11 relax and rejuvenate. The PAP elites do not see, and feel the
 12 reality of a large number of foreigners and migrants in HDB
 13 estates on a daily basis, but ordinary Singaporeans DO!

Singh, in lines 1-4, informs the audience that the government's (PAP) policies on population and immigration has always put growth of the economy as their priority. The population policy paper (Population White Paper) released in February 2013 was seen as the government calling for an increase of Singapore's population from the then-5.4 million to 6.9 million by 2030⁷, drawing a huge backlash of reaction from Singaporeans that resulted in rare public mass protests (Koh, 2013). Singh gives an explanation for why he disagrees with the white paper, saying that the government needs to think about the impact such a large population might have on the quality of life for Singaporeans. In line 5, he then adds a comment on the white paper itself, saying 'Especially if the government has some plan to increase the population to seven, or eight, or don't know how many million'. Here, Singh is exaggerating for rhetorical effect, pausing after 'seven' and 'eight', accompanying each number with an upward push of his hand to indicate the number going higher and higher. With '*don't know how many million*', he uses syntax not associated with SSE, but more usually with Singlish. Singh shows his disapproval through the utterance, but also manages to insinuate that the PAP do not care for the common Singaporean, and population policies are at the PAP's whim and fancy. Indeed, after the jeering from the crowd, Singh continues in SSE, separating the 'elites' from the 'rest of us', the 'PAP' from the 'ordinary Singaporean', positioning himself with the audience.

As we can see from the excerpts above, deviating from SSE into utterances that contain recognizable Singlish elements during specific moments to laugh at or dismiss the PAP is a systematic and repeated strategy that defines the opposition politician performance. I have shown that both Singh and Low find explicit solutions to manage the tension between distinctive, even contrastive indexical fields. They profit from the bivalent relationship between English and Singlish features of speech, and purposefully mix semiotic resources to simultaneously index different social meanings in the English and Singlish indexical fields. Thus, this particular practice of *mixing* by the WP members, motivated by ideologies surrounding SSE and Singlish, is what solidifies their position as opposition party politicians in a one-party Singapore, and is what carries *interactional meaning*. The overall impression, or the 'overall effect of using a code-switching style', is what is 'tactically exploited for group identifications (Alvarez-Caccamo 1998:36-37), and not just the individual stances that are taken when speakers alternate into different codes.

4 Conclusion

This paper has uncovered the patterned strategies of code-switching used by Singaporean opposition politicians, and how they are constrained and afforded by language ideology. Having competency in SSE holds overt prestige and is indexical of high education and ability to lead but is also indicative of an elite, ruling party politician.

⁷ All Worker's Party Members-of-Parliament in the House voted against the motion to endorse the Government's White Paper on Population. The motion passed 77-13 on 8 February 2013 (Yahoo News Singapore, 2013).

Singlish, being seen on the opposite end of the pole to SSE, can point to localness and community membership. In managing the tension between these ideological poles, WP politicians vary their performance in order to be able to benefit from both indexical fields. Through the data analysis, I hope to have shown in studying linguistic variation, it is crucial to recognize the multiplexity of relationships between the ideologies of language varieties, and how these various amalgamations are managed locally leading to emergent identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

In studying language use by Barack Obama, Alim and Smitherman found that Obama's success lies in his linguistic awareness as well as his ability to 'style-shift' in different situations. This quote below summarizes this succinctly:

'Barack Obama's mastery of White mainstream ways of speaking, or "standard" English, particularly in terms of syntax, combined with his mastery of Black culture's modes of discourse, in terms of style, *was an absolutely necessary combination* for him to be elected America's first Black president' (Alim & Smitherman, 2012:20, emphasis added).

Similarly, Worker's Party politicians in Singapore had to master two modes of discourse, and within the Singaporean context, combine them in ways that allow for them to be seen as 'not too elite like the PAP, but not too uneducated' at the same time. Also, just as Alim and Smitherman's monograph on Obama's style-shifting highlights that race in America is often viewed through linguistic lens, this paper also comments on how sensitivity to class issues are often reflected through the way people manage their linguistic resources in Singapore.

4.1 Bivalency and simultaneous indexicalities

Hybrid languages like Singlish problematize our traditional understandings of code-switching, that alternation happens between two distinct codes. The data provides supports that we should see multilingualism as a host of semiotic resources (Blommaert, 2010) - resources that can simultaneously belong to more than one linguistic system, and more than one indexical field. I have adopted Woolard's (1998) concept of *bivalency* to explain why the defining a traditional 'language switch' between English and a hybrid language like Singlish is hard to make. Speakers are able to utilize the potential bivalencies between English and Singlish forms to simultaneously index alternative and sometimes contrasting social meanings. This blurs the lines between what is traditionally acceptable in the public sphere and what may not be, and most importantly, the artful mixing produces new ideologies through language use. In the case of Singapore English, our understanding of what the mix is might best be approached through our understanding of ideology. Such hybrid performances, where lines between one language and the next are more categorically ideological than they are grammatical, question the way we analyze linguistic practices, and encourage a deeper look into classical methods of language description. In the paradigm shift towards a superdiverse (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) view of the world, communities of practice such as Singapore provide an insight into the linguistic dynamics of multilingual spaces.

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