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SINGAPURSKI ENGLESKI U SUVREMENIM MEDIJIMA

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Abstract

In the present paper, Singaporean English is analysed on the basis of different online sources. The thesis starts with a short historical and sociolinguistic background of this variety. Different theoretical frameworks are then clarified. Regardless of their differences, they all agree that Singaporean English is not one unified variety. Rather, it encompasses everything from Colloquial Singaporean English (called Singlish) to Standard Singaporean English, whose main difference from Standard British English lies in pronunciation. In the empirical part of this thesis, Singaporean English in different Internet sources is analysed on the phonological, grammatical and lexical level. It is shown that different manifestations of Singaporean English are present in different online sources: from the acrolectal variety in minister's speech to the varieties closer to the basilectal end of the continuum in satirical texts and mrbrown's video. In the conclusion of this thesis, it is remarked that each particular variation of Singaporean English depends on the type of discourse in different contemporary media forms.

Key words: varieties of English, Singaporean English, linguistic features, internet sources

1 Introduction

Singapore is a city-state in South-East Asia with a population of roughly 4 million, which comprises Chinese, Malays, Indians, Peranakans and other ethnicities. Therefore, it is characterized by a high level of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Within this multilingual society of Singapore, English is extensively used as a *lingua franca*. Singaporean English belongs to Kachru's (1985) so-called *Outer Circle* of English-speaking countries, which were once under the British colonial rule and where English is well established as a second language. In these countries English is used as an official language and as a means of communication among people who are not its native speakers. However, this is not the case anymore in Singapore as Singaporean English is one of the few New Englishes increasingly spoken as mother tongues (Jenkins, 2003), with a majority of population now using it even at home. It encompasses a range of Englishes, from Colloquial Singaporean English (popularly called Singlish) to Standard Singaporean English, differing little in grammar and vocabulary from Standard British English, yet with more differences in pronunciation. This complex linguistic situation is mirrored on the Internet as well, where Singaporean English can be found in both its standard and non-standard manifestation. In the present paper, the linguistic features of Singaporean English on the web are identified and compared to the traditional descriptions found in the literature. The aim of this thesis is to determine if there exists a correlation between the use of different varieties of Singaporean English and the type of discourse present in different online sources.

2 Historical and sociolinguistic background: English in Singapore

English was first introduced to Singapore in 1819 when the port became a part of the British colonial empire. Since English was seen as a prestige language associated with new knowledge and progress, a large number of indigenous people enrolled in English-medium schools. Alongside the more standardized variety, a colloquial variety developed, more in the playgrounds where children of different language backgrounds who were learning English at school came into contact (cf. Wee, 2008a). Over the twentieth century, English-medium education became more and more popular and in 1987 the government made the decision that all education would be in the medium of English. However, a bilingual language policy 'English+1' was also introduced and it required that all children learn their own mother tongue alongside English. Wee (2008a) explains this by claiming that English is often seen as

a window to the knowledge, technology and expertise of the modern world, however it is the mother tongue that serves as a cultural anchor preventing Singaporeans from losing their Asian identities.

Nowadays English is widely spoken in Singapore and is used to a great extent in all spheres of life. It is one of Singapore's four official languages (alongside Malay, Tamil and Mandarin), as well as the main language of education, media, government and administration. The variety used in this context is usually referred to as Standard Singaporean English (henceforth abbreviated as StSgE), "a localized version of Standard English, which does not exhibit major differences from other versions of Standard English around the globe" (Leimgruber, 2011: 48). The features which distinguish it from Standard British English appear principally in the use of culturally-based lexical items and in pronunciation, in that the standard type of British English pronunciation is not held up as the pronunciation model (Gupta, 1994). In such a multilingual situation like Singapore, a colloquial variety called Colloquial Singaporean English or Singlish (henceforth abbreviated as CollSgE) has developed under the influence of many indigenous languages. Nowadays, Singlish is used by all ethnic groups and, at the same time, "by proficient speakers as well as by those whose English may be very limited" (Gupta, 1994: 5); therefore, there are different forms of Singlish in daily use.

The Singaporean government's attitude towards CollSgE is generally negative, so in 2000 they launched the Speak Good English campaign which encouraged the population to use the standard variety of Singaporean English. The government wanted "to attract and sustain transnational investment and new entrepreneurial initiative in order to gain a competitive edge over its regional neighbours" (Chye, 2009: 9) and CollSgE was seen as a threat to Singapore's worldwide economic success. The view that Singlish should be eliminated or discouraged, has met with resistance from some Singaporeans who see it as a key ingredient in the unique melting pot that is Singapore (cf. Wee, 2008a). However, Crystal (2012) claims that there is no intrinsic conflict between the standard and colloquial variety of Singaporean English, because the former permits Singaporeans of different linguistic backgrounds to communicate with each other and with people abroad and the latter provides a sense of local identity.

The co-existence of StSgE and CollSgE has been explained by two theoretical models. Platt's (1975) lectal continuum approach treats Singaporean English as "a multitude of subvarieties ranging from the acrolect at the 'top' (equivalent to Standard English) through a

number of mesolects all the way to the basilect Singlish.” (Deuber et al., 2018: 10). The variation in Singaporean English is assumed to depend on the level of education and the socio-economic background of the speaker. Following this logic, only the most educated will have full access to the acrolect, whereas everyone is believed to be proficient in basilect. To briefly illustrate the difference between the acrolect and the basilect, the following examples, taken from a Wikipedia article, are provided:

Basilect ("Singlish"): "Dis guy Singrish si beh zai sia."

Mesolect: "Dis guy Singlish damn good eh."

Acrolect ("Standard"): "This person's Singlish is very good."

The acrolect is actually Standard Singaporean English which displays almost no traces of CollSgE, whereas the mesolect combines the features of both StSgE and Singlish. Platt's continuum approach was criticized by Gupta (1994), who claims that there is a diglossic situation between standard and colloquial variety, "involving a clear switch between the two styles of speech according to the situation in which the interaction takes place" (Deterding, 2007: 6). In this model StSgE is the H (high) variety, whereas CollSgE is the L (low) one and which one is used is actually a matter of the speaker's personal choice. Gupta (1994) emphasizes that both Colloquial Singaporean English and Standard Singaporean English are used only by those who are proficient speakers of English. The downside of this theory is that in practice there is not a strict division between these two varieties.

Since nearly all Singaporeans speak more than one language, their English has undeniably been influenced by different L1s. The influence of their mother tongue is subsequently evident in the way they pronounce English words and the intonation they employ. Another factor that greatly contributes to their fluency in English is their level of education. For example, the older population, who were not educated in English-medium schools, just like younger Singaporeans, who had English as a second language, certainly will not achieve a complete mastery of the language. All these factors lead to a substantial variation within English in Singapore and should be taken into consideration when discussing Singaporean English. In addition, code-switching between English and some of the local indigenous languages is very common. For instance, in the intra-ethnic conversations with Malays, Tamil Indians and Chinese, there is English-Malay, English-Tamil and English-Mandarin code-switching respectively.

3 Empirical research: Representation of Singaporean English in contemporary media

The linguistic analysis of Singaporean English that will be presented here is based on two YouTube videos, henceforth abbreviated as YT1 and YT2, and two excerpts from the satirical website *TalkingCock.com*, which will be abbreviated as T1 and T2. The speech characteristics of two well-known Singaporeans will be analysed: Minister for Education Ong Ye Kung (M) and famous YouTuber mrbrown (B), both of them having been born and raised in Singapore. Ong Ye Kung is the current Minister for Education in Singapore, whereas mrbrown, whose real name is Lee Kin Mun, is a Singaporean blogger and YouTuber, famous for publishing social and political commentary on the situation in Singapore. Mrbrown's videos exhibit more basilectal varieties of Singaporean English, since he uses many colloquial terms and constructions. The two texts were retrieved from the popular Singaporean satirical website *TalkingCock.com* which contains the largest single corpus of CollSgE on the web. On this website the authors make use of Singlish since they see it "as a useful means of invoking a positive emotional response (i.e. humour and laughter) from their audiences" (Chye 2009: 19).

All these sources provide valuable insights into the characteristics of Singaporean English in both its spoken and written form. After having analysed them, it is clear that Singaporean English is not only one variety; therefore, it is not simple to make generalizations when it comes to linguistic description. For that reason, in the present analysis examples will only be given of features which occur across a range of varieties united under the name of Singaporean English. A clear division between StSgE and CollSgE works with features of syntax, "but it is not so neat when the sounds and sound system are concerned" (Lim, 2004: 54). Before identifying them, it is worth noting that the features that will be mentioned do not relate to those with limited education in English.

3.1 Phonetics and phonology

3.1.1 Vowels

In the following description of the Singaporean English vowel system, lexical sets defined by Wells (1982) will be used. One of the most important features of Singaporean English is the absence of a distinction between tense and lax vowels (Kirkpatrick, 2007). However, it is important to mention that this characteristic is not restricted only to Singapore, but is also shared by other New Englishes like Indian, Malaysian and African Englishes. For

instance, the STRUT and PALM vowels, that is /ʌ/ and /ɑ:/ respectively, are merged and commonly pronounced as /a/, especially in the colloquial variety (Lim, 2004). This can be confirmed by examples from the videos:

B: This is Kim Huat, Singapore *number* ['nambə] one taking care of old age fan. (YT2, 0:14)

B: I realised I am not *young* [jaŋ] anymore. (YT2, 0:22)

M: ... they are so *hard* [had] to change. (YT1, 1:46)

B: And *lastly* [lastli], I am not as mobile as I used to be. (YT2, 1:21)

While RP makes a distinction between the vowel /ɒ/ in LOT and /ɔ:/ in THOUGHT lexical sets, Singaporean English has the same vowel /ɔ/ in both lexical sets (Deterding, 2010). The following examples illustrate this feature without exception:

M: *Forty* [fɔti] years ago... (YT1, 1:48)

B: Three, fall sick *all* [ɔl] the time. (YT2, 1:02)

M: We can say all we *want* [wɔn] about... (YT1, 1:09)

Moving on to other vowels, TRAP and DRESS vowels are merged and neutralized to /ɛ/, as can be observed in words such as *fan* and *back* (YT2). In Singaporean English, the FLEECE and KIT sets share the same vowel, represented by /i/, as indicated in the examples from the videos: *need*, *dreams*, *three*, *keep*, *eat*. Similarly, there is no contrast in the GOOSE and FOOT lexical sets which is evident in the following examples where /u/ is used: *too*, *pursuit*, *two*, *look*, *you*. What the above examples prove is that there is no length distinction between vowels in Singaporean English. However, there are instances in which signs of variability can be seen. Namely, in the Minister's speech, difference between tense and lax vowels can be observed:

M: ...over 98% *pass* [pa:s] the PSLE. (YT1, 2:47)

This is probably the result of the many years the minister has spent abroad, studying at London School of Economics, where he has been in contact with Standard British English and exposed to RP.

One of the pronunciation features that Lim (2004) notices is that the vowel /ɜ:/ of the NURSE lexical set is pronounced as /ə/. However, this feature is evident in only one example in minister Kung's speech:

M: ... and this is holistic development of a *learner* ['lɜ:nɜ]. (YT1, 0:42)

In other cases, even within the same video, the vowel /ɜ:/ usually remains the same as in RP, as shown in the examples below:

M: *First* ['fɜ:st] of all... (YT1, 0:17)

B: Recently I *hurt* [hɜ:] my back you know. (YT2, 0:18)

As Wells (1982) observes, in Singaporean English, the FACE and GOAT vowels are monophthongal and pronounced as [e:] and [o:] respectively. Deterding (2010) also discusses this feature, claiming that monophthongal FACE and GOAT are very common in most outer circle varieties of English, like in Jamaica, Brunei, and much of the rest of South East Asia. This characteristic is confirmed repeatedly in the videos and it is a recurring phenomenon in the speech of minister Kung and mrbrown:

M: I've *spoken* [spɔ:kən] about our plan to build, configure and *scale* [ske:l] over the next five years. (YT1, 0:02 – 0:05)

M: Forty years *ago* [ago:] ... (YT1, 1:49)

M: Our *goal* [go:l] must be... (YT1, 2:54)

B: *Hello* [helo:], this is Kim Huat... (YT2, 0:12)

B: ...three thoughts about *growing* [gro:ɪŋ] old. (YT2, 2:16)

Another feature noticed in the videos is the pronunciation of the diphthong /eə/ in the SQUARE lexical set. It is monophthongized and simply pronounced as [ɛ:]:

M: It's about a joy of learning, about entrepreneurial *dare* [de:] ... (YT1, 0:37)

M: It is not easy, we can't *tear* [tɛ:] the system down. (YT1, 0:45)

B: And lastly, take *care* [kɛ:] of each other. (YT2, 2:34)

B: Diapers, can *wear* [wɛ:] by themselves one meh? (YT2, 1:49)

It is worth noting that this kind of pronouncing /eə/ is not present regularly:

M: Education is *there* [deə] to help us along. (YT1, 4:12)

Similarly, in the lexical set NEAR the diphthong /ɪə/ is occasionally pronounced as /i/ in words like *ideas* (YT1) and *realized* (YT2). Other diphthongs do not undergo any particular change and are pronounced standardly:

M: It's about a joy of learning, about entrepreneurial dare, about our moral *grounding* ['graʊndɪŋ] ... (YT1, 0:39)

B: Two, I *now* [naʊ] need reading glasses to look at my Instagram loh. (YT2, 0:49)

Singaporean English shows a tendency to avoid /ə/, preferring strong vowels in many unstressed syllables (Wells, 1982), especially at the beginning of words:

M: Third, *society* [sə'saɪti] needs to recognize... (YT1, 1:26)

M: Forty years *ago* [a'go] ... (YT1, 1:49)

B: ...with three thoughts *about* [a'baʊ] growing old that you should *consider* [kən'sɪdə]. (YT2, 2:16)

With function words like prepositions, conjunctions, object pronouns and auxiliaries, weak forms are used less often, so each of these has a full vowel (Tan, 2012). Deterding (2010) states that this is a shared tendency among outer circle Englishes. It can be seen throughout both videos and is present in the speech of minister Kung and mrbrown:

M: Our plan *to* [tu] build... (YT1, 0:02)

B: ...that remind *me* [mi] I'm getting old. (YT2, 0:37)

B: ... that you should consider *for* [fə] your loved ones and yourself. (YT2, 2:18)

According to Jenkins (2003), CollSgE shows a tendency to lengthen final vowels which is particularly noticeable in mrbrown's speech. In the video, words like *influencer* and *consider* are pronounced respectively 'influenceer' and 'consideer', with long /ə:/. It is worth noting that this kind of pronunciation is not present in other words in the video and is restricted exclusively to CollSgE.

3.1.2 Consonants

One of the pronunciation features of Singaporean English that Wells (1982) notices is consonant devoicing. This refers to the word-final obstruent devoicing, which is indicated in the following examples:

M: ... unless *employers* [im'plɔɪərs] demonstrate... (YT1, 1:17)

M: ... good jobs need not necessarily come only from good *grades* [greɪds]. (YT1, 1:24)

B: Last time I go travelling, one day go *five* [faɪf] places. (YT2, 1:26)

B: Two, look at existing support in case you need care for a *long long* [lɒŋk] time. (YT2, 2:27)

In the formal speech of minister Kung this usually occurs with noun plurals where the regular plural ending /s/ is pronounced as [s], no matter what the noun-final consonant is. Even within one video (YT1), however, a variation can be noted. For example, in the phrase: *First of all, all of us - parents, students, educators...*, the first “of” undergoes intervocalic devoicing and is pronounced with voiceless /f/, whereas in the second “of” the obstruent /f/ undergoes intervocalic voicing.

The next characteristic of Singaporean English that Lim (2004) identifies is final consonant deletion. This feature is not unique to this variety of English since it is the well-known process of connected speech elision, affecting final coronal obstruents, which occurs in other varieties as well (Cruttenden, 2008). In Singaporean English it is usually associated with CollSgE, but can be occasionally found in StSgE, as shown in the examples below:

M: ...*must* [mas] do this way' *kind* [kain] of thinking. (YT1, 0:13 – 0:17)

M: ... this is holistic *development* [di'veləpmən] of a learner. (YT1, 0:41)

M: *Second* ['sekən], employers must... (YT1, 0:55)

M: ...to many *different* ['dɪfərən] places. (YT1, 4:34)

B: *Recently* ['ri:sənli] I *hurt* [hɜ:] my back you know. (YT2, 0:18)

What is interesting about Singaporean English, as Trudgill and Hannah (2017) notice, is that final consonant deletion has grammatical consequences, so present tense *-s*, past tense *-ed* and plural *-s* may be omitted. Nevertheless, this was found in only two examples, showing variability in Singaporean English once again:

M: Today times have *changed* [tʃeɪndʒ]... (YT1, 2:40)

B: And then, I *realised* [ˈrɪlaɪz] I am not young anymore. (YT2, 0:21)

In other examples, nouns are marked for plural and verbs are marked for present and past, so *parents*, *students*, *educators* are pronounced with final *-s* and past tense inflection *-ed* is maintained in *inherited* and *passed*. Thus, the videos at hand show that there is no consistency in this respect.

According to Trudgill and Hannah, “word-final stops are usually glottalized and unreleased” (2017:141). This feature was not identified in the speech of minister Kung, and it is more evident in the basilectal variety in *mrbrown’s* video:

B: In *fact* [fæʔ], I can hear the growing old knocking on my door. (YT2, 0:24)

In the present analysis, it may be observed that the glottal stop [ʔ] does not appear in a more formal variety, but rather in informal contexts. However, since many word-final plosives are completely elided, it is not easy to draw a general conclusion.

As noted by Deterding (2007), in Singaporean English initial voiceless plosives /p/, /t/ and /k/ are sometimes unaspirated, which was found in the following utterances:

M: First of all, all of us - *parents* [p̄erənts], students, educators... (YT1, 0:20)

M: If I may *put* [p̄ut] it starkly... (YT1, 2:05)

However, this feature shows variability as in the same corpus there are examples of words where syllable-initial voiceless plosives are being aspirated:

M: ... develop diverse *talent* [tʰælənt] and help our young realize their dreams. (YT1,3:32)

B: ...number one *taking* [tʰekɪŋ] care of old age fan. (YT2, 0:15)

The next linguistic feature that Wells (1982) and Kirkpatrick (2007) mention is TH- Stopping. Dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are pronounced /t/ and /d/ in initial position, which is evident in the following examples:

M: Step-by-step I *think* [tiŋ] we are getting *there* [der]. (YT1, 1:38 – 1:40)

M: ... *these* [diz] mindsets *that* [dæt] we inherited, *they're* [dei] so hard to change.
(YT1, 1:43 – 1:47)

M: ...65 per cent of *them* [dem] passed PSLE. (YT1, 1:58)

B: I *think* [tiŋ] have to photoshop myself into my travels. (YT2, 1:38)

B: One day you cannot really do *these* [dis] *things* [tiŋs] by yourselves. (YT2, 1:56)

In the video featuring minister Kung the occurrence of /θ/ and /t/ is variable at times. For example, /t/ is used at the beginning of *thinking*, yet just a few seconds later he uses /θ/ in *third* and *through*.

TH-Fronting is also often found to affect the dental fricative /θ/ of some words in Singaporean English (Tan, 2012). In syllable-final position /θ/ is replaced by labiodental /f/ as illustrated in the following examples:

M: ...to support our economic *growth* [grof]. (YT1, 2:15)

M: ...multiple *paths* [pafs] to success. (YT1, 4:29)

B: So Kim Huat would like to leave you *with* [wif] three thoughts about growing old.
(YT2, 2:15)

It is important to note that TH-Fronting and TH-Stopping are not restricted only to Singaporean English as “the avoidance of dental fricatives is widespread in Englishes throughout the world, not just in outer circle varieties, but also in some inner circles styles of pronunciation (Deterding, 2010: 392). For instance, TH-Fronting is a well-known characteristic usually associated with Cockney (a traditional working-class dialect of London), whereas TH-Stopping is commonly heard in Ireland or in New York (Wells, 1982).

In RP “clear” /l/ occurs before a vowel or /j/, whereas “dark” (velarized) variety /ɫ/ occurs elsewhere, i.e. before a consonant, /w/ or pause, and this variation is entirely determined by phonetic environment (Wells, 1982). Singaporean English follows the rule of a “clear” /l/ in onset position, whereas the “dark” /l/, as Trudgill and Hannah (2017) notice, is usually vocalized to [w]:

M: I've spoken about our *plan* [plæn]to *build* [biw]... (YT1, 0:02)

M: It *will* [wiw] not change overnight... (YT1, 0:46)

M: ... many of them *still* [stiu] think that way. (YT1, 2:37)

B: ... now take *longer* ['lɔŋgə] to *heal* [hiu]. (YT2, 1:01 - 1:03)

B: When I'm *old* [ou] and *ill* [iu]... (YT2, 1:44)

In addition, the syllable-final /l/ is often omitted and, based on the examples below, this usually occurs after the back vowels. However, the data of just two speakers is insufficient to draw any conclusions.

M: ...even at the *school* [sku] level to catalyze this change. (YT1, 0:51)

B: Three, *fall* [fə] sick that time... (YT2, 1:01)

To summarize, different realizations of sonorant /l/ were found in the present corpus. 'Clear' /l/ was usually found in the onset, whereas in the syllable rhyme, /l/ was realized as a vocalized /l/ or it was completely elided. This variability is a consequence of the lenition process whose main purpose is the reduction of articulatory effort through consonant changes (cf. Josipović Smojver, 2017). In the present analysis, these changes are expressed in the following hierarchy of lenition where different realizations of /l/ can be seen as different stages on a scale:

l > u > Ø

Wee (2008a) claims that there are no syllabic /l/ and /n/ in Singaporean English, i.e. a schwa sound is always clearly heard as the carrier of the syllable. The following words provide the relevant examples: *mission* ['miʃən], *survival* [sə'vaɪvə] (YT1).

3.1.3 Prosody

One of the most prominent features of Singaporean English is syllable-based rhythm. In syllable-based languages, there is an impression that "each syllable between two stresses takes roughly the same amount of time to produce and thus contribute equally to the overall duration of the interstress interval" (Josipović, 1999:132). Exact measurements, however, indicate that the impression of 'isochrony' of interstress syllables in stress-based rhythm is only a perceptual illusion caused by the 'conspiracy' of vocalic quality and quantity (cf. Ramus et al., 1999; White and Mattys, 2007; Mairano, 2011). Accordingly, the syllable-based rhythm of Singaporean English is primarily caused by the absence of vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, including those of grammatical words (cf. Deterding, 2010). By using PVI (the Pairwise Variability Index), which is based on a comparison of the duration of

vowels in neighbouring syllables, Deterding (2010) established an exact method of placing a language or a variety of a language on the scale ranging from stress-based to syllable-based rhythm. This confirmed the status of Singaporean English in rhythmic typology as a typical syllable-based variety of English. Lastly, syllable-based rhythm creates that “staccato effect” (Tan, 2012) which is clearly heard throughout the corpus at hand:

M: 'I've 'spoken a'bout 'our 'plan to 'build, con'figure 'and 'scale over the 'next 'five 'years. (YT1, 0:00 – 0:05)

M: 'What is the 'toughest 'challenge of 'all? It is 'changing 'mindsets. (YT1, 0:07-0:12)

M: To a 'large ex'tent, 'this gene'ration of 'parents, 'many of 'them 'still 'think 'that 'way. (YT1, 2:33 – 2:40)

B: 'Three, 'fall 'sick 'that 'time, 'now 'take 'longer to 'heal. (YT2, 1:01 – 1:03)

B: It's 'not just the 'medical 'bills that 'worry me 'lor! (YT2, 1:41 – 1:43)

According to Wells (1982), Singaporean English is also characterized by occasional unusual placements of word stress. For that reason, trying to formulate a set of general rules that would predict how stress assignment within words works is not easy. There is a general opinion that stress in Singaporean English tends to be oriented towards the end of a word, which can be confirmed by occasional examples from the videos: edu'cators, kno'cking. Nevertheless, in a number of words the placement of stress simply occurs on a different syllable without following any rules: 'university, 'unless, pic'ture.

3.2 Grammar

The standard variety of Singaporean English in general does not demonstrate any difference from Standard British English. Since CollSgE is characterized by specific grammatical constructions, it is of greater importance for the present analysis. For that reason, the main resources for this part of the paper are two satirical texts - *Auntie visits the travel fair* (T1), *Scotland: land of the boh cheng kor* (T2) and mrbrown's video (YT2).

3.2.1 Verb phrase

According to Gupta (1994), one of the main tendencies in CollSgE is limited marking of the third person singular present tense form. However, Leimgruber (2011) states that this is not a specifically Singaporean English feature as it is common in other New Englishes as well. This feature is a recurring phenomenon in the video and texts under consideration.

However, there are still some occasions where this is not the case and third person singular present tense ending is present; therefore, this feature exhibits a high degree of variability:

T1: He *say*, now got recession... (Line 4)

T1: When he *go* on tour, hor, he only *look* for nepals, one. (Line 16)

T2: He *say*, 'got castle, got church, got countryside'. (Line 3)

B: Three, *fall* sick that time, now *take* longer to heal. (YT2, 1:01 – 1:03)

T1: Log on next time when Auntie *travels* to Afghanistan! (Line 30)

T2: ...but then, it *comes* with free hostess on the side. (Line 31)

The past tense marking is also highly variable. The past tense verbs are usually unmarked in the extracts, so the past sense is conveyed lexically, using words like *yesterday* or *already* (sometimes spelled as *orredy*) or it is simply gathered from the context of the sentence. This can be observed in the examples below:

T1: *Yesterday* my travel agent ... *call* me and *tell* me... (Line 2)

T1: So I *see* him small, *go* to the Travel Fair and *looksee-looksee*. (Line 9)

T1: Then he *show* me a package for Afghanistan... (Line 21)

T2: I *hear* only, I *stone* five minute. (Line 6)

T2: When I *reach* Scotland, I *orredy know* this place *is* condemn. (Line 13)

B: Recently I *hurt* my back. (YT2, 0:18)

B: Three, *fall* sick that time... (YT2, 1:01)

B: Last time I *go* travelling, one day *go* five places, *take* a lot pictures. (YT2, 1:24 – 1:28)

Nevertheless, there are still examples where this is not the case and past participle is marked. It seems that this occurs most often with irregular verbs:

T1: At the last fair, I *bought* a package tour to Turkey and kena con! (Line 6)

T1: But I *told* them to go and find my neighbour Mr. Lim Peh instead. (Line 15)

T2: I *went* to the tourist office. (Line 17)

B: Last time I *was* like Wolverine. (YT2, 1:04)

As Kirkpatrick (2007) observes, the past tense marking in Singaporean English depends on whether the action being described is a single action or a habitual one. Namely, when the speaker is describing a single action, the past tense is marked, whereas with habitual actions it is rarely marked. However, in the present analysis this was only partially confirmed. In the following two examples, the speaker is describing a single action, but did not mark the past tense:

T1: So I *see* him small, *go* to the Travel Fair and *looksee-looksee*. (Line 9)

B: Recently I *hurt* my back. (YT2, 0:18)

Tan (2012) points to copula omission as one of the most salient and noticeable grammatical feature of CollSgE. That is, the verb ‘to be’ tends to be omitted between the subject and its adjective complement or before the present participle of the verb. This feature occurs in the corpus at hand:

T1: There very exciting, one. (Line 23)

T2: Singapore still better. (Line 37)

B: Five things that remind me I getting old. (YT2, 0:35 – 0:37)

However, there are also cases where the copula is present between the subject and its adjective complement:

B: I’m old and ill. (YT2, 1:44)

T2: Anyway, the whiskey *is* damn cheap. (Line 30)

T2: The city *is* not bad one. (Line 33)

As far as the verb ‘got’ is concerned, Wee (2008a) claims that in CollSgE it is used in several different ways: as a perfective, possessive or existential marker. This is proven many times in the texts:

T1: Anyway, here also *got* plenty terrorists... (Line 18) (existential marker)

‘Anyway, there are also plenty terrorists here...’

T2: *Got* castle, *got* church, *got* countryside... (Line 3) (existential marker)

‘There are castles, there are churches, there is countryside...’

T1: At least the Iceland tour *got* plenty ice. (Line 7) (possessive marker)

‘At least the Iceland tour had plenty of ice.’

T1: And then *got* another agent try to sell me a Nepal tour. (Line 13) (perfective marker)

‘And then another agent tried to sell me a Nepal tour.’

Deuber et al. (2018) state that *kena* passive is a grammatical construction generally associated with the basilectal variety, common in spontaneous speech. There is only one example which illustrates this feature:

B: And if one day, you *kena* severe disability... (YT2, 2:00)

‘And if one day, you suffer from a severe disability...’

Likewise, Wee (2008b) mentions that *kena* passive has an adversative reading so verbs like *praise* or *like* do not take passive voice. Instead, it is usually used with words like *scold* or *caught*, which have a negative connotation.

3.2.2 Noun phrase

The next characteristic of CollSgE that Trudgill and Hannah (2017) refer to is the omission of articles in the noun phrase. Nevertheless, this feature is apparent in only three examples:

T1: *Get rid of tickets.* (Line 4)

T1: *When he go on tour...* (Line 16)

T2: *Where can I find man who don'ch wear pants?* (Line 17)

On the other hand, a strong tendency to retain articles as they are in Standard English is found:

T1: I got *the* perfect tour for you! (Line 20)

T1: Then he show me *a* package for Afghanistan (Line 21)

T2: *The* capital is called Edin-burk. (Line 14)

T2: I went to *the* tourist office and ask... (Line 17)

As Tan (2012) notices, CollSgE shows a tendency not to mark nouns for plural. This is however not restricted only to this variety, but is one of the main grammatical tendencies of the New Englishes (Jenkins, 2003). This is occasionally present in the corpus at hand, as some plural nouns are marked and some are not. Usually, when the plural inflection is missing from the nouns, there are other indicators of their plurality, like the word *all*. This is particularly evident in the first three examples:

T1: ...there the *man* all very macho one, leh. (Line 24)

T2: I see all the old *building* only. (Line 22)

T1: ... because got a lot of good *deals*. (Line 3)

T2: I cannot find the *men* without pants. (Line 34)

As for pronouns, in CollSgE they are used in accordance with the standard variety, and this is demonstrated in the examples below:

T1: I tell *him*... (Line 5)

T2: I think, ah, all that whiskey make *them* all "brur". (Line 15)

The only difference is noted in the use of relative pronouns. Wee (2008b) observes that in the formation of CollSgE relative clauses the relative pronoun *one* is invariant and follows the modifying clause. The following examples illustrate this feature:

T1: ... there the man all very macho one, leh. (Line 25)

T1: You sure like! All, hwah, hairy-hairy one. (Line 25)

There is also one example in which relative pronouns *who* or *that* are completely absent, with the verb not being marked for tense or aspect:

T1: Got one company try to sell me a spa package. (Line 11)

It is important to mention that examples of relative clauses formed according to the rules of Standard English are also found:

T2: ... a man *who* don'ch wear pants. (Line 17)

3.2.3 The structure of clauses and sentences

In CollSgE subject and/or object are often absent, especially when they are easily recovered from the context. As Kirkpatrick (2007) observes, this is the result of the influence of Chinese, which is a pro-drop language. This feature is often associated with basilectal varieties. In the present corpus this is seen only in *mrbrown's* speech:

B: Three, fall sick that time, now take longer to heal. (YT2, 1:01 – 1:03)

B: Last time go travelling, one day go five places, take a lot pictures. (YT2, 1:24 – 1:28)

In all the other cases, the subject and the object are clearly expressed:

T1: When *he* go on tour, hor, *he* only look for nepals, one. (Line 16)

T2: *I* think maybe *they* drink too much the Scotch whiskey and need to pang jio more quickly. (Line 8)

Another feature that is associated with CollSgE is object-preposing (Wee, 2008b). It means that the direct object takes the initial position in the sentence. Only one example of this was found in the present corpus:

T2: Scotland not bad what, I think you might like. (Line 5)

As for question formation, it may be done according to the rules of Standard English. This is found even in the texts from the present corpus that exhibit basilectal features:

T2: Where can I find man who don'ch wear pants? (Line 17)

B: How to be Instagram Travel Influencer? (YT2, 1:35 – 1:37)

Nevertheless, the majority of *wh*-questions in CollSgE are formed without inversion, usually with question word not fronted. This is shown in the following interrogatives:

T1: This place where one? (Line 22)

B: And if one day, you kena severe disability how? (YT2, 1:59 - 2:00)

A recognizable feature of CollSgE is the productive use of reduplication. Some illustrative examples are presented below:

T1: Come and support *a bit a bit*. (Line 8)

B: I know *choy choy choy*. (YT2, 1:53)

Furthermore, Wee (2008b) distinguishes two subtypes of verb reduplication: when the verb is repeated two times, it is understood to take place over a short period of time; on the other hand, when the verb is repeated three times, it indicates that the action is continuous and it takes place over a longer period of time:

T1: Go to the Travel Fair and *looksee looksee*. ('have a look') (Line 9)

T1: I *look, look, look*, but like nothing very the interesting like that. (Line 19) ('I was looking, but there was nothing interesting like that.')

3.2.4 Discourse particles

CollSgE is known for its extensive use of specific pragmatic particles which serve to “signal the kind of speech act being performed and the attitude of the speaker” (Tan, 2012: 135). The most widely recognized ones are *ah, lah, ma, meh, lor, hor, what* and they typically occur at the end of words or phrases. They are evident in the texts and mrbrown’s video which exhibit more basilectal variety of Singaporean English.

According to Trudgill and Hannah (2017), particle *lah* has different meanings, which will depend to a large extent on specific contextual factors – it can signify informality, solidarity and emphasis. In the first sentence, it seems that *lah* is used to show annoyance and in the second example it is used for reassurance.

T1: He say, now got recession, some more some travel agents all kam tiam, so must get rid of tickets. I tell him don’ch talk cock, *lah*. (Line 5)

B: It’s the little things *lah*. (YT2, 0:33)

Leimgruber (2011) observes that the particle *lor* indicates a sense of resignation, whereas *meh* is used to indicate scepticism. These meanings could also be inferred from the following two examples:

B: It’s not just the medical bills that worry me *lor!* (YT2, 1:43)

B: Diapers, can wear by themselves one *meh?* (YT2, 1:49)

Further on, as Deuber et al. (2018) note, *hor* is used to ask for the listener’s attention, support and agreement, while *mah* indicates the information as obvious.

T1: Because, *hor*, the whole bloody tour also got no turkey to eat! (Line 6)

T1: When he go on tour, *hor*, he only look for nepals, *one*. (Line 16)

T1: NATAS spell backwards is SATAN, *mah!*

What indicates that what the speaker is saying should be obvious to the addressee, whereas *leh* is used to soften a request, claim or complaint that may be brusque otherwise (Leimgruber, 2011).

T2: Scot-land not bad *what*. (Line 5)

T1: There the man all very macho one, *leh*. (Line 25)

In many examples a grammatical particle *one* is found, frequently in a sentence-final position. It is used as a marker of emphasis which Singaporean English speakers tend to use when commenting on something (Wong, 2005).

T1: When he go on tour, *hor*, he only look for nepals, *one*. (Line 16)

T1: He say, “There very esciting, *one*. Every night got fireworks.” (Line 23)

T2: They really don'ch wear pants *one*? (Line 7)

3.3 Lexicon

Concerning the vocabulary of Singaporean English, there are certain lexical items that distinguish it from the rest of the English-speaking world. For instance, the standard variety contains words from Standard British English, but with differences in meaning. This is evident in words such as *slippers* (meaning ‘flip-flops’) and *to renovate* (meaning to decorate) (Leimgruber, 2011). Locally-coined words and expressions are another prominent feature of Singaporean English. An interesting example is provided by Jenkins (2003): ‘to be in hot soup’ is a combination of two British English idioms, ‘to be in hot water’ and ‘to be in the soup’ and has the same meaning ‘to be in trouble’ as in British English. Greetings and leavetakings in Singapore are also specific. Some examples of greetings in Singaporean English are: *Have you eaten already?* and of leavetakings: *Walk slowly ho!* (Jenkins 2003).

CollSgE contains many lexical items borrowed from the local languages (in particular from Chinese and Malay) which make it unique and distinctive. At times, the understanding of certain words can be a problem, but more often meanings can be inferred from the context. This feature is present to a great extent in the present corpus, especially in the satirical texts

and mrbrown's video. All the explanations provided here are found in the online Singlish Dictionary. In mrbrown's video (YT2) adjective *chuan* means 'tired, exhausted', *choy choy choy* is a Cantonese phrase to ward off bad luck. Both *kiasu* and *kiasi* refer to 'an over-cautious person'. The text *Auntie Visits the Travel Fair* (T1) features several specifically CollSgE words. *Looksee-looksee* means 'to have a quick look around' and is a blend of two English words (*look* and *see*) and the Malay duplication plural marker. *Wah lau* means 'Oh no!' and *tolong-tolong* 'please, help me'. Hokkien terms *si gin nah* can be roughly translated as 'bloody', whereas *sian* means 'boring, dull, tiring'. In the second text *Scotland: land of the boh cheng kor* (T2), Scotsmen are being called *boh cheng kor*, a term explained further in the text as 'not wearing pants'. The meaning of *pang jio* is easily inferred from the context as 'urinate'. *Ah quah* is an expression of Hokkien origin and it means 'an effeminate man', whereas *kway chap* (as well deriving from Hokkien) means 'prostitute'. However, not all the words derive from Hokkien: *teruk* ('terrible') is from Malay.

4 Conclusion

Singaporean English is a dynamic language system with two main varieties - StSgE and CollSgE. The present analysis proves that some characteristics in the present corpus correspond to the traditional descriptions of Singaporean English, whereas in many cases there are signs of variability.

On the phonological level, these two varieties exhibit the same features. The analysis confirmed that there is usually no distinction between long and short vowels and diphthongs are frequently monophthongized, so the vowels in FACE and GOAT are pronounced as [e:] and [o:] respectively. In addition, both standard and colloquial varieties prefer full vowels in unstressed syllables, including those of function words. One of the consequences of the absence of reduced vowels is syllable-based rhythm, which turns out to be the most salient feature marking this variety of English as unique. As for consonants, voiced sounds are generally replaced by their voiceless counterparts in word-final position and consonant clusters at the end of words usually undergo reduction. Due to the simplification of word-final consonant clusters, it is expected that the present tense *-s*, past tense *-ed* and plural *-s* may be absent; however, there are many examples where nouns are pronounced with plural marker (*parents, students*) and verb with past tense inflection *-ed* (*changed, realized*). TH-Stopping and TH-Fronting have been widely reported for Singaporean English, even though the avoidance of the dental fricatives is widespread in Englishes throughout the world. Lack of

aspiration for initial plosives is not found in all examples, so there are words produced with aspiration: *talent* [t^hælənt], *taking* [t^hekɪŋ]. If they are not deleted, plosives tend to be replaced by glottal stops in the right context for glottalization, especially in the CollSgE. Finally, the “dark” /l/ is usually vocalized to [ɯ] in the syllable rhyme: *will* [wiɯ], *still* [stiɯ], but there are examples where the syllable-final /l/ is completely omitted: *school* [sku], *fall* [fɔ̃].

Grammatical features described in the literature are occasionally noticed; thus, they are considerably variable. In the descriptions of Singaporean English, it is generally stated that verbal and noun inflexions are absent and this was partially confirmed in the present analysis. Namely, there are cases where plural nouns or past tense are marked and the third person singular present tense ending is used. The copula ‘to be’ is expected to be omitted from the sentences, but there are also examples where it is preserved, in particular between the subject and its adjective complement. In many sentences, articles are employed in the same way as in the standard variety, which was not expected. Subject omission and object preposing, which are usually mentioned in the literature, were only occasionally found. Regarding the formation of questions, a lack of inversion of the subject and the verb is usually reported, with the question word not being fronted; however, examples were found in which questions were formed following Standard English rules. Only two distinctive features of CollSgE did not show variability: reduplication and discourse particles, which serve to express the speaker’s attitude. For instance, the particle *lor* indicates a sense of resignation, and *meh* scepticism. Finally, CollSgE contains many words from the local languages like *chuan* (‘tired’), *kiasu* (‘an over-cautious person’), *teruk* (‘terrible’) which can easily make this variety completely incomprehensible to a speaker not acquainted with Singaporean English.

It can be concluded that the video featuring minister Kung is the one with the most acrolectal variety of Singaporean English. In his speech, only a slight difference from Standard British English can be noted. This is probably the case because he is speaking in the Parliament and his speech has to be as intelligible as possible since it may be presented to the international audience. Contrary to this, *mrbrown’s* video and satirical texts from the *TalkingCock.com* website exhibit features (like the use of discourse particles) closer to the basilect part of the continuum. However, within the same texts and videos, there are cases when the grammar follows the rules of Standard English; thus, we can notice features of both StSgE and CollSgE.

The present analysis of different online sources shows a correlation between linguistic variability and types of discourse present in different media types. CollSgE is associated with humour and entertainment and it typically appears in satirical texts, memes, funny YouTube videos, where the use of Singlish provokes laughter and amusement among the audience. StSgE, on the other hand, is exclusively used on government websites and news portals as well as in videos intended for international audience, as their purpose is to preserve intelligibility and facilitate communication.

Finally, the limitations of the corpus used in this paper, as well as the qualitative type of analysis employed for this purpose do not allow us to draw wide-ranging conclusions about speech patterns and discourse, especially as there is a substantial internal variation in Singaporean English. For that reason, it would prove quite interesting to further examine the use of discourse particles. Similarly, it would be a challenge to conduct acoustic measurements of the syllable-based rhythm.

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Internet sources for the empirical research

Audio sources:

YT1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1xPL1J--cc>

YT2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5deLLveKayw>

Written sources:

T1: Auntie visits the travel fair: <http://72.5.72.93/html/article.php?sid=725>

T2: Scotland: land of the boh cheng kor: <http://72.5.72.93/html/article.php?sid=449>