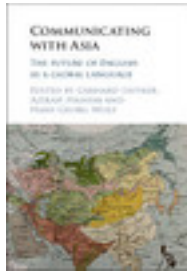


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8 The Americanization of the phonology of Asian Englishes: evidence from Singapore

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Abstract

This chapter seeks to find out if the phonology of Singapore English (SgpE) has been Americanized. This chapter will focus on four pronunciation features in SgpE, namely, the postvocalic-*r*, taps, the pronunciation of the vowel [æ] in *dance*, and the vowel [eɪ] in *tomato*. In order to ascertain if there has been a “shift” or change in the phonology of SgpE, speakers of an older group aged forty and above will be compared with a younger group of speakers who are aged between twenty and twenty-five. The informants for the data also consist of speakers of all three major ethnic groups in Singapore – the Chinese, Malay, and Indians, and a comparison will be made between these three groups to see if any particular ethnic variety of SgpE is more susceptible to Americanization. The results show that some American English (AmE) features are not prevalent across all age and ethnic groups. While it is perhaps not surprising that younger speakers display significantly more AmE features than older speakers, it is interesting to note that the speakers of the Chinese ethnic group are the ones producing more AmE phonological features, as compared to the speakers of the other two ethnic groups. The results on the whole suggest that post-colonial Englishes, such as SgpE, adapt their linguistic features with the force of globalization.

8.1 Introduction

In a recent language attitudes study conducted by Tan and Castelli (2013), American English (AmE) was found to be preferred over Singapore English (SgpE) by most speakers of English even though SgpE was judged to be no less intelligible compared to AmE. The participants in their study, especially participants from East and Southeast Asia, saw AmE as the model of choice as, according to Tan and Castelli (2013: 197), “AmE is not only the variety that these participants are more familiar with given the US-dominant media exposure, it is also an influential variety, enjoying a great deal of prestige... Intelligibility or even positive attitudes do little to change the bias toward

AmE.” It is of little wonder, therefore, that even local politicians want to move toward AmE as a standard of reference for English in Singapore. In one of his public speeches on language issues in 2011, Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s ex-Prime Minister, remarked that one of Singapore’s future challenges is to decide whether to adopt AmE, as he believes that adopting AmE as a standard for Singapore might be inevitable (Ramesh 2011). In the same speech, he predicted that AmE will have a dominant role in Singapore and would most likely prevail over other varieties of English, given the increasing exposure to AmE through America’s dominating media and economy. Will SgpE really move toward AmE? To what extent would AmE affect the phonology of SgpE, and what does this imply for Asian Englishes? This is what this chapter aims to explore.

It is not without any basis to say that SgpE has the potential of becoming Americanized, as AmE is, according to Kirkpatrick (2007), the most influential and powerful variety of English in the world today. In his article on the transition of AmE into a high prestige language, Kahane (1992) reiterates John Adam’s 1780 prediction that AmE is destined to be the language of the world in the next few centuries. The rise of American popular culture, an extension of the country’s political and economic influence in the world today, has contributed greatly to the expansion of AmE. The international reach of American mass media through news, movies, music, and advertisements has also heightened the prestige of American culture.

It probably comes as no surprise therefore to find AmE dominating the linguistic ecology of a locale such as Singapore, given AmE’s influence in many parts of the world. Yet it becomes particularly interesting to look at the impact AmE has on SgpE when one considers this against the historical backdrop of English in Singapore, which involves a different, yet equally powerful British English (BrE). Prior to its independence in 1965, Singapore was a British colonial outpost. Even after independence, BrE is still known as an official frame of reference for English teaching in Singapore (Ooi 2001), and held as the exonormative standard for pronunciation training (Saravanan and Gupta 1997). In an early study on language attitudes on English varieties, Goh (1983) found that BrE was chosen by Singaporeans as the most highly regarded variety, and 84 percent of the participants acknowledged BrE to be the educated and standard variety, suggesting strongly that BrE was the widely accepted and respected norm. Yet over a decade later, Saravanan and Poedjosoedarmo (1997) show evidence that young Singaporeans regard AmE as less “foreign” and more “natural” as compared to BrE. Saravanan and Poedjosoedarmo suggest that these positive attitudes toward AmE might possibly propel young Singaporeans to adopt American features in their speech. Ooi (2001) also remarks that AmE is unofficially competing with the recognized British norm due to the influx of American movies, television, and radio programs. This view echoes that of

Brown (1999), who holds the frequent screening of American television programs on Singapore's English national channel during prime time to be the main contributing factor to the Americanization of SgpE. Be it as it may, there is no doubt that Singaporeans are viewing AmE in a more favorable light today.

The question then is: have Singapore's ties with its British colonial past and language been weakened so much that American features have been adopted and incorporated into SgpE? This chapter focuses on four pronunciation features in SgpE, namely, the postvocalic-*r* taps, the pronunciation of the vowel [æ] in *dance*, and the vowel [eɪ] in *tomato*. Of particular interest in this chapter is the use of these AmE features between speakers of two different age groups: an older group aged forty and above, and a younger group aged between twenty and twenty-five. The rationale behind this comparison is that should the AmE phonological features appear more predominantly in the speech of the younger speakers, one can posit that the Americanization of SgpE is a relatively recent phenomenon.

8.2 Past research on American features in SgpE phonology

There exists a large body of work on SgpE pronunciation. Older publications are comparative in nature, comparing SgpE to BrE (e.g., Tongue 1979; Platt and Weber 1980; Tay 1982; Deterding and Hvitfeldt 1994). Such works stem from the tradition that SgpE should be primarily British, and that any differences between SgpE and BrE are deviations or aberrations. More recent works are descriptive in nature (e.g., Bao 1998; Wee 2004; Brown and Deterding 2005; Deterding 2005; Low 2012), making observations about the phonological features in SgpE without comparison to another variety; and some others go into further detail, working on ethnic variations within SgpE (e.g., Lim 2000; Tan 2010). Precisely because of the fact that SgpE is believed to have evolved from its British past, and is thus tied very strongly to British pronunciation, very few studies have focused specifically on features of AmE pronunciation in SgpE.

Rhoticity is one of the most common and obvious features that differentiates AmE from BrE. Rhoticization is considered a norm in AmE (Ladefoged 2006), and occurs in most dialects of AmE. In terms of rhoticity, SgpE has commonly been described as and believed to be a non-rhotic variety (e.g., Low and Brown 2005; Deterding 2007; Salbrina and Deterding 2010), though postvocalic-*r* use has been observed to be increasingly common. This is especially so among young Singaporeans who, Deterding (2007) believes, regard postvocalic-*r* as "cool," an influence perhaps from Hollywood and American music. In rhotic varieties of English, the postvocalic-*r* occurs wherever there is an <r> in the spelling in word-final positions, for example, *bar* [bɑr] and before a consonant, e.g., *mart* [mɑrt]. American, Scottish, and Irish Englishes are examples of rhotic varieties (Wells 1982). In contrast, non-rhotic varieties of English,

such as BrE, only allow [ɹ] to occur before a vowel (Crystal 2003). Some post-colonial Englishes like SgpE and Indian English, because of their British descent, have also been commonly described as non-rhotic. An early work by Nihalani, Tongue, and Hosali (1979), for instance, considers Indian English to be lacking in rhoticity. Chand (2010), however, shows that urban Indian English is becoming semi-rhotic, and the use of postvocalic-*r* can be predicted by social factors. Similarly for SgpE, because SgpE has been believed to be non-rhotic, little has been written on this subject in SgpE. Only three studies (Tan and Gupta 1992, Salbrina and Deterding 2010, and Tan 2012) so far have been devoted to rhoticity in SgpE.

Salbrina and Deterding (2010), for instance, using a sample of Malay-speaking SgpE speakers, concluded that SgpE was non-rhotic and exhibited far fewer instances of rhoticity than Brunei English; only 8.3 percent of their SgpE tokens showed rhoticity. In contrast, the earlier work by Tan and Gupta (1992), interestingly, observed some degree of rhoticity in SgpE. They further suggested that the use of postvocalic-*r* was a prestige feature for some speakers. Poedjosoedarmo (2000), describing phonological features of the speech of Singaporean newscasters and radio deejays, also argues that SgpE is influenced by American media. She found, in her study, some AmE-like characteristics in SgpE, but noted only a few instances of postvocalic-*r*. The most recent study by Tan (2012) shows that the use of postvocalic-*r* in SgpE is strongly and directly correlated to the speaker's educational and socioeconomic status. Tan's study of twenty-four SgpE speakers of different educational levels and socioeconomic status suggests that the use of postvocalic-*r* is set to increase as it is used to signal one's upward social mobility, no doubt an influence from the dominant American culture as a symbol of globalization.

The other feature that this chapter looks at is taps – another common characteristic of AmE that differentiates it from other varieties of English (Kretzschmar 2010) and also commonly observed in many regional varieties of AmE (Davies 2005). According to Ladefoged (2006), a tap is produced as the tip of the tongue moves up to contact the roof of the mouth in the dental or alveolar region and then moves back to the floor of the mouth along the same path. Taps occur as replacement of the regular pronunciation of /t/ and /d/ in the middle of words such as *latter* and *ladder* (Ladefoged 2006) and they occur after a stressed syllable and before an unstressed syllable (Herd, Jongman, and Sereno 2010). Interestingly, no known study so far has looked at the occurrences of taps in SgpE. It is to be hypothesized, therefore, that the presence of taps in the speech of the participants in this study could be the result of the Americanizing effect on SgpE.

It is well known that there are distinct vowel features that set BrE and AmE apart (e.g., Finegan 2004; Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2005; Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006; Kretzschmar 2010). Obvious and well-established examples

include the use of [eɪ] in words such as *tomato* as compared to [ɑ:] in the British variety and the use of the vowel [æ] in words such as *dance*, *can't*, and *plant* as opposed to [ɑ] in BrE – both of which will be looked at in this chapter. And as mentioned earlier, while there are numerous studies on the vowels in SgpE (e.g., Deterding and Hvitfeldt 1994; Lim 2004, 2012; Deterding 2007; Tan and Low 2010; Low 2012), none has focused on AmE features in the SgpE vowel inventory.

8.3 This study

A total of forty-eight SgpE female speakers form the pool of informants in this study. As mentioned earlier, these speakers are of two different age groups: an older group aged forty and above, and a younger group aged between twenty and twenty-five. The other important point to add is that participants were grouped according to the three major ethnic groups in Singapore – the Chinese, Malays, and Indians. A comparison will be made between these three groups to see if any particular ethnic variety of SgpE is more susceptible to Americanization. At the same time, should there be no discernable difference between the three ethnic groups, one can conclude that the features are not due to individual ethnic substratal influences. The speakers are made up of three equal groups of sixteen speakers from each of the three ethnic groups. Of the sixteen speakers in each group, eight were young adults aged twenty to twenty-five, the other eight were older adults aged above forty.

As age and ethnic groups are the two variables in this data set, all other variables were kept constant as much as possible. For instance, only females were chosen so as to reduce the effect of gender differences on the results. Females were chosen over males; as Wolfram (1969) has noted, females are found to be generally more aware of socially evaluative linguistic features and are more careful with their way of speech. The education levels of the participants were controlled as they have been found to be correlated to the speech patterns of Singaporeans (see Tan 2012). The young adults are undergraduates or recent graduates from the author's university. The older adult participants were recruited through word of mouth from friends and acquaintances of the researchers, and most of them are parents whose child was undergoing tertiary education at the author's university. All participants from the older age group had also received tertiary education.

All participants are Singaporeans who have not lived in America for more than three months and hence can be said not to have had substantial direct exposure to AmE. The Chinese participants are all English-Mandarin Chinese bilinguals. To ensure that the participants are minimally affected by their language abilities in Mandarin Chinese, speakers who spoke mainly English in their households and in their daily lives were selected. All of the Malay participants

are English-Malay bilinguals. Not all the Malay speakers speak mainly English in their households and in their daily lives, but they reported to at least use English and Malay equally in their daily interactions. Likewise, all participants of Indian ethnicity are English-Tamil bilinguals. All Indian-Singaporean speakers reported that they speak English dominantly in their households and in their daily lives.

8.3.1 Data elicitation design

To elicit postvocalic-*r*, twenty target words were varied in terms of the preceding vowels (*/ɑ/*, */ɔ/*, */ɛ/*, */ə/*, and */iə/*), and */ɹ/* was positioned in both simple and complex codas (see Appendix for the reading list). The target words can be seen in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1. Target words to elicit postvocalic-*r*

	<i>/ɑ/</i>	<i>/iə/</i>	<i>/ɛ/</i> ¹	<i>/ə/</i> ²	<i>/ɔ/</i>
Monosyllabic	star	hear	hair	fur	core
V/ <i>r/</i>	car	beer	rare	sir	pour
Monosyllabic	park	cleared	paired	nerd	court
V/ <i>r/C</i>	start	beard	cared	bird	bored

To elicit taps, a word list consisting of twenty words was constructed for */t/* and */d/* that are candidates for alternation into taps in AmE, and they were varied for five different vowel environments, similar to the word list for postvocalic-*r*. The word list can be seen in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2. Target words to elicit taps

	<i>/ɑ/</i> ³	<i>/i/</i>	<i>/ɛ/</i>	<i>/u/</i> ⁴	<i>/ɔ/</i> ⁵
<i>/t/</i>	butter	litter	letter	scooter	water
	cutter	bitter	kettle	suitor	bottle
<i>/d/</i>	budding	needle	ladder	noodle	bonding
	cuddling	reading	paddle	doodle	boarding

For the vowels, a word list consisting of ten words was constructed for the following vowel distinctions, namely *[ɑ]/[æ]*, and *[ɑ:]/[ɛɪ]*, with five target words for each vowel. The word list can be seen in Table 8.3.

As it is difficult to ensure adequate and appropriate environments for the occurrences of the phonetic features investigated, the advantages of natural and spontaneous speech were sacrificed in favor of a reading task. The reading

Table 8.3. *Target words to elicit vowel pronunciation*

BrE [ɑ] > AmE [æ]	BrE [ɑ:] > AmE [eɪ]
dance	tomato
laugh	charade
staff	gala
can't	amen
gasp	cicada

task required the participants to read a set of fifty sentences, with each of the target words embedded within each sentence. Sentences were also controlled so that there were no more than ten words in each sentence so as to keep the participants' reading constant. This method of data collection was necessary to ensure a sufficient number of tokens for each feature, and more importantly, to allow for a fair comparison across all the speakers.

8.3.2 Procedure

The recording was done with a Marantz Professional PMD660 portable audio recorder, and the sessions were carried out either in a sound-proof Linguistics Laboratory at the university, or on occasions, when the location proved to be inconvenient to the participants, especially for the older adults, in an enclosed room with minimum sound distractions in their homes. Participants were asked to partake in a background profile survey before the start of the recording to ensure that they met all the controlled requirements.

8.3.3 Analysis

Each target word was given an auditory binary analysis, indicating whether or not it was realized either with the postvocalic-*r* or tap, or the vowels under scrutiny. In addition, for the consonants, namely for the postvocalic-*r* and taps, an acoustic analysis using Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2014) was carried out to confirm the auditory analysis, looking in particular at the third formant (F3) of these consonants. This is because acoustically, F3 is the most salient characteristic of /ɹ/, characterized by a dip in the formant. Meanwhile, the occurrence of taps can be confirmed by the small gap in F3 due to the swift sudden movement of the tongue.

The total number of tokens analyzed for postvocalic-*r* and taps is 960 each. The results will be presented by comparing across ethnic groups and age groups, first describing the consonants in the next section, followed by vowels in the section after.

8.4 Production of postvocalic-*r* and taps

The results in this section will be presented with a focus on speaker-specific productions of postvocalic-*r* and taps and their correlation to the speaker's age and ethnic group. Statistical analyses (one-tailed ANOVA and post-hoc Tukey) were carried out to compare the differences between the different ethnic groups and age groups. Table 8.4 shows the percentages of occurrences of postvocalic-*r* and taps across the speakers of the younger age group and across the three ethnic groups; Table 8.5 shows that of the speakers of the older age group.

Table 8.4. *Percentages of occurrences of postvocalic-r and taps of the younger group of speakers across the three ethnic groups*

Speaker	CY1	CY2	CY3	CY4	CY5	CY6	CY7	CY8	Average
Chinese (Young)									
Postvoc.- <i>r</i> (%)	5.0	5.0	0.0	70.0	80.0	65.0	70.0	65.0	45.0
Tap (%)	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	15.0	5.0	5.0	10.0	5.0
Speaker	MY1	MY2	MY3	MY4	MY5	MY6	MY7	MY8	Average
Malay (Young)									
Postvoc.- <i>r</i> (%)	5.0	30.0	0.0	10.0	15.0	5.0	0.0	40.0	13.13
Tap (%)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	5.0	5.0	1.9
Speaker	IY1	IY2	IY3	IY4	IY5	IY6	IY7	IY8	Average
Indian (Young)									
Postvoc.- <i>r</i> (%)	0.0	25.0	5.0	10.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	10.0
Tap (%)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	1.3

In terms of the production of postvocalic-*r*, there seems to be a correlation between the speaker's age and ethnic group. The Chinese speakers, as a whole, produce the highest percentage of postvocalic-*r* with an average of 27.19 percent, whereas the other two groups of speakers (namely, the Malay and Indian speakers) produce postvocalic-*r* at a much lower frequency, with an average of 11.57 percent and 5.0 percent, respectively. The younger speakers also have a tendency to produce more postvocalic-*r* as compared to the older ones, and this is true across all groups.

Table 8.5. Percentages of occurrences of postvocalic-*r* and taps of the older group of speakers across the three ethnic groups

Speaker	CO1	CO2	CO3	CO4	CO5	CO6	CO7	CO8	Average
Chinese (Older)									
Postvoc.- <i>r</i> (%)	20.0	0.0	5.0	5.0	0.0	15.0	20.0	10.0	9.38
Tap (%)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	5.0	10.0	2.5
Speaker	MO1	MO2	MO3	MO4	MO5	MO6	MO7	MO8	Average
Malay (Older)									
Postvoc.- <i>r</i> (%)	0.0	10.0	10.0	0.0	20.0	10.0	20.0	10.0	10.0
Tap (%)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	1.3
Speaker	IO1	IO2	IO3	IO4	IO5	IO6	IO7	IO8	Average
Indian (Older)									
Postvoc.- <i>r</i> (%)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Tap (%)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

While the average seems low, the production rates are significant when analyzed by individual speakers. Five out of eight young Chinese speakers produce postvocalic-*r* for more than 50 percent of the tokens. In contrast, half of the young Malay and Indian speakers produce almost no postvocalic-*r* at all. The difference between the young Chinese speakers' postvocalic-*r* production and that of the young Malay and young Indian speakers is found to be statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ ($p = 0.00001$, $N = 960$, $df = 2$). These findings seem to suggest that postvocalic-*r* production is prevalent only among the young Chinese speakers.

It is also apparent that the postvocalic-*r* occurrences are found primarily in the speech of the younger speakers. The older Indian speakers, in fact, do not have a single instance of postvocalic-*r*, and the average means of postvocalic-*r* production in the speech of older Chinese and Malay speakers are less than 10 percent. The younger speakers' production of postvocalic-*r* is significantly different from that of the older speakers at $p < 0.05$.

The frequencies of taps are negligible. Speakers of all ethnic and age groups produce almost no taps. Out of a possible 960 instances for taps to occur, only nineteen taps were produced, and they were produced idiosyncratically by fifteen out of the forty-eight speakers, and each speaker producing only a couple

of taps, typically on words such as *bottle* and *letter*. What is interesting to note though is that the speakers who produce the taps (albeit in small numbers) are also the ones producing postvocalic-*r*. In the same vein, the speakers who do not produce postvocalic-*r* also do not produce taps. This observation seems to suggest that the production of postvocalic-*r* and taps go in tandem.

The Chinese speakers, on average, produce more taps (3.75 percent) as compared to the Malay (1.6 percent) and Indian speakers (0.65 percent). The younger speakers, similar to what we saw in the postvocalic-*r* production, are also the ones producing more taps, as compared to the older speakers. The younger speakers, on average, produce 2.73 percent of taps, as compared to only 1.26 percent by the older speakers. Though these tendencies are marginal, they do support the general pattern seen earlier in the production of postvocalic-*r* and are significant indicators of the influence of AmE.

8.5 Who says “to-MAY-to”? : vowel productions

As mentioned earlier, there are five target words for each vowel production, and in this section, I will focus not on the actual numbers, but the words that have been produced with American pronunciation, as the numbers are too small to run any meaningful statistical analysis.

It is quite clear from tables 8.6 and 8.7 that vowel productions are not as dichotomized as consonants are. For one, there is no identifiable ethnic group that produces American pronunciations more than the other two. Second, it is also not apparent that the younger speakers produce them more than the older speakers. There are, however, interesting consistencies to the words that tend to have the American vowel pronunciations.

Speakers show a tendency to produce words such as *tomato*, *charade*, and *amen* with the diphthong [eɪ], as opposed to the British use of [ɑ:]. This is regardless of ethnic group and age group, though it is interesting to see that the Indian speakers (on the whole) produce these words with the diphthong [eɪ] for 55 percent of the total tokens, more than that produced by the Chinese speakers at 28.75 percent and the Malay speakers at 35 percent. Statistically, there is no significant difference with regard to age and ethnic group in the production of these vowels, indicating that age is not a factor here. It is worth noting, though, that out of the possible five words in this group, only three are pronounced with the American vowels, with *charade* and *tomato* the two words with the highest count. The word *gala* was pronounced with the American pronunciation only six times in total, and no single speaker pronounced *cicada* with an [eɪ]. Some words, not all, are produced with the American pronunciation, suggesting that this phenomenon is perhaps not quite yet a part of the SgpE phonological system.

Table 8.6. Occurrences of American vowel pronunciation among the younger group of speakers across the three ethnic groups by percentages

Speaker	CY1	CY2	CY3	CY4	CY5	CY6	CY7	CY8	Average (%)
Chinese (Young)									
[ɑ] > [æ]	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	–	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	25.0
	–	–	<i>can't</i>	–	–	<i>can't</i>	–	<i>can't</i>	
[ɑ:] > [eɪ]	<i>tomato</i>	–	–	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	–	30.0
	<i>charade</i>	–	–	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	–	<i>charade</i>	–	
	<i>amen</i>	–	–	–	<i>amen</i>	–	–	–	
	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	<i>gala</i>	
Speaker Malay (Young)	MY1	MY2	MY3	MY4	MY5	MY6	MY7	MY8	Average (%)
[ɑ] > [æ]	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	–	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	27.5
	–	–	–	–	–	<i>can't</i>	–	<i>can't</i>	
	–	–	–	–	–	<i>dance</i>	–	<i>dance</i>	
[ɑ:] > [eɪ]	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	–	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	–	32.5
	<i>charade</i>	–	–	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	–	<i>charade</i>	–	
	<i>amen</i>	–	–	–	<i>amen</i>	–	–	–	
	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	<i>gala</i>	
Speaker Indian (Young)	IY1	IY2	IY3	IY4	IY5	IY6	IY7	IY8	Average (%)
[ɑ] > [æ]	–	–	–	<i>gasp</i>	–	<i>gasp</i>	–	–	5.0
[ɑ:] > [eɪ]	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	–	<i>tomato</i>	55.0
	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	
	<i>amen</i>	–	<i>amen</i>	<i>amen</i>	<i>amen</i>	<i>amen</i>	–	<i>amen</i>	
	–	–	–	–	–	–	<i>gala</i>	–	

Table 8.7. Occurrences of American vowel pronunciation among the older group of speakers across the three ethnic groups by percentages

Speaker	CO1	CO2	CO3	CO 4	CO5	CO6	CO7	CO8	Average (%)
Chinese (Older)									
[ɑ] > [æ]	<i>gasp</i>	–	<i>gasp</i>	–	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	–	<i>gasp</i>	17.5
	<i>dance</i>	–	–	–	–	<i>dance</i>	–	–	
[ɑ:] > [eɪ]	<i>tomato</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	27.5
	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	–	–	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	
	<i>amen</i>	–	–	–	–	–	<i>amen</i>	<i>amen</i>	
	–	–	<i>gala</i>	–	–	–	–	–	
Speaker Malay (Older)	MO1	MO2	MO3	MO4	MO5	MO6	MO7	MO8	Average (%)
[ɑ] > [æ]	–	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	<i>gasp</i>	–	<i>gasp</i>	25.0
	<i>dance</i>	–	–	–	–	<i>dance</i>	–	<i>dance</i>	
	–	–	–	–	–	<i>can't</i>	–	–	
[ɑ:] > [eɪ]	<i>tomato</i>	–	<i>tomato</i>	–	<i>tomato</i>	–	–	–	37.5
	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	–	–	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	
	<i>amen</i>	–	–	<i>amen</i>	<i>amen</i>	–	<i>amen</i>	<i>amen</i>	
	–	–	<i>gala</i>	–	–	–	–	–	
Speaker Indian (Older)	IO1	IO2	IO3	IO4	IO5	IO6	IO7	IO8	Average (%)
[ɑ] > [æ]	–	–	–	<i>gasp</i>	–	–	<i>gasp</i>	–	5.0
[ɑ:] > [eɪ]	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>	–	<i>tomato</i>	55.0
	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	<i>charade</i>	
	<i>amen</i>	–	<i>amen</i>	<i>amen</i>	<i>amen</i>	<i>amen</i>	–	<i>amen</i>	
	–	–	–	–	–	–	<i>gala</i>	–	

The same tendency can be observed in words such as *gasp*, *can't*, and *dance*. Some words, more than others, receive the AmE pronunciation. The word *gasp*, for instance, was produced with the vowel [æ], as opposed to the British use of [ɑ]. Again, this is regardless of age group, though it is interesting to see here, that, unlike the previous vowel set, the Indian speakers tend to produce this the least, with an average of only 5 percent, as compared to the Chinese speakers at 10.15 percent and the Malay speakers at 26.25 percent. There are, however, no statistical differences across the age groups. Again, it is important to note that out of the possible five words in this group, only *gasp* has the greatest tendency to be pronounced with [æ]. Words like *can't* with the American pronunciation are favored more by the younger speakers, appearing five times in total in the speech of the young adults, as opposed to only once in the speech of the older adults. On the other hand, the word *dance*, pronounced with [æ], appears to be preferred by the older speakers, as it is produced a total of four times by these speakers, as compared to only twice by the younger speakers. Words like *laugh* and *staff*, on the other hand, are still pronounced with [ɑ], and not [æ]. As can be seen, these occurrences, though present, are in small numbers, and they are not consistent across all the target words. In fact, the inconsistency of these vowel productions in a small number of specific words suggests that this may not be a robust phonological shift toward the American pronunciation, but points toward a random pronunciation preference for some lexical items. This certainly begs a bigger question: why some words and not others? This is most certainly fodder for future research.

8.6 Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking if SgpE has moved from a British norm toward an American one, and I suggested that the answer to this question lies in the presence of salient AmE features, such as postvocalic-*r* and taps, in the SgpE of young and old adults. I hypothesized that young SgpE speakers would show more AmE features as compared to the older SgpE speakers, suggesting that the influence of AmE is a fairly recent phenomenon, and that SgpE is moving from a more BrE model toward an AmE one. Putting the results together, however, it becomes apparent that the Americanization process is not a uniform one. For one, only the postvocalic-*r* and the use of the diphthong [eɪ] in words like *tomato* appear to be the two relatively more prominent American features out of all the features studied here. Most speakers hardly produce taps, if any. There is some degree of usage of the vowel [æ] in words like *gasp*, but the usage does not extend across all the possible target words. One can conclude, at this point, that some American features are present, but not salient in SgpE.

With the exception of postvocalic-*r*, no other feature shows any difference in usage by age or ethnic group. It is clear that the younger speakers produce

postvocalic-*r* with a higher frequency compared to the older speakers. It is also noteworthy that the younger Chinese speakers lead the pack by producing the postvocalic-*r* with a much higher frequency than their Malay and Indian counterparts. This somewhat erratic behavior of the postvocalic-*r* calls for an explanation. Why is the postvocalic-*r* used predominantly by the young speakers but not by older ones? Why is postvocalic-*r* restricted to the young Chinese speakers, but not taken up by the Malay and Indian speakers? There are some possible answers to these questions. First, the relative absence of postvocalic-*r* in the older adult group shows that the introduction of this feature into SgpE is a recent phenomenon. This explains and provides justifications for the earlier works on SgpE pronunciation (e.g., Low and Brown 2005; Deterding 2007; Salbrina and Deterding 2010), which suggest that SgpE does not have postvocalic-*r*. The young SgpE speakers' relatively high frequency use of the postvocalic-*r* also corroborates with what has been found in previous studies, which noted an increased use of the postvocalic-*r* (e.g., Tan and Gupta 1992; Poedjosoedarmo 2000; Tan 2012). In fact, as Chand's (2010) study on Indian English has shown, as a city urbanizes, social factors do create an increased use of postvocalic-*r*, even though Indian English was said to be a non-rhotic variety of English. It is also highly possible that the use of postvocalic-*r* in SgpE is due to the speakers' increased exposure to AmE, as suggested also by Tan and Gupta (1992), Poedjosoedarmo (2000), and Tan (2012). These young SgpE speakers have English as their main home language, and one can therefore assume that these speakers are likely to be exposed to the highly Americanized English-language media in Singapore.

It is in fact highly peculiar that one finds more occurrences of postvocalic-*r* in the Chinese speakers than the Malay speakers. As Salbrina and Deterding (2010) and Deterding and Salbrina (2013) have found, Brunei English is rhotic in part because these speakers use postvocalic-*r* in Malay. If the postvocalic-*r* in Malay contributes to rhoticity, by the same logic, Malay speakers of SgpE are the ones more likely to use postvocalic-*r*. Interestingly, this lack of rhoticity in the SgpE of Malay speakers has also been reflected in Salbrina and Deterding's (2010) study. Salbrina and Deterding, when comparing speakers of Brunei English and Malay speakers of SgpE, note a significantly higher use of the postvocalic-*r* in Brunei English as compared to SgpE speakers of the Malay ethnic group. This is despite the fact that both groups of speakers in their study speak Malay. Salbrina and Deterding concluded that this difference is due to the fact that the Malay spoken in Singapore is perhaps less rhotic than the Malay spoken in Brunei. Substrate influences do little to explain the occurrences of postvocalic-*r* in SgpE.

The reason for the ethnic difference in the postvocalic-*r* production, as we have seen in this chapter, therefore, may be a nonlinguistic one. One could hazard, as Tan and Gupta (1992) have suggested, that the postvocalic-*r* is, in

their words, associated with “high prestige.” If it were true that postvocalic-*r* production is correlated to high prestige, the results in this chapter would suggest that the older speakers or the Malay or Indian speakers have no conception of high prestige. This also suggests that the Chinese SgpE speakers are more prestige-conscious than the Malay and Indian speakers. Such a conclusion would, however, be odd. Even if this was truly the case, more sociological evidence is required before one can say this conclusively.

What this chapter has presented is a pilot study showing a small set of data with a few prominent AmE features. The results reveal some interesting aspects of SgpE phonology, and more importantly, has raised bigger questions for future research. Future studies investigating beyond the four AmE features studied in this chapter will certainly provide a more comprehensive picture of SgpE phonological change. Furthermore, as the data collection process in this study has only dealt with females, one wonders if male participants also show similar production patterns.

To conclude, it is perhaps not inaccurate to say that Asian Englishes are fertile grounds for change and innovation. As postcolonial Englishes, such as SgpE, go through the processes of nativization and change, new norms are adopted and one sees the adaptation of linguistic features with the force of globalization. What we are observing now is perhaps the process of SgpE detaching itself from its British history, and displaying not only its own local flavor, but also prominent phonological features of other varieties such as AmE. As Englishes in Asia continue to evolve and flourish, it becomes paramount to acknowledge that these Englishes will exhibit change that reflects the make-up of their linguistic ecologies.

NOTES

- 1 The words *hair*, *rare*, *paired*, and *cared* are produced with the vowel [ɛ] in SgpE.
- 2 The words *fur*, *sir*, *nerd*, and *bird* are produced with the vowel [ə] in SgpE as SgpE does not make a distinction between long and short vowel pairs.
- 3 The words in this column are produced in SgpE with the vowel [ɑ], as opposed to [ʌ] in BrE.
- 4 The words *scooter*, *suitor*, and *noodle*, are produced with the vowel [u] in SgpE as SgpE does not make a distinction between long and short vowel pairs.
- 5 All the words in this column are produced with the vowel [ɔ] in SgpE.