

The Linguistic Features of Translanguaging Interactions in Singapore: A Discourse Analysis Perspective

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Abstract—Translanguaging has been researched as a heated topic about multilingual discourse studies. However, there were few studies observing from the perspective of translanguaging among Chinese Singaporeans in routine conversations, which is a research gap. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine the nature and discuss the influencing factors of translanguaging among Chinese-English bilinguals in Singapore with the use of discourse analysis as a research method. Major findings were: 1) some Chinese-English bilinguals were more efficient in English than others; 2) Singapore's localized and multilingual use of English have resulted in Colloquial Singapore English or Singlish; 3) influencing factors of translanguaging shown in the clips include students' inadequate training for learning English as a second language, teachers' time constraints, and teachers' limited resources to incorporate support strategies for students, which were restricted by schools. Nonetheless, the contribution of this study is to explore the nature of translanguaging of Chinese-English Bilinguals, especially in the Singapore context, which will provide further implications for Singaporean English discourse studies.

Index Terms—Linguistic features, translanguaging, discourse analysis, Singapore.

I. INTRODUCTION

Translanguaging is a meaningful topic that contributes to bilingualism or multilingualism studies, especially in the perspective of language education. It has been pragmatic to various sectors, for example, daily pedagogy, and cross-modal together with multimodal communication. Some researcher even argues that any activity which is slightly non-conventional can be described in terms of translanguaging [1]. However, there were few studies looking at the Singaporean English context, which is also interesting to be researched.

In terms of Singapore, it is a global destination which has been considered to speak different languages, including Chinese, Malay, certain Indian languages and some Southeast Asian languages [1]. Thus, the current situation of English spoken as a second language in the Singapore context should be important to be researched, and also its influencing factors.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Linguistic Features

In Singapore, two varieties of English are spoken: Standard English and Singlish, which are specifically different in grammar, accents, and intonations. For example, compared with Standard English, Singlish does not have any

form of subject-verb agreement or inflectional morphology with the simplification of word-final consonant cluster [2]. Singlish also has language traits of reduplication, use of loan words from ethnic languages, and extensive use of acronyms. In addition, the syllabic stress in Singlish is unique compared to that used in Standard English. Even all the features of Singlish (e.g., register) can appear to be utterly unknown to the speakers of Standard English [3]. However, the sociolinguistic nature of Singapore can be considered as highly impacted by the rising rates of mixed marriages, which is a trend that has thrown flux to the essentializing nature of the language in the education policy of Singapore [3].

Even though English is considered the medium of instruction in Singaporean classrooms, learners also study their “Mother Tongue,” which is the language of the ethnic group of the child. “Mother Tongue” was defined as the native language with which someone is born and brought up [2]. However, there are three major ethnic groups in Singapore: Chinese, Malay, and Indian. Accordingly, their common languages include Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil. In this case, Singapore has been considered one of the multilingual nations that do not utilize translanguaging as a resource in the classroom either in English or mother tongue classes. However, some of the challenges that Singaporean educators face include enhancing language diversity in the school together with the culture of pedagogy alongside negative perceptions towards mother tongue. Vaish argues that translanguaging can be applicable, especially in the context where the teacher encounter difficulties for expressing themselves with pure English for students to understand his/her meaning fully; then he/she will use the other language (e.g., Chinese) to express bilingually to assist students' understanding [4]. However, it can also be applied to other contexts such as day-to-day street conversation, especially in transcultural interactions.

B. Singapore Language Policy

Singapore is a multilingual nation where several languages are spoken with policy support. However, some studies have proved that the Singaporean government argues that language diversity has been a challenge since language identity is related to cultural and social identity [4]. Also, language devotion may result in inter-ethnic differences when the practical rank or the sentimental ideals of particular ethnic dialects are at stake [4]. That presents weakness to outgoing incorporation and collectively suggests incompetence in economic administration and institution. Hence, it hinders the social, monetary as well as political development of the nation, indicated by the Singapore government [4]. Therefore, the intention of justifying the pragmatic demands of the country facilitates language formulation in Singapore [4]. Singapore has developed a

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multilingual policy as per the country's Independence Act of 1965, which declared that Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, and English are Singapore's official dialects. Hence, the state recognizes Malay, Mandarin and Tamil as the native languages for the Chinese at 13%, Indian at 3%, Malay at 10%, and other societies in Singapore at 2% [4].

However, the multilingual rule of Singapore has only rendered English the recognition of an authorized dialect because it is the dialect of expertise and economic growth. On the same note, Patrick posited that ethnic languages were declared official by the government of Singapore to serve as an anchor for cultural traditions for Singaporeans and avoid over Westernization and the prevention of decentralization [5]. Accordingly, certain scholars have considered the Singapore strategy of multilingualism as an approach of responding to charges of 'linguicism' by speakers of the native languages [6]. The concept of linguicism implies a situation in which the obligation of English is associated with the burden of sociocultural, emotional, and verbal values of the leading culture upon the repressed society, thereby creating an unfair distribution of resources and authority.

As stated above, the unconcealed supremacy of English as an authorized and managerial verbal has raised concerns for the Singapore administration. Even though proficiency in English has granted Singaporeans enhanced financial access to worldwide prospects, it has equally resorted to specific challenges for the country. According to Chua, some of the cultural side effects resulting from the English language's dominance include the undesirable Western lifestyle such as drug misuse, sexual tolerance, and political tolerance [7]. Accordingly, Singapore also implemented a policy on bilingualism mandated in schools by 1966. It stated that every child should study English and their native language as a central element of the Singaporean education structure [8]. Hence, Chinese scholars in Singapore are compelled to learn English as the "First Language" and Mandarin as the "Second Language." Therefore, the concept of bilingualism regarding Singapore implies an aptitude in English and one other authorized language.

C. Translanguaging in Discourse Analysis

Translanguaging is the act of utilizing different languages and various linguistic features by bilinguals to maximize communicative potentials [9]. This section reviews previous research on both discourse analysis and translanguaging for summarizing previous work before comparing them with the current study. Translanguaging is a phenomenon in which individuals apply different meanings, enabling symbols to acclimatize and actively participate in various social and linguistic circumstances [10]. Translanguaging allows people to develop creative understandings in their correlations with people and establish a free and equal atmosphere within which everyone has a right of expression. Other scholars have regarded translanguaging as an essential aspect of identifying formation and have even described translanguaging as an effective approach to creating understanding, enhancing inclusion, and even negotiating arrangement across various language categories [11]. Nevertheless the concept of translanguaging is usually confused with code-switching, even though the latter can be considered as a method that is implemented by bilingual speakers, which comprises the use

of two languages [11]. It has been implemented by bilingual speakers who use two languages [11]. However, translanguaging is also different from code-switching. It uses two or more languages and involves drawing a compound linguistic system that cannot be presented in a single language. Accordingly, translanguaging is about using language as an agile implement to allow people to select the language channels which work for them at the time and enable their language to fit in the circumstances that would have left them out.

After reviewing previous studies, this research seeks to explore the below research questions:

1. What are the linguistic features of translanguaging in Singapore?
2. What are the influencing factors of speaking Singaporean English?

These research questions will be answered in the below sections by using the research method of discourse analysis to analyze three clips.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Participants

This data of this study is collected from online videos recorded of Singaporean Chinese nationals being interviewed to respond to various questions in Chinese. The majority of the more than ten participants were randomly selected for the video interviews. The total length of the video is around 37 minutes. They all provided various perspectives of regular communication amongst Chinese Singaporeans. However, their consent was acquired after confirming whether they are Singaporean-Chinese instead of Malayan. The video interviews comprised both male and female participants, and most of them appeared to be college students. Hence, people who could be considered to have grown up and studied under the Singapore mandate on bilingualism and multilingualism.

B. Instruments

On the same note, video recording instruments were used in this research to capture the interview sessions. Participants were asked questions that were already prepared based on common aspects of daily life to determine whether they could identify or translate them into Chinese. These videos provide individual interviews of various people as they are asked different questions on different occasions to determine their proficiency. The video interviews were designed based on qualitative principles, and there were no dependent and independent variables that could be used to plot specific information. However, different videos used as sources of data in this study (i.e., Clip 1,2,6 in the following sections) were conducted differently. The interviewers individually interviewed various people on the streets in multiple sessions and all of the interview sessions were recorded in videos.

C. Procedures

Therefore, this study uses the research method of discourse analysis on the aspect of translanguaging. The discourse analysis method involves the study of spoken language in correlation to the social context. Hence, discourse analysis is directed towards understandings on how language is applied to real-life circumstances. Consequently, the

approach focused on the purposes and effects of the languages spoken by Singaporean Chinese nationals in Singapore.

IV. RESULTS

Various clips presented how Singaporeans are proficient in Chinese in multiple ways. There was a total of six video clips, and some of them are also manifestations of translanguaging and use of Singlish.

A. Chinese Proficiency of Chinese in Singapore

Transcript One presents the Chinese Proficiency of Chinese in Singapore. This clip shows the Singaporean mixed Chinese and English accent which is full of Nanyang characteristics. Based on the language used, this research finds a strong relationship between these two language speakers. Also, this depicts the characteristics of Translanguaging as a theory of language and shows the theoretical motivations behind value addition when it comes to translingual contexts [12]. Below is an outline of the conversation that takes place in the clip.

Transcript One:

- 01 PA: Wait, ah...
 02 PB: I can't speak Chinese!
 03 PC: like, give the youngsters inspiration. Ya right. 04 PD: Uhm, I think it's OK.
 05 PE: No! I think the... dependent on that athlete's skills. 06 PF: What is "Dependent"?
 07 PF: Dependent ...depends on their skills.
 08 PG: so if they don't have skills, they can't win what. 09 PH: Because he is like, give them the role model.
 10 PI: I think it's unfair because our teachers are critical. 11 PJ: Then it's also the staff of the government.
 12 PK: Because teachers educate students, they shouldn't be. charged fees.
 13 PL: Ya, it is essential to teachers, so free parking is required, and students are also critical so free parking is required.

This transcript includes Participants of A to K, which is shorthanded by PA to PK. The background of the original video on Transcript One was a survey on the proficiency of Chinese in Singapore, and the interviewer went round the street meeting different people who are originally Chinese to ask them questions. The questions were asked in English, and the interviewees were required to translate to Chinese to determine their level of proficiency-based on the complexity of the question. However, from the data collected in the first video, most Singaporean Chinese nationals are not well equipped with their ethnic language. That is a result of the implications of the multilingual and bilingual policy in Singapore. Even though the participants in the study appear to know certain basic terminologies, they can hardly communicate fluently in Chinese, because they have ascribed to the Singapore norm of prioritizing the English language.

B. Singapore English Version of *Beauty and the Beast* with a Unique Accent

The clip shows a different version of *Beauty and the Beast*. This is the Singaporean version of the movie which comes

with a rich and unique accent of the Singaporean culture. The video clip presents a conversation between the two characters. Based on the language used, we find that some participants are unable to pronounce the Chinese sentences could hardly read in a flowing manner which suggested a lack of proficiency. This clearly depicts the characteristics of Translanguaging as a theory of language and shows the theoretical motivations behind value addition when it comes to translingual contexts [12]. Below is part of the conversation that takes place in the clip:

Transcript Two:

- PL: Beast PM: Belle
 01 L: Belle. You happy with me or not ah?
 02 M: Ya!
 03 L: Si tai tsi? [Hokkien: What's going on]
 04 M: I long time never see my pa ya, I miss him leh~
 05 L: Ah I got method, you come you come. Ah, you see this mirror? It can show you anything what, you want to see what, it show you nice nice.
 06 M: Show me ah pa please! Woah, so hot! Wahkao, Pa! Ah. pa so sick, still come out with dead, woah, cannot one leh!
 07 L: Then no choice, you go find your Lin Bei (Dad) 08 M: Ah? What you say ah?
 09 L: you not my prisoner liao, zao zao zao! (go go go) 10 M: You mean I free or what?
 11 L: Ya lah! Putin
 12 M: Oh thank you ah. Pa, you wait I go coming liao!
 13 L: You keep, so you got way to see me and remember me. ah!
 14 M: Thank you ah, you also understand my ah pa need me.
 Bye bye~

The video is a short clip that presents the Singapore version of *Beauty and the Beast* in which Singlish is used and given an image of how translanguaging is used in Singapore media to merge English with the three ethnic languages that are also considered as official languages. The conversation between Belle and the Beast depicts what real-life conversation looks like using Singlish. Just as Austin implies, the conversation is made up of either conversations or performatives as the language is brief to breach the barrier of communication [13].

C. The Chinese Level of Singaporeans

The clip presents the Chinese level of Singaporeans based on the names given to food. This is the Singaporean version of the movie which comes with a rich and unique accent of the Singaporean culture. This clearly depicts the characteristics of Translanguaging as a theory of language and shows the theoretical motivations behind value addition when it comes to translingual contexts [12]. The video clip presents a conversation between the two characters. Below is an outline of the conversation that takes place in the clip:

Transcript Three:

- N-K: Participant N-K
 01 N: Taiwan special something something lah!
 02 O: Quite handsome ah this guy! 03 P: Of course, mah~
 04 Q: Food maybe can? 05 R: I

don't know eh.

06 S: Errrr, I cannot lah... I really cannot.

07 T: I don't know! I just know something "Melon". 08 U: Oh! Sesame is it?

09 V: Spicy, have you tried?

10 W: Wah I think this guy really know his food well ah. Except the Fermented Bean curd lah.

11 X: Correct not? Ah~

This video was also a street interview in which Singaporean Chinese nationals were asked to identify certain foods in Chinese such as sesame and pancakes. The majority of the interviewees were able to identify and translate some foods even though some questions that were ranked as challenging defeated some of the respondents such as the translation of fermented bean into Chinese.

V. DISCUSSION

The present research conducted by the various videos in this paper presents the phenomenon of translanguaging among Chinese Singaporeans. Some of the video showed the extent to which Chinese Singaporeans are fluent in using English, especially in the identification of everyday commodities such as street foods, while other videos also showed the extent of translanguaging such as the use of Singlish amongst Chinese Singaporeans. One of the findings from the survey is that communication in Singlish is distorted and people who speak Singlish tend to use bridging vocabularies which include beginning a sentence with 'like' and following up the conversation with 'right' to ascertain the attention of their audience. Nevertheless, that mode of communication tends to be different from native communications which do not take the same construction. On the other hand, Singlish is also affected by the language policy in Singapore which indicates that English alongside the native languages should be spoken as official languages. Accordingly, there is no official recognition of Singlish as a language amongst the Chinese Singaporeans even though it is a common dialect.

Another finding is the expression of moods in sentence as the expressions and communications in Singlish tend to rise and fall in accordance with the mood of the speaker. There are various instances as recorded in the video in which the conversations took different approaches based on the mood of the characters. For example, in the video in which the interviewer was asking people on the street about foods, the change in mood with mention of certain foods led to the pronunciation of certain words which implicated the various ways through which Singlish differently portrays the expression of moods. Hence, the expressions when Singlish speakers are in a good mood are different from how they speak Singlish when they are in a bad mood. Another example is the fourth transcript (from 00:12 to 01:05), which manifests the appropriate expression of emotions when speaking Singlish. In the first instance, the speakers seem to be aggressive in the expression and there is clear rise in the intonation as aligned with the mood; "Can lah, you take and pay lor!" And also "You siao ah? (Are you stupid?)" all of which record different intonations.

Even though the pronunciation of certain words in Singlish are similar to the pronunciation in the native language, there are some words that differ from certain aspects of native languages. For instance, some pronunciations of Hokkien are similar to those in Singlish like "zaozaozao," while others are different from the native Hokkien. The example is evidence in the video of Beauty and the Beast in the sentence, "Ya lah! Putin." Another observation recorded from the research is the concept of direct literal translation of Chinese word order such as the sentence "You siao ah?... Chop seat" Another finding from the research with the videos is when speaking Singlish, the vocal intonation tends to rise which does not give the exact impression of the native language. In a nutshell, the research study suggests the need for translanguaging, as there are various differences which have been considered to emerge from the communication gap. Hence, this study emphasize on the current research gap and provides possible implications of embracing translanguaging amongst Chinese Singaporeans.

VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper has examined the nature of translanguaging of Chinese-English bilinguals in Singapore using videos of live interviews. There are two varieties of English that are spoken in Singapore. They include Standard English and Singlish which are specifically different in terms of grammar, accents and intonations. This paper has addressed two research gaps in the study of translanguaging which include distinguishing translanguaging from code-switching, even though code-switching is one of the practices of translanguaging. There has also been a research gap in the study of how translanguaging can be used by Chinese Singaporeans in routine conversations and even in the classroom. However, the sociolinguistic nature of Singapore can be considered to have been highly impacted by the rising rates of mixed marriages which is a trend that has thrown flux to the essentializing nature of the language in education policy in Singapore. The multilingual policy of Singapore has only accorded English the recognition of an official language, as it is the language of technology and economic development. In addition, Singapore also implemented a policy on bilingualism which was mandated in schools by 1966 and stated that every child should learn English and the mother tongue as a fundamental element of the Singapore education system. The discourse analysis was conducted based on video interviews recorded from the streets of Singapore and it is obvious that the majority of Singaporean-Chinese nationals are not well equipped with their ethnic language and that is a result of the implications of the multilingual and bilingual policy in Singapore.

APPENDIX

Video Links:

Survey on Chinese Proficiency of Chinese in Singapore! This mixed Chinese and English accent full of Nanyang characteristics...

<https://b23.tv/kAZ9hcJ>

Total video duration:

05:38

Can Singaporeans speak Chinese? Singapore Street

Visit | Are Singaporeans really bad at Chinese?

<https://b23.tv/Orvq1Rd>

Total video length: 18:15

Singapore English version of Beauty and the Beast, with a unique accent

<https://b23.tv/TRBIPsN>

Total video duration:

02:06

Magic Singaporean English Singlish! How much can you understand?

<https://b23.tv/d4ShPWg>

Video duration: 01:18

Encountered Singapore [Street Interview] Singaporean Chinese Proficiency Test

<https://b23.tv/gWwQUkZ>

Video duration: 01:36

What is the Chinese level of Singaporeans? (Name of Food) <https://b23.tv/odcXWdx>

Video duration: 08:50

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