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PAPER

Linguistic insecurity and the linguistic ownership of English among Singaporean Chinese

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Abstract

Linguistic insecurity and linguistic ownership rest on the same foundational ideas. However, despite the extensive study of both, the two concepts have never been discussed in conjunction. This paper refines both concepts and puts forth a set of conditions to test for the presence of linguistic insecurity and the exercise of linguistic ownership in 287 Singaporeans through an empirical survey examining their use of English, as well as their perceptions of other speakers in the Singapore English-speaking community and Singapore English itself. The results reveal that Singaporeans are linguistically insecure but yet exercise full ownership of the English language. These somewhat paradoxical findings uncover an unusual relationship between linguistic insecurity and ownership. We argue in this paper that there exists a new type of linguistic ownership in Singapore, one that does not invoke notions of authority or legitimacy. It is this new notion of *linguistic ownership* that drives a new brand of *linguistic insecurity* documented in this paper.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Since William Labov documented New Yorkers' negative perception of their own speech variety in his pioneering work *The social stratification of English in New York City* (1966, 2006 version cited), the concept *linguistic insecurity* has been looked at in a range of sociolinguistics work. Research has shown how speakers brand their own speech variety as inferior in a myriad of other linguistic communities across a variety of different nations (Martinez & Petrucci, 2004; Owens & Baker, 1984), and sometimes even across different times in the same nation (Preston, 2013). More recently, research has also shown how speakers of the 'inferior' language variety are typically 'non-native' speakers of the language (Buripakdi, 2012; Cho, 2015). Similarly, the concept of *linguistic ownership*, or the lack thereof, has seen some intellectual debate, particularly in the very nature of linguistic ownership itself (Bokhorst-Heng, Alsagoff, McKay, & Rubdy, 2007; Norton, 1997). Scholars have questioned how and who can own a language; or if a language can even be possessed at all (Hutton, 2010; Widdowson, 1994). Yet, despite the lack of a consensus on the definition, *linguistic ownership* has been argued to be the right for speakers of their language or dialect, be it a new variety or a non-native variety, to be viewed as legitimate (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2013; Wee, 2002).

Even though the two terms – *linguistic insecurity* and *linguistic ownership* – have been discussed by different scholars in distinct contexts and domains, there are striking points of similarities between the two. The central tenet that both concepts rest on is the idea that one key group of speakers sets the language standards for the rest of the speakers. This notion then develops into a dichotomy between the so-called 'native' and 'non-native' speakers, which therefore also brings to fore the assumption that the latter is linguistically inferior to the former. Furthermore, linguistic innovations by speakers outside of the key group are often branded as 'bad' or 'broken' forms of the language, and these are often found in discussions of both linguistic insecurity and linguistic ownership as well. However, despite the common characteristics, the potential relationship between the two concepts has thus far yet to be explored. In fact, it is rare for both *linguistic insecurity* and *linguistic ownership* to be discussed concurrently even when they occur in the same context.

As we will show in this paper, one such context where the two concepts are deeply intertwined is that of Singapore's linguistic situation, wherein the young nation has had a complicated – if not schizophrenic – relationship with the English language. Singaporeans extensively, and almost exclusively, use the language in both their public and private domains (Tan, 2014), which is a result of the capital accorded to English through the state's own language policies. There is also growing evidence that Singaporeans are in fact competent speakers of a standardised local variety of English that is perfectly intelligible to the global community (Bolton, 2010; Pakir, 1991; Tan & Castelli, 2013). However, there is also a general belief that Singaporean speakers are 'poor English speakers' who speak a type of 'localised English' inferior to that spoken by native speakers (Wong, 2011). Such is the state's negative perception of English proficiency in the country that a yearly language campaign, the Speak Good English Movement, was launched in 2000 to encourage citizens to speak good English (Rubdy, 2001). At first glance, one may be tempted to say that Singaporeans suffer from linguistic insecurity and may even say that Singaporeans do not have ownership of the English language. However, these are impressions and anecdotes that have yet been studied in any detail. It is therefore the aim of this paper to use Singapore as a site to study the nature of the relationship between linguistic insecurity and linguistic ownership and their application to the ways in which Singaporeans use and view English. In this paper, we will present empirical evidence, gathered through a survey carried out on a convenience sample of 287 respondents, to investigate whether Singaporean speakers of English are suffering from linguistic insecurity, and if so, how this condition is tied to the lack of linguistic ownership. We focus, in this paper, on Chinese Singaporeans as they form the largest ethnic group in Singapore, with over 75% of the population (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010).

2 | DEMYSTIFYING LINGUISTIC INSECURITY AND LINGUISTIC OWNERSHIP

Before we can explore the relationship between *linguistic insecurity* and *linguistic ownership*, it is important to discuss what the two concepts are and how their presence and/or effects can be tested for. This is particularly essential in the case of *linguistic ownership*, given the lack of agreement amongst scholars on the definition of what ownership entails and how it can be applied to something as intangible but cardinal as a language. As discussed earlier, *linguistic insecurity* was mentioned when Labov (2006) observed New Yorkers' keen awareness of stigmatised features and prestige features and the resultant alterations that these speakers made to their speech in a bid to avoid this stigmatisation. These speakers, he explained, were motivated by 'a profound linguistic insecurity', which was 'an observable recognition of an exterior standard of correctness' (Labov, 2001, p. 277; Labov, 2006, p. 318). Some scholars have also used the notion of 'correctness' as a key element in their definitions of linguistic insecurity, such as Baron (1976, p. 1.) who described it as 'the feeling that many if not all Americans have that their language is somehow not quite up to snuff, that it is out of control – riddled with errors – or simply unskilful and gauche,' similarly identifying the speakers' perception that their speech was erroneous as a tenet of insecurity. However, other scholars have identified the idea of inferiority as the central component of linguistic insecurity instead. Meyerhoff (2006, p. 172) offers that linguistic insecurity is 'speakers' feeling that the variety they use is somehow inferior, ugly or bad.' Similarly, Hall, Smith, and Wicaksono (2011), p. 45) characterise the concept as 'the [speakers'] belief that their language variety is inadequate or that their own speech

and writing are somehow inferior.' In a similar fashion, Allard and Landry (1998, p. 216) detail linguistic insecurity as 'the tendency to evaluate one's language or mastery thereof overly negative when comparing oneself to others.'

The notion of 'inferiority' as a key element in linguistic insecurity is also present in the works of scholars exploring the linguistic attitudes and behaviours of the 'superior' parties. Hall (1950, p. 245) was the first to comment on the 'snobbery and social discrimination which goes on in the name of "correctness"' and presented a rather scathing speculation that those who partook in such discrimination merely wanted an easy way to feel superior to someone. In more recent literature, Milroy and Milroy (2002) talk about the 'complaint tradition', wherein the proponents of the 'standard' variety emphatically oppose what they feel are unacceptable deviations of the language. Specifically, the authors outline a particular type of complaint, in which the non-standardised varieties of the language or forms of the non-standardised variety are considered 'illiteracies, or barbarisms' and that the speakers who used these non-standardised forms were displaying 'signs of stupidity, ignorance, perversity, moral degeneracy' (Milroy & Milroy, 2002, p. 33), thus justifying the discrimination of such speakers. Here, it is evident how linguistic insecurity could potentially be weaponised to normalise discrimination against a select group of speakers.

Between the notions of 'correctness' or 'inferiority', the latter is perhaps more effective as the core element of linguistic insecurity. Although speakers suffering from linguistic insecurity are commonly observed to be grappling with the notion of 'correctness' in their speech, a definition of linguistic insecurity that pivots on 'correctness' is unable to account for speakers who are insecure about speaking their own language variety even when their speech is largely error-free. An apt example would be the linguistic insecurity suffered by Korean translators and interpreters observed by Cho (2015). Although the participants in the study had achieved a high-level of proficiency in English language as they had spent their formative years in English-speaking countries, they still experienced intense linguistic insecurity upon returning to Korea as they perceived their own English use to be inferior to that of the native speakers in the aforementioned countries.

Definitions of *linguistic ownership* are as equally elusive. Most commonly, *linguistic ownership* has been defined along the lines of 'authority' and 'legitimacy'. Ownership as authority over a language was first broached by Henry G. Widdowson (1994) when he explored the possibility of the British as authorities of the English language. In his work, Widdowson (1994, p. 378) presents an analogy between the English language and champagne to highlight a commonly-held notion: while there are many sparkling wines around the world, there is only one proper champagne, similarly, while there are many varieties of English, there is only one 'original' English language. If that be the case, Widdowson argues, it naturally follows that it is the British who own English and have authority over its usage. However, Widdowson ultimately rejects this idea, stating that no nation or community can lay claim to a language. Rubdy (2015) also highlights the various dangers presented by the accordance of power to a certain group of speakers through the definition *linguistic ownership* as authority. Doing so cements and normalises the notion that the British (or any other 'native' speaker community deemed suitable) have the right to police the use of the language by the rest of the English speakers in the world, who are cast as inherently less competent speakers (Rubdy, 2015). Furthermore, it would also serve to reinforce the lingering negative political and social effects of colonisation and globalisation on 'non-native' speakers. It is clear that to think about *linguistic ownership* along the lines of authority is inherently problematic and would only further 'disenfranchise the majority of English speakers today' (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015, p. 1).

Building on Widdowson's work, Higgins (2003, p. 315) adds the notion of 'legitimacy' in her definition of linguistic ownership, positing that ownership was 'the degree to which they project themselves as legitimate speakers with authority over the language.' In fact, there have been a number of studies on linguistic ownership of the English language in Singapore. Both Bokhorst-Heng et al. (2007; Bokhorst-Heng, Rubdy, McKay, & Alsagoff, 2010) and Rubdy, McKay, Alsagoff, and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) drew on Higgins's work and replicated her study in the Singaporean context, drawing on both concepts of authority and legitimacy and taking linguistic ownership to be the extent to which speakers consider themselves as legitimate speakers who possess authority over the language. In both studies, the authors measured how much linguistic ownership speakers exercised by how confident they were when making an acceptability judgment – that is, whether or not speakers relied on their own knowledge of the language or exonormative language rules to do so. The authors both found that younger speakers were more confident in relying on their intuitions, as opposed to the older speakers who referred to exonormative language rules when making

their acceptability judgments. This suggests that younger speakers are more likely to view themselves as legitimate speakers who possess authority over the language.

While the results point towards positive developments of the English language in Singapore, defining *linguistic ownership* along the lines of legitimacy faces many of the same problems that the definition of ownership along the parameters of authority faces. One has legitimacy when one is recognised as lawful or valid by a set of laws or an authority. If one decides that an individual has *linguistic ownership* of a language only when he or she has legitimacy as a speaker of the language, this speaker necessarily requires the *approval* of an authority, or has to be seen to have met a set of criteria put forth by this authority. Who has the authority to accord legitimacy to another speaker? Can one confidently or even ethically claim to have authority over another speaker? As such, resting *linguistic ownership* on a theoretical foundation that includes elements of either legitimacy or authority does raise problems beyond language itself. In fact, Wee (2002) seems to have also alluded to the problematic nature of *linguistic ownership* along the lines to legitimacy or authority. In Wee's discussion of *linguistic ownership* with reference to the Eurasian community's claim of the English language as their mother tongue and the state's refusal of the claim, he states that the notion of ownership is simply 'a metaphor for reflecting the legitimate control that speakers may have over the development of a language' and when speakers claim ownership of a language, they are asserting 'a specific relationship' between themselves and the language (p. 283). This marks a useful point of departure for us to look further into what this specific relationship may look like.

As discussed, the two concepts, *linguistic insecurity*, and *linguistic ownership*, rest on a number of foundational beliefs. We have therefore put forward a set of conditions to test for linguistic insecurity and linguistic ownership in a speaker. This set of conditions is necessary because there has not been much work done in this area and certainly less done in Singapore. Furthermore, as far as we know, this set of conditions would be the first of any such attempts at laying out the conditions for these two concepts to be tested empirically. The conditions are, for the most part, adapted from what scholars have talked about with regard to these two concepts. What we have done though, is to combine the various perspectives and distil them into a series of statements. For a speaker to be classified as displaying *linguistic insecurity*, the following conditions have to be met:

(i) Speaker's sense/perceived inferiority of:
  I^1 – his/her own language abilities (Meyerhoff, 2006)
  I^2 – other speakers' (belonging to the same language community) language abilities (Hall et al., 2011)
  I^3 – the local variety of language spoken by his/her speech community (Mooney & Evans, 2015)

(ii) Speaker's sense/perceived superiority of:
  S^1 – the language abilities of speakers from another speech community that speaks the same language (Allard & Landry, 1998)
  S^2 – another variety of the language (Milroy & Milroy, 2002)

What we would like to add is that in the case that Conditions I^2, I^3, S^1 and S^2 are met while I^1 is not, the speaker can still be described as displaying linguistic insecurity, though this insecurity does not extend to his/herself.

Like what we did with *linguistic insecurity*, we also put forth a set of conditions to look at a speaker's exercise of their *linguistic ownership*. For the most part, the conditions are adapted from Higgins (2003), except that we have refrained from using the ideas of authority or legitimacy in our explication of *linguistic ownership*, since as discussed, how this can be deeply problematic. We prefer therefore to take linguistic ownership as the right of a speaker to use and manage the language in accordance with the nature and purpose of the language, in other words, their ability to exercise their linguistic ownership. In addition, we have also included the idea of identity construction to be an important aspect of linguistic ownership. This is with consideration to the fact that the English Language in Singapore has been long characterised as a purely instrumental language that allows Singaporeans access to the global economy and cannot fulfill a speaker's private linguistic needs, such as serving as a mother tongue or being used in a speaker's identity construction (Heng, 2012; Wee, 2002). For Singaporeans to effectively exercise their *linguistic ownership* therefore, their use of the language cannot purely be instrumental in nature, but must do some identity work, and we know how language

works in different ways to construct identity (Boxer, 2002; Davies, 2004; Morgan, 2014). For a speaker to be classified as having exercised their *linguistic ownership*, the following conditions have to be met:

(i) Ability:

  A^1 – the speaker is proficient in their variety of the language (Higgins, 2003)

(ii) Confidence: the speaker is confident

  C^1 – in their language use (that is, comfortable and competent in their use of their variety of language across different situations and interlocutors) (Higgins, 2003)

  C^2 – in their language judgment (that is, while the speaker may *refer* to external language references, he/she does not *defer* to them) (Higgins, 2003)

(iii) Identity: The language is part of their linguistic identity

  ID^1 – the language is used in the speaker's private domains (Boxer, 2002)

  ID^2 – the speaker identifies as a speaker of that variety of the language (Davies, 2004)

  ID^3 – the speaker feels that their speech community can be identified by that variety of the language (Morgan, 2014)

In the next section, we outline the situation of the English language in Singapore and show that linguistic insecurity and the lack of linguistic ownership have their roots in state language policies and narratives.

3 ⎸ ENGLISH IN SINGAPORE: A HISTORY OF INSECURITY?

The insecurity surrounding the English language in Singapore can be described as having been created by the Singaporean state. The current national narrative surrounding the English language in Singapore has been in production since the 1970′s, when the state seemingly observed the 'falling standards of English' in the nation and endeavoured to uncover its cause (Low, 2010, p. 232). It was at this point that the caricature of the typical Singaporean as a clumsy and inadequate English speaker emerged. This image has since been cemented into the public consciousness and employed as an imagined enemy in the state's battle against poor language standards. The rhetoric regarding the problem of 'poor' English reached its fever pitch at the turn of the millennium, when the Speak Good English Movement (henceforth SGEM) was launched. The SGEM is 'an annual media blitz of ministerial speeches, television features, radio programs, newspaper editorials, book releases, website launches, street banners and billboards, and Speak Good English contests', aimed at improving the standard of English used by Singaporeans (Liew, 2011, p. 115). It is in the creation of this movement that the narrative of linguistic insecurity was accorded political legitimacy and institutionalised. While the SGEM has always been adamant in maintaining that it is a bottom-up movement and not a campaign (Koh, 2006), most regard it to be a language campaign launched by the government, considering that most of the guests of honour at each year's SGEM launch have been ministers of state (Rappa & Wee, 2006; Velayutham, 2007). The SGEM concerns itself with helping Singaporeans speak 'good' English that is 'standard'. Thus, the theme of each year's SGEM is centred around a particular goal of language use that Singaporeans should strive towards, and examples of these goals include speaking internationally intelligible English, making the choice to use 'Standard' English, and being ambassadors of 'good' English (SGEM, 2018). Additionally, resources such as pronunciation guides, grammar rules and quizzes are provided. The key messages, and in fact, the very existence of the SGEM serve to reinforce the idea that Singaporeans are poor speakers of English, or they are speakers of an undesirable variety of English.

A discussion of English in Singapore cannot avoid the presence and impact of Singapore Colloquial English, or as it is more fondly known, Singlish. While the focus of this paper is not on Singlish, the state's vehement denouncement of Singlish as the main obstacle hindering Singaporeans from speaking 'good' English is an important tenet of the SGEM and the wider narrative surrounding English in Singapore. In fact, as Stroud and Wee (2012) point out, 'the state assumes that there are Singaporeans who are interacting entirely in Singlish because they are unable to speak the standard variety' (p. 13). Upon this assumption, the state is then able to construct the message that Singaporeans

must improve their English for their own good. When then is the state's ideal standard of English? The answer can be found in the very speech that launched the SGEM in the first place. In his 1999 National Day Rally, Singapore's then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong proclaimed to Singaporeans that 'to become an engineer, a technician, an accountant or a nurse, you must have standard English', which was 'a form of English that is understood by the British, Americans, Australians, and people around the world'. It is probably no coincidence that British, American, and Australian English were explicitly named. These are the varieties commonly known as the 'Inner Circle Englishes' (Kachru, 1985). This exonormative orientation towards the Inner Circle English-speaking countries is commonly displayed in the public sphere, be it in the form of ministerial proposals for native speakers to be hired as English Language teachers to newspaper forum letters espousing how Singaporeans should consume British media to better their English (The Straits Times, 2006; Teo, 2017). It is perhaps unsurprising that the state would look towards the British as the speakers of 'good English'. After all, Singapore was a British colony and it would naturally follow that the English language would continue to play a significant and prestigious role in the country. However, it is not just the British that have been identified as the speakers of 'good' English, other Inner Circle countries like the United States and Australia are regularly mentioned as the speakers of the ideal standard of English as well. This then makes it clear that the state appears to subscribe to the idea of a single linguistic norm provided by the Inner Circle that should be adhered to.

One of the crucial factors that allows the state to reinforce the narrative of linguistic insecurity is the native-non-native dichotomy. A lingering remnant of the outdated distinction of English as a Native Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries, the native-non-native dichotomy reinforces the division between 'native speakers' and 'foreign learners' and the implicit conferment of superiority onto the former (McArthur, 1998). The superiority stems from the assumption that 'native' speakers 'own' the English language by the virtue of it being their birthright and thus it is only they who have the authority over the language and by extension, the 'non-native' speakers of English (Hackert, 2012). This is where *linguistic ownership* enters as an important concept in the circumstances surrounding the English language in Singapore. By steadfastly claiming Singaporeans as 'non-native' speakers of English, the state is not only able to maintain that Singapore English and its speakers are inferior, it also simultaneously blocks any possible claim of linguistic ownership of English from Singaporeans. Indeed, both the state and SGEM has been careful to regularly remind Singaporeans in explicit and implicit public discourse of their status as supposed 'non-native' speakers of English (Iswaran, 2009; Koh, 2006; Lee, 2000). As such, it follows that Singaporean English speakers do not own the language and thus have no authority over it, which in turn is a key justification used by the state to condemn any local linguistic innovation and/or indigenisation in the English language as 'bad' English.

The state's denial of linguistic ownership of English to the people has been consistent and unchanging throughout Singapore's modern history. In its earliest conception, it was achieved via the state's characterisation of the English language as a language that as inherently loaded with Western culture and values and can only be used as a language for pragmatic purposes, while Asian languages such as Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil will be the languages more suited for the population (Lee, 1967). This serves to conflate the language with a population of speakers, and what this also implies is that English cannot be owned by Singaporeans, who are in essence non-Western. It is clear that the message from Singaporean state regarding English and its speakers in Singapore is that the speakers are 'non-native' speakers inferior to the 'native' speakers. The brand of *linguistic insecurity* seen here is markedly different from the *linguistic insecurity* that has been studied by Labov and others. The Labovian type of *linguistic insecurity* is almost always propagated by the speakers themselves, who are motivated by their perceived inferiority. Comparatively, the kind of *linguistic insecurity* seen in Singapore is one that is created by the state and imposed onto the people through a narrative that includes many of the elements of both *linguistic insecurity* and *linguistic ownership* discussed thus far. It is apparent that there is an intimate relationship between *linguistic insecurity* and *linguistic ownership*, and this relationship, as we have highlighted, is one that has yet to receive any academic attention thus far. While we have shown that the state has a hand in creating a discourse of insecurity and lack of ownership, it is unclear if these sentiments are felt and reflected in the way the Singaporean community uses English. How much impact does this state narrative have on the people of Singapore and their linguistic attitudes and behaviours towards the English language? Do Singaporeans suffer from linguistic insecurity, and to what extent do they exhibit linguistic ownership of English?

4 | DATA COLLECTION

To test for the presence of linguistic insecurity in a speaker and the degree to which they exercise linguistic ownership, a questionnaire was designed using the set of conditions detailed earlier. The questionnaire method was chosen as large numbers of respondents were needed in order to reliably identify general trends. Excluding biographical questions, the questionnaire contained a total of 37 questions, which included questions about speakers' language repertoire, English language use in both private and public domains, their attitudes of English and speakers of English, and their perception of English-based policies and education in Singapore. These questions were not framed in the set of conditions as outlined above, so as to avoid priming the participants. The questions were however designed to elicit responses to the conditions for linguistic insecurity and linguistic ownership. The questionnaire was administered online through the use of online form website Typeform to collect for ease of dissemination and data collection. Respondents were solicited through the authors' networks and passed on through word-of-mouth and recommendation. Participants were compensated upon completion of the questionnaire. The data was collected over a period of 5 months in 2016. Due to the exploratory nature of this study and the difficulty in obtaining respondents, the nonprobability sampling technique snowball sampling was utilised. Potential respondents were first identified in the population and recruited due to their proximity to the researchers. After which, these respondents were asked to recruit others in their social circle.

There was a total of 287 respondents. All respondents were either Chinese Singaporeans or Chinese Permanent Residents. We decided to focus only on the Chinese community in Singapore as it forms the largest group in Singapore at over 75% of the population (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2016), and while not necessarily generalisable to the other two ethnic groups, the results obtained would serve to sufficiently represent the state of linguistic insecurity and linguistic ownership of a large portion of the population. As this is the first such study, we also wanted to control ethnicity and language backgrounds as possible variables. There were only two other criteria that respondents had to meet in order to qualify as suitable respondents to the questionnaire: education level and age. All speakers were required to have obtained a minimum qualification of a Singapore-Cambridge GCE O-level to ensure that they have received at least ten years of English-medium education, thereby ensuring sufficient exposure to the language, thus skewing the sample towards better educated Chinese Singaporeans. Only the effects of cohort on the questionnaire results were considered during data analysis. The reasons for setting the two criteria and for only considering the effects of one social variable in data analysis are the same. The age criterion was set as this paper only concerns itself with English language policy post-Independence. Therefore, we only looked for participants who enrolled in the primary education system after the 1966 English-knowing bilingual education policy was launched. The respondents were then grouped into two cohorts: respondents born before 1980 (henceforth labelled as Group 1) and respondents born during and after 1980 (labelled as Group 2). Of the 287 respondents, 75 were in Group 1, and 212 in Group 2. This division was motivated by one momentous change in English language policy during the year 1987. In 1987, English become the language of instruction across the national school system and respondents who began their primary education at the age of 7 during and after this year form Group 2 (Vaish & Teck, 2008).

5 | DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, we present the results of the questionnaire according to the conditions for *linguistic insecurity* and *linguistic ownership* as we set forth above.

5.1 | Linguistic insecurity

Condition I^1: *speaker's sense of inferiority in own linguistic ability*

TABLE 1 Average rating of perceived self-proficiency in English from each group of respondents

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Total
Group 1	7.43	7.33	7.33	7.04	7.28
Group 2	8.67	8.04	8.42	7.67	8.20

For respondents to be classified as displaying linguistic insecurity, the first condition is that they must perceive their own linguistic ability to be lacking. To do this, participants were asked to rate their English proficiency on a scale of 1 (elementary) to 10 (full mastery) in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Table 1 shows the average rating of perceived proficiency in the four language areas from each group of respondents.

As can be seen, both groups of participants are self-assured of their proficiency in English across listening, speaking, reading and writing, and they average across all four areas at 7.28 ($SD = 1.76$) out of a score of 10 for Group 1 and 8.20 ($SD = 1.17$) at Group 2. This suggests that the education policy change in 1987 designating English as the medium of instruction has had an impact on reducing the linguistic insecurity experienced by Singaporeans. Going by Condition I^1, the respondents do not display linguistic insecurity as they do not perceive their linguistic ability to be lacking.

Condition I^2: *speaker's sense/perceived inferiority of other speakers' (belonging to the same language community) language abilities*

Condition S^1: *speaker's sense/perceived superiority of the language abilities of speakers from another speech community that speaks the same language*

As defined earlier, linguistic insecurity is not just the perceived inferiority of one language variety and its speakers in and of itself, this perceived inferiority must occur in conjunction with the perceived superiority of another variety of the same language and its speakers. This means that respondents must fulfil both conditions in order to be classified as displaying linguistic insecurity. Thus, Conditions I^2 and S^1 will be discussed in tandem. There are four questions in the questionnaire that can elicit these two conditions. Each serves to determine the respondents' perception of the language abilities of speakers in two speech communities: (1) the Singaporean English-speaking speech community and (2) other English-speaking speech communities around the world.[1] This revealed the extent to which the respondents view the speakers in the various speech communities as inferior and/or superior.

The first question asks the participants to rate the average standard of English spoken in seven countries: United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, India, China, Vietnam. Figure 1 shows the respondents' average rating of the perceived standard of English in various countries on a scale of 1 (elementary) to 10 (full mastery). The nations are exemplars of the Inner, Outer and Expanding Circles.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the two countries typically regarded as belonging to the Inner Circle – the United Kingdom and Australia – are rated as having the highest standard of English amongst the countries. More importantly, respondents rate the standard of English in the United Kingdom ($M = 8.66, SD = 1.22$) as higher than the standard of English in Singapore ($M = 8.20, SD = 1.34$). This shows that respondents not only regard English in Singapore as inferior (Condition I^2), they also believe in the superiority of other speakers of English (Condition S^1), and in this case, of the 'Inner Circle' varieties.

Besides the above question, a series of Likert scale questions paired with statements regarding English in Singapore were designed to determine respondents' perception of the standard of English in Singapore and test for Conditions I^2 and S^1. The statements are as follows:

1. The standard of English in Singapore can be/should be improved.
2. The Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) is a necessary campaign in improving the standard of English in Singapore.
3. Employing native speakers as English language educators will help improve the standard of English in Singapore.
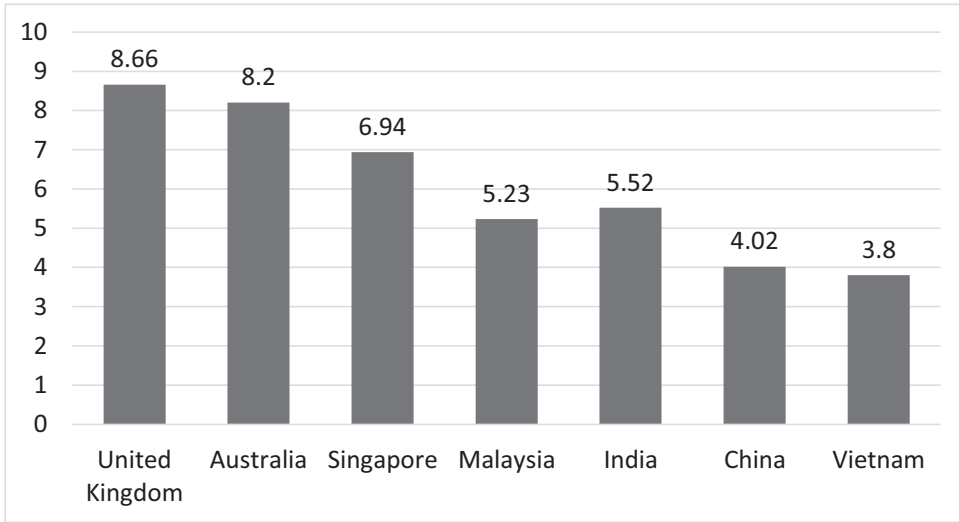
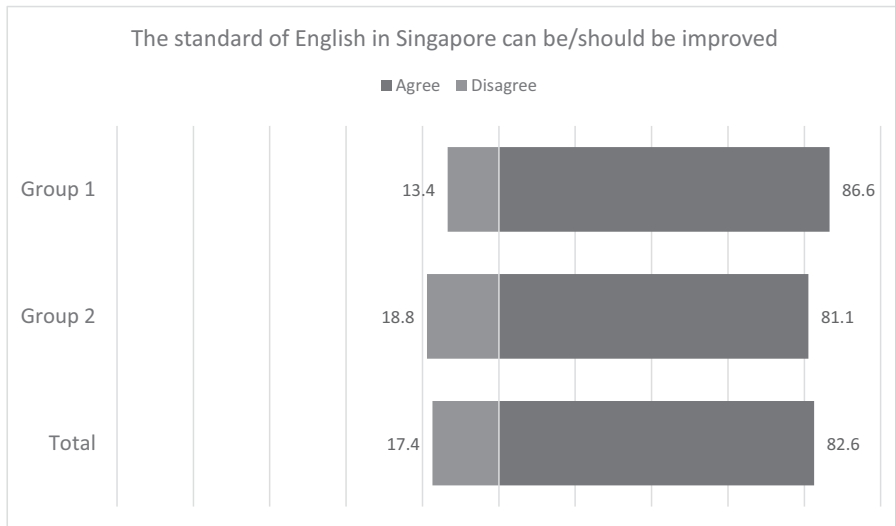**FIGURE 1**   Respondents' average rating of English language standards across various countries

FIGURE 2   Percentage of respondents that disagreed or agreed with the statement 'The standard of English in Singapore can be/should be improved'

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The mean levels of agreement to each of the three statements are presented in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

For the first statement, the respondents average a level of agreement of 4.44 out of 6. This overall high level of agreement from the respondents shows that they view the English language standards in Singapore to be low and can be improved, thus fulfilling Condition I[2]. To Statement 2 on the necessity of the SGEM, respondents have a slightly lower mean level of agreement of 3.48 to the statement. In consideration of the high level of agreement to Statement 1, this comparatively lower level of agreement to this statement is more likely due to the respondents' perception of the SGEM than the English language standards in Singapore. However, when presented with Statement 3, the respondents average a level of agreement of 3.90. This relatively high level of agreement points towards the fact that the respondents perceive 'native' speakers to have superior language abilities. However, this is not equally true across the two groups, as illustrated in Figure 2. Group 1 respondents agree with the statement ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.02$) more than
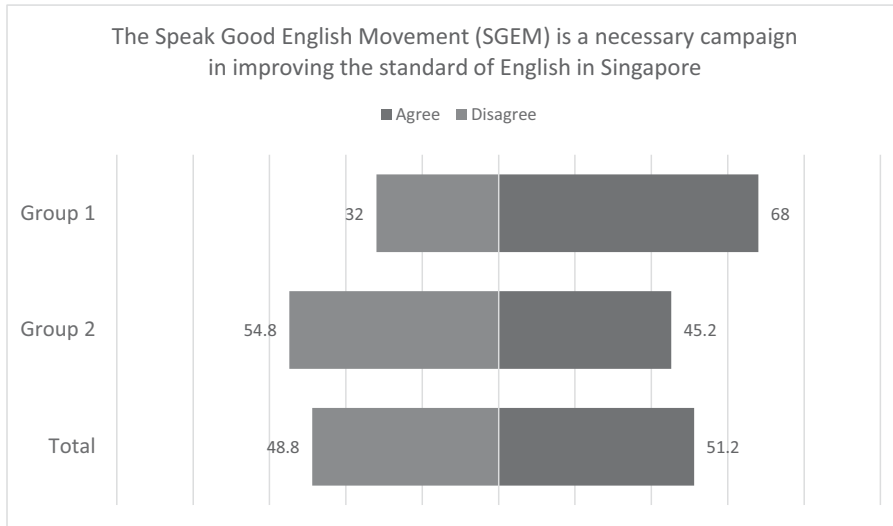
FIGURE 3 Percentage of respondents that disagreed or agreed with the statement 'The Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) is a necessary campaign in improving the standard of English in Singapore'
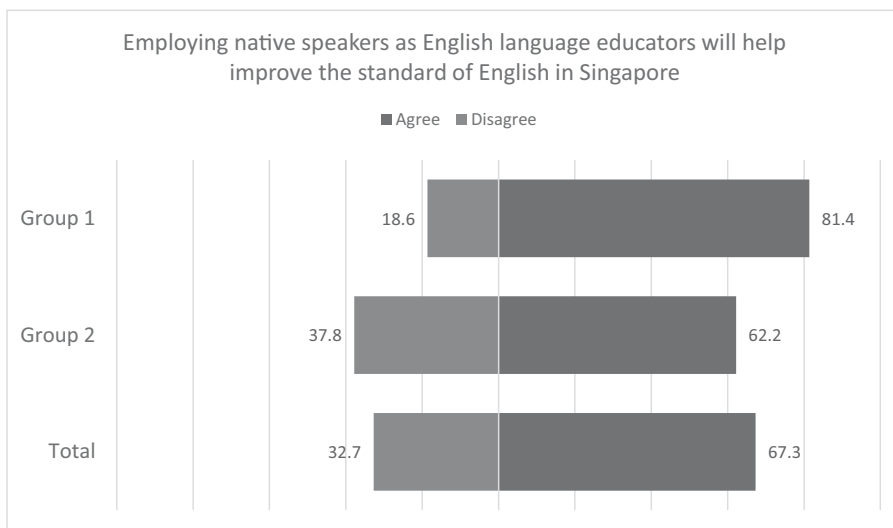

FIGURE 4 Percentage of respondents that disagreed or agreed with the statement 'Employing native speakers as English language educators will help improve the standard of English in Singapore'

Group 2 respondents ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.30$). This raises the possibility that Group 2 respondents are less linguistically insecure than Group 1 respondents. The above has demonstrated that the respondents have met both Conditions I^2 and S^1 and thus can be classified as displaying linguistic insecurity.

Condition I^3: *speaker's sense/perceived inferiority of the local variety of language spoken by his/her speech community*

Condition S^2: *speaker's sense/perceived superiority of another variety of the language*

For the same reasons as those detailed above, the results pertaining to Conditions I^3 and S^2 will be discussed concurrently. There are four questions asked to elicit responses to these two conditions. The questions were designed to

TABLE 2 The ideal variety of English to be spoken in Singapore

	Group 1	Group 2	Total
British English	34.7%	14.2%	19.5%
American English	2.7%	2.4%	2.4%
British English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary)	36.0%	42.0%	40.4%
American English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary)	4.0%	3.8%	3.8%
A standard Singapore variety of English (local accent and local vocabulary)	21.3%	34.9%	31.4%
Others	1.3%	2.8%	2.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	(N = 75)	(N = 212)	(N = 287)

TABLE 3 The ideal variety of English that should be taught in Singapore classrooms

	Group 1	Group 2	Total
British English	57.3%	38.7%	43.6%
American English	5.3%	24.2%	4.5%
British English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary)	25.3%	41.0%	36.9%
American English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary)	2.7%	4.2%	3.8%
A standard Singapore variety of English (local accent and local vocabulary)	9.3%	10.4%	10.1%
Others	0.0%	1.4%	1.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	(N = 75)	(N = 212)	(N = 287)

uncover what variety of English the respondents viewed as superior (Condition S[2]) and whether or not they viewed Singapore English as inferior (Condition I[3]). The first question presented five varieties of English to the respondents:

1. British English;
2. American English;
3. British English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary);
4. American English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary); and
5. a Singapore variety of English (local accent and local vocabulary).

Respondents were asked which of the five varieties of English is the ideal and should be spoken in Singapore. Their responses are presented in Table 2. Of the respondents, 66.4% feel that some form of an Inner Circle variety of English should be spoken in Singapore. Although 31.5% of the respondents indicate that the local variety of English is ideal, it is clear that the majority feel that an Inner Circle variety of English (or a variety modelled after it) is preferred, and thus is the variety that should be spoken in Singapore.

The next question is of a similar nature. The breakdown of the responses to this question are in Table 3. Respondents were asked which of the five varieties of English they felt should be taught in school, and here, a high 88.8% of respondents feel that some form of an Inner Circle variety of English should be taught in schools, while only 10.1% support the local variety.

It must also be noted that there is an overwhelming preference for British English or a form of it, demonstrating clearly which Inner Circle nation specifically Singaporeans are exonormatively oriented to.

Besides eliciting responses regarding the ideal variety of English, questions were designed to uncover the respondents' attitude towards the local variety of English. Respondents were presented with two hypothetical situations: (1) a public speaker in a formal setting (for example, someone being interviewed for the news) and (2) a speaker on a mass
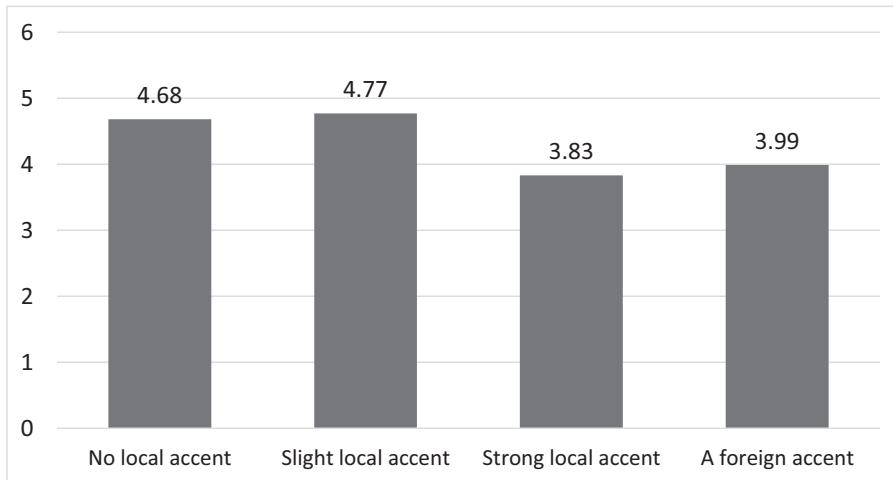
FIGURE 5 Respondents' levels of acceptance of the various accents

media platform (for example, a newscaster). They were then asked to report their acceptance of the following accents on public platforms on a scale of 1 (not acceptable at all) to 6 (totally acceptable):

- no local accent;
- a slight local accent;
- a strong local accent; and
- a foreign accent

Broadly defined as a 'regional or social variation in pronunciation' (Holmes & Wilson, 2017, p. 501), a speaker's accent can identify him or her to other speakers as a member of a speech community and serve as evidence of the shared variety of language. Therefore, the respondents' acceptance of the local accent on public platforms can serve as an indication of their perception of the local variety of English.

The respondents' acceptance of the varying accents is presented in Figure 5. Clearly, participants prefer to have either no local accent or slight local accent to a foreign accent on public platforms. A paired samples t-test reveals that the respondents significantly prefer the speakers to have no local accent ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.03$) or a slight local accent ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 0.87$) over a foreign accent ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.25$).

However, that does not mean that the respondents have a positive perception of the local variety of English. A paired samples t-test shows that the respondents significantly prefer the speakers to have no local accent ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.03$) or a slight local accent ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 0.87$) over a strong local accent ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.15$). Such results indicate that the respondents do not like an overt marker of the local variety of English, which is likely due to a negative perception of it.

Still on accents, Figure 6 shows the respondents' average level of acceptability of the various accents. The trend of Group 2 respondents displaying less linguistic insecurity than their older counterparts in Group 1 can also be seen in the responses to this question. Group 2 respondents ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 0.83$) are more accepting of a slight local accent than their Group 1 counterparts ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.88$). Additionally, Group 2 respondents ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.11$) are also more accepting of a strong local accent than Group 1 respondents ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.21$).

The findings in this section demonstrate that the respondents not only view Inner Circle Englishes, specifically British English, as a superior ideal that should be adopted in Singapore, they also feel that the local variety of English is inferior, thereby fulfilling both Conditions I[3] and S[2]. In summary, the results presented this section have shown that respondents have fulfilled all the conditions to qualify as displaying linguistic insecurity, except for Condition I[1].
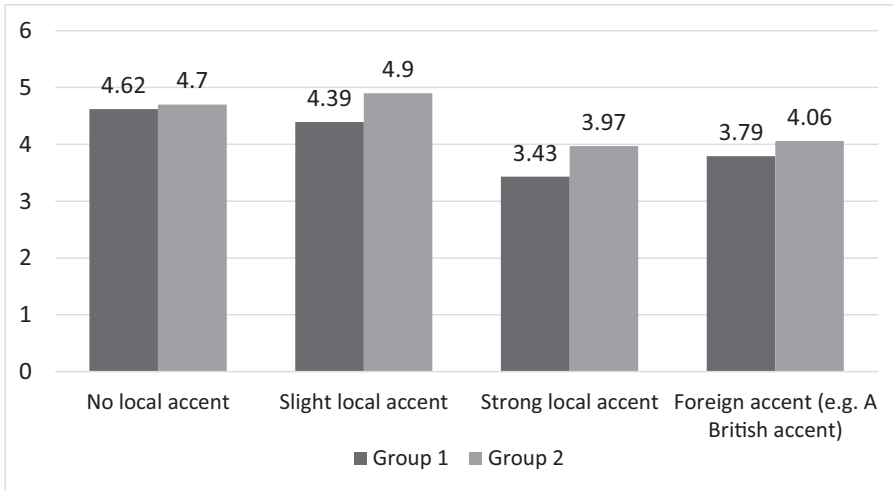
FIGURE 6 The two respondent groups' levels of acceptance of the various accents

Although they do not perceive themselves to have poor proficiency in English, they perceive other Singaporean speakers' as lacking in language ability while viewing the so-called 'native' speakers to be superior. Similarly, they also view the variety of English spoken here in Singapore as inferior to the varieties of English spoken in Inner Circle nations. That said, it has also been shown that younger respondents are less linguistically insecure than older respondents, which points towards the significant impact the shift to English as the MOI in Singaporean classrooms had. This will be further discussed in the Discussion section. In the next subsection, we present the findings relating to the conditions for a speaker's linguistic ownership.

5.2 | Linguistic ownership

Condition A[1] – the speaker is proficient in their variety of the language

The first condition that a speaker needs to fulfill in order to exercise their linguistic ownership is to be proficient in their variety of the language. As discussed above in Condition I[1], the respondents have rated their own language proficiency a fairly high 7.96 out of 10 when asked to rate their language proficiency across four language areas. While some may argue these numbers are based on self-reporting and are a result of the respondents' perception of their proficiency, there is some evidence to show that the average Singaporean's proficiency in English is even higher than what one might be led to believe from the respondents' self-reporting. In the most recent 2017 Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) test – the most recognised measure of 'non-native' speakers' English proficiency – students from Singapore obtained a score of 97 out of a possible 100 (Educational Testing Service, 2018). Another international measure of English language proficiency, the Education First English Proficiency Index (EF-EPI), labelled Singapore was as having 'Very High Proficiency' in English, ranking fifth out of 80 countries around the world (Education First, 2018). While such tests are not representative of the population as a whole due to the lack of demographic information of the candidates who take them (Bolton, 2008), they provide at least some documented information on Singaporeans' proficiency in English. From this, it can be inferred that many Singaporeans are proficient English speakers, which provides concrete support for Condition A[1].

Condition C[1]: *the speaker is confident in their language use (i.e. comfortable and competent in their use of their variety of language across different situations and interlocutors)*

For this condition, respondents were asked how confident they would feel on a scale of 1 (not confident at all) to 6 (very confident) speaking English in a number of hypothetical conversations:
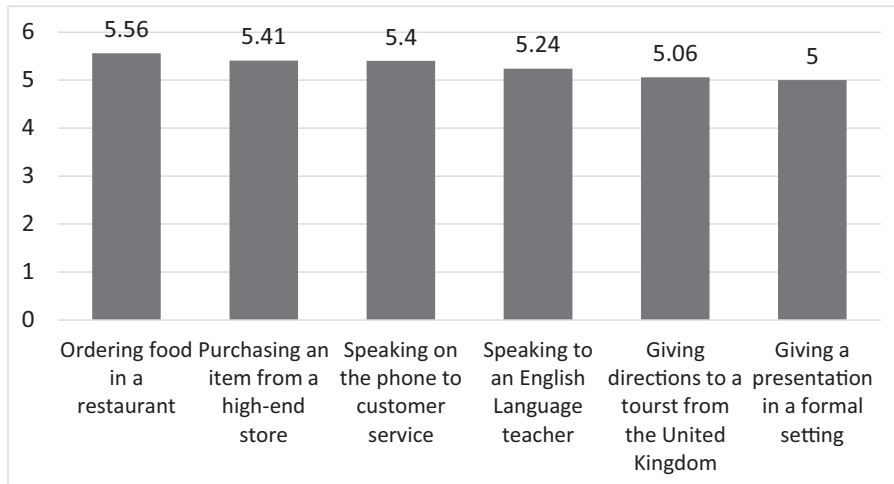
FIGURE 7 Respondents' average level of confidence in speaking English in various situations

1. ordering food in a restaurant;
2. purchasing an item from high-end store;
3. speaking on the phone to customer service;
4. speaking to an English language teacher;
5. giving a presentation in a formal setting; and
6. giving directions to a tourist from the United Kingdom.

As can be clearly seen in Figure 7, the respondents report remarkably high levels of confidence across the various situations. While the respondents' average confidence in their use of English across the first three situations is considerably high, there are two situations in which they present significantly lower averages. Compared to the first three situations, the respondents' show a lower average confidence level of 5.24 ($SD = 0.95$) when speaking to an English Language teacher. Similarly, the respondents also reported a lower average confidence level of 5.06 ($SD = 0.98$) when giving directions to a tourist from the United Kingdom. These findings align with those relating to linguistic insecurity discussed earlier, that is, the respondents' lower levels of confidence in these two situations are most likely due to their linguistic insecurity. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the respondents' average confidence levels across all six situations is a 5 out of 6. This shows that respondents are definitely confident in their language use across a range of situations and have fulfilled Condition C^1.

Condition C^2: *the speaker is confident in their language judgment (i.e. while the speaker may refer to external language references, he/she does not defer to them)*

Condition C^2 is concerned with whether or not speakers are self-assured in their knowledge of the language. If a speaker consistently submits to the authority of the language knowledge contained in resources such as dictionaries or defers to other users of the language, they cannot be described as exercising their linguistic ownership. Thus, a number of questions were designed to elicit if respondents would refer to the various language resources and defer to other speakers over their own language knowledge and/or judgment. The first question asked respondents how likely they were to refer to the following language resources:

- Oxford English Dictionary;
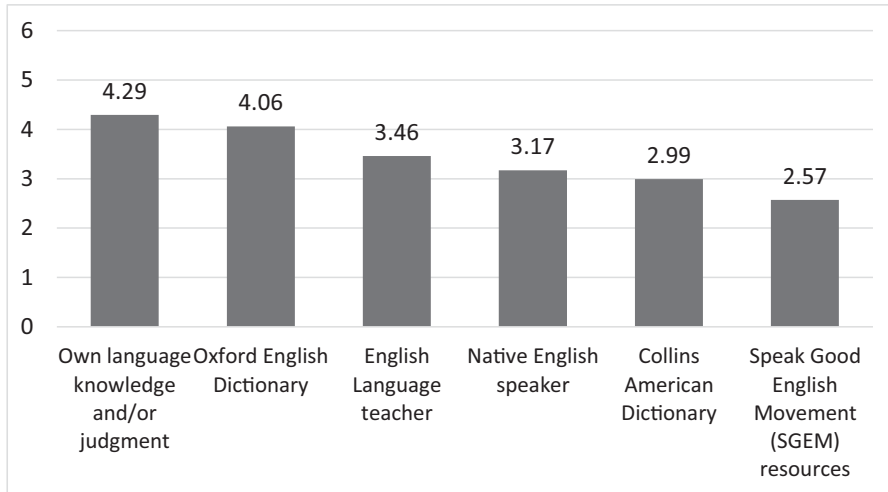- Collins American Dictionary;

FIGURE 8 Likelihood of respondents referencing the various language resources

- English Language teacher;
- native English speaker;
- Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) resources; and
- own language knowledge and/or judgment.

Figure 8 shows the average likelihood that respondents would refer to the following language resources. Respondents are more likely to rely on their own language knowledge and/or judgment ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.12$) when the need arises as compared to the Oxford English dictionary ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.39$), Collins American Dictionary ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.22$), an English Language teacher ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.34$), the knowledge and/or judgment of a 'native' English speaker ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.33$), and SGEM resources ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.37$). Respondents were also presented with questions that required them to make acceptability judgments:

1. Do you feel that the sentence 'Every time we go to the movies, my father bought popcorn for us' is problematic?
2. If asked to judge the grammaticality of the sentence 'Every time we go to the movies, my father bought popcorn for us', how likely are you to refer to the following resources?
   - grammar rules;
   - English language teacher;
   - native English speaker;
   - Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) resources; and
   - own language knowledge and/or judgment.
3. If someone were to pronounce the word *children* as 'cheew-ren', would you find it problematic?
4. If asked for the pronunciation of 'children', how likely are you to refer to the following resources?
   - pronunciation guide in dictionaries;
   - English language teacher;
   - native English speaker;
   - Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) resources;
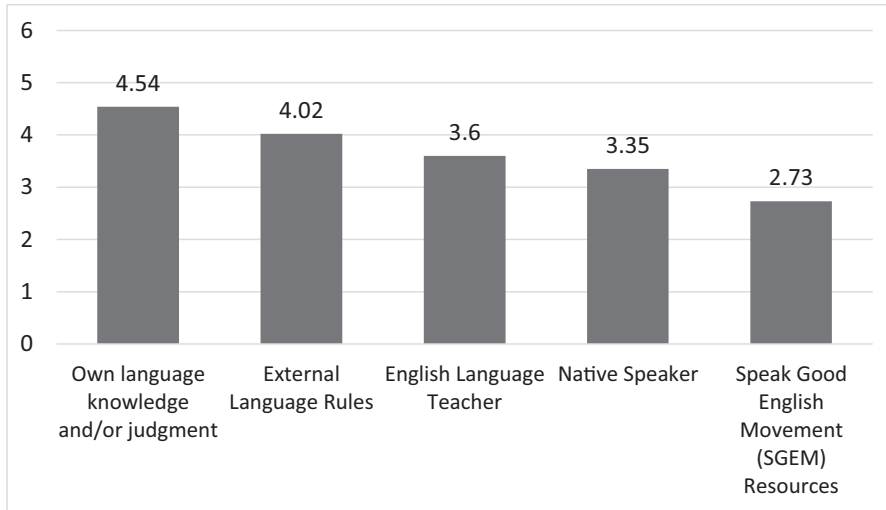   - own language knowledge and/or judgment.

FIGURE 9 Likelihood of respondents referencing the various language resources when asked to make an acceptability judgment
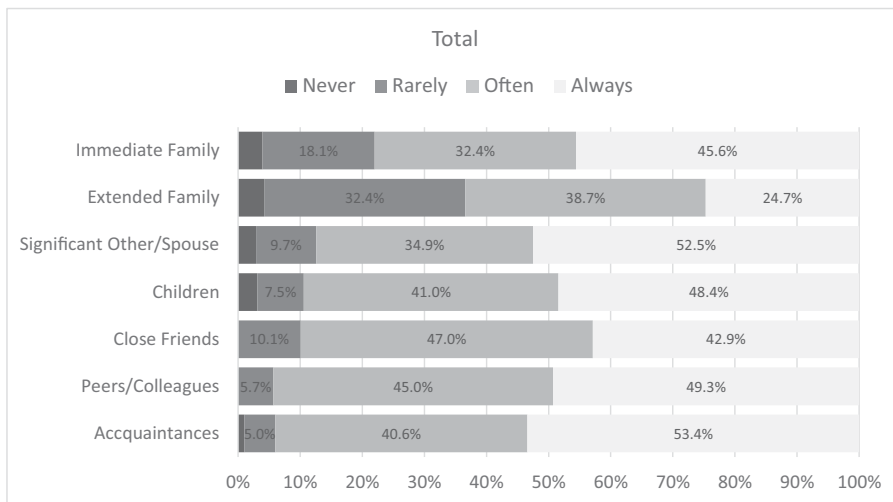

FIGURE 10 Respondents' frequency of English-use in various social circles

The scores were averaged, and the results are shown in Figure 9. The respondents are significantly more likely to base their acceptability judgments on their own linguistic knowledge and/or judgment ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.12$) than external language rules ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.25$), reference to an English Language teacher ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.33$), the knowledge and/or judgment of a 'native' English speaker ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.30$), and the SGEM resources ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.45$). Going by Condition C^2, respondents are exercising their linguistic ownership.

Condition ID[1]: *the language is used in the speaker's private domains*

Condition ID[1] tests if a language serves more than an instrumental purpose for a speaker, that is, a speaker would use this language in private domains even there is no necessity or benefit. Figure 10 shows that respondents use English in their private domains with high frequency, though perhaps slightly less frequently with extended family.

TABLE 4 The variety of English spoken by respondents

	Group 1	Group 2	Total
British English	20.0%	1.9%	6.6%
American English	1.3%	0.5%	0.7%
British English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary)	30.7%	28.8%	29.3%
American English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary)	4.0%	8.0%	7.0%
A standard Singapore variety of English (local accent and local vocabulary)	44.0%	59.0%	55.1%
Others	0.0%	1.9%	1.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	(N = 75)	(N = 212)	(N = 287)

This finding is not a surprise, and in fact corroborates with Tan (2014), whose study unveils the extensive use of English in Singaporean Chinese speakers' private domains. The General Household Survey, conducted in 2015, also shows that 37.4% of the Singapore Chinese population aged 5 and above currently use English as their home language (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2010). This number will only go on to increase as Singaporeans who grow up with English as their home language will continue to do so in the future with their own children. It is clear from here that Condition ID[1] is met.

Condition ID[2]: the speaker identifies as a speaker of that variety of the language

As part of another condition for linguistic ownership, besides using the language in their private domains, a speaker also has to identify himself/herself as a speaker of the variety of language they want to exercise linguistic ownership of. To determine if the respondents identify as speakers of the local variety of English in Singapore, they were presented with five varieties of English:

- British English;
- American English;
- British English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary);
- American English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary); and
- a Singapore variety of English (local accent and local vocabulary).

They were then asked to indicate which variety of English they speak. The results are presented in Table 4. Slightly more than half of the respondents (55.1%) indicate that they speak 'a standard Singapore variety of English' with local accent and vocabulary, and 36.3% of the respondents believe that they speak either British or American English, but with local accent and vocabulary. From this, we can say that they have fulfilled Condition ID[2], and are thus exercising linguistic ownership.

Condition ID[3]: the speaker feels that their speech community can be identified by that variety of the language

Beyond an individual identifying as a speaker of a variety of language, it is also important that there is a larger community that they belong to. Thus, the questions testing for Condition ID[3] are concerned with the extent to which respondents regard the English spoken in Singapore as distinct from the other Englishes spoken around the world. A series of Likert scale questions paired with statements regarding English in Singapore were designed to determine the extent to which the respondents view the English spoken in Singapore as unique. The statements are as follows:

1. 'The accent of a Singaporean English speaker is immediately identifiable'
2. 'The English spoken in Singapore is different from the English spoken in other countries'
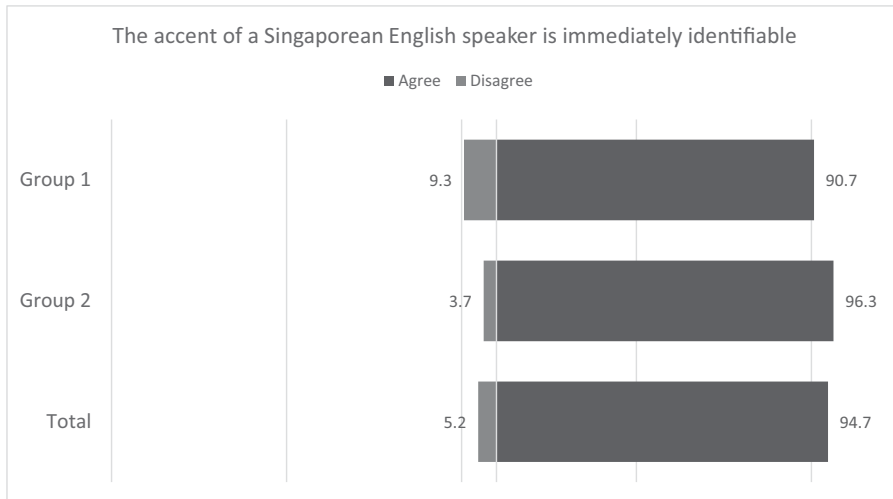
FIGURE 11   Percentage of respondents that disagreed or agreed with the statement 'The accent of a Singaporean English speaker is immediately identifiable'
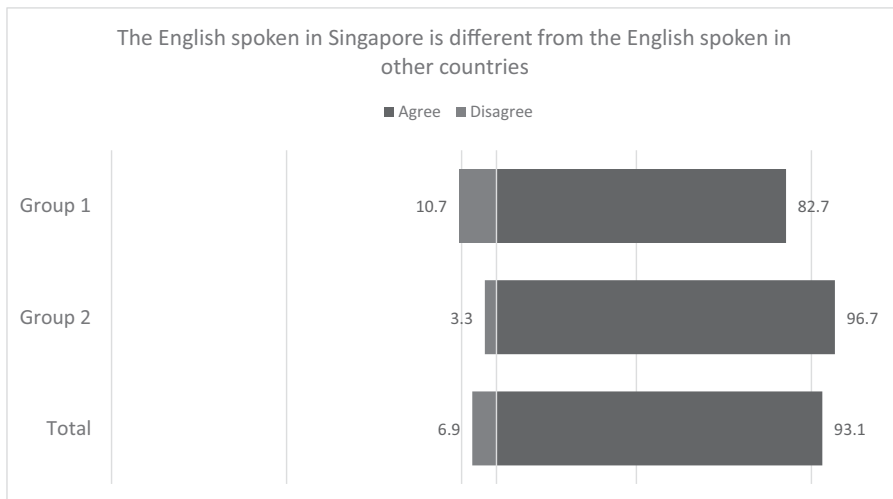

FIGURE 12   Percentage of respondents that disagreed or agreed with the statement 'The English spoken in Singapore is different from the English spoken in other countries'

3. 'English in Singapore is a distinct variety of English with local vocabulary and accent'

The respondents were then asked to rate their agreement with the statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The mean levels of agreement to each of the three statements can be seen in Figures 11, 12, and 13.

The respondents' high mean level of agreement to Statement 1 indicates that the respondents perceive the variety of English spoken by a Singaporean English speaker to be a distinct variety. This is further supported by the high levels of agreement from respondents to the following two statements showing that they definitely view English in Singapore as separate from the other Englishes around the world. Here, it is increasingly apparent that the respondents are aware that the English in Singapore is a variety of English different from either British English or American English, thus fulfilling Condition ID[3]. The results presented in Table 5 provide yet the strongest evidence. Of the respondents, 70.7% identify the English spoken in Singapore to be a 'standard Singapore variety of English with a local accent and a local vocabulary'.
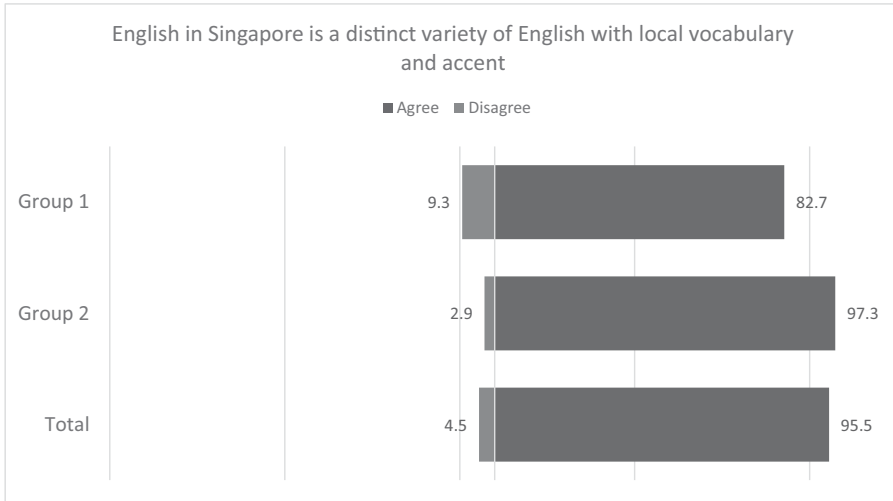
FIGURE 13 Percentage of respondents that disagreed or agreed with the statement 'English in Singapore is a distinct variety of English with local vocabulary and accent'

TABLE 5 Respondents' characterization of the English spoken in Singapore

	Group 1	Group 2	Total
British English	13.3%	1.4%	4.5%
American English	1.3%	0.0%	0.3%
British English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary)	26.7%	17.9%	20.2%
American English with Singaporean features (local accent and some local vocabulary)	4.0%	2.8%	3.1%
A standard Singapore variety of English (local accent and local vocabulary)	53.3%	76.9%	70.7%
Others	1.3%	0.9%	1.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	(N = 75)	(N = 212)	(N = 287)

A notable observation is that 40% of Group 1 respondents think of the English in Singapore as some form of British English. However, given that Group 1 respondents probably experienced the Singapore education system during a time when the education policy dictated that Received Pronunciation be taught in Singapore classrooms (Gupta, 2010), it is likely their English Language education has caused these respondents to permanently associate English with the British. Despite this, it is clear from the above that the majority of respondents feel that their speech community can be identified by that variety of the language, thereby fulfilling Condition ID[3].

6 | DISCUSSION

Based on the testing of the various conditions for *linguistic insecurity* and *linguistic ownership*, the results lead us to two conclusions: (1) Singaporeans are linguistically insecure; and (2) Singaporeans have linguistic ownership of English. Table 6 provides a summary of the conditions and if the respondents have met them.

At first glance, the conclusions seem contradictory. If a speaker exercises their linguistic ownership of a language, it should be unlikely, and in fact, maybe even impossible, for them to experience linguistic insecurity. After all, if the speaker is proficient in the language and believes that they possess the right to use and manage the language in accordance with the nature and purpose of the language, they would not be exonormatively oriented to another variety of

TABLE 6 Respondents' fulfillment of the various conditions

	Condition	Met
Linguistic insecurity	I^1: Speaker's sense/perceived inferiority of his/her own language abilities	✗
	I^2: Speaker's sense/perceived inferiority of other speakers' (belonging to the same language community) language abilities	✓
	I^3: Speaker's sense/perceived inferiority of the local variety of language spoken by his/her speech community	✓
	S^1: Speaker's sense/perceived superiority of the language abilities of speakers from another speech community that speaks the same language	✓
	$S2$: Speaker's sense/perceived superiority of another variety of the language	✓
Linguistic ownership	A^1: The speaker is proficient in their variety of the language	✓
	C^1: The speaker is confident in their language use (i.e. comfortable and competent in their use of their variety of language across different situations and interlocutors)	✓
	$C2$: The speaker is confident in their language judgment (i.e. while the speaker may *refer* to external language references, he/she does not *defer* to them)	✓
	ID^1: The language is used in the speaker's private domains	✓
	ID^2: The speaker identifies as a speaker of that variety of the language	✓
	ID^3: The speaker feels that their speech community can be identified by that variety of the language	✓

the language, and neither would they regard other speakers' language abilities as superior to their own. It is also bizarre that Singaporeans are linguistically insecure about the language, and their fellow speakers' linguistic abilities, but yet feeling very secure about their own language proficiency (Condition I^1). This is clearly a paradox, and this paradox can be explained by what the state says and does with the English language.

As detailed earlier, the state has been relentless in their production of the narrative that Singaporeans are poor non-native English speakers. A language campaign built on the aforementioned idea is a yearly affair. Prominent members of the government often touch on the need for Singaporeans to improve their English in public speeches. News articles and commentary pieces on the deplorable English language standards in the nation are commonplace in mass media. What the state has been *saying* is that English is not a language that Singaporeans use well. Yet the state *does* plenty with the English language. English has been institutionalised in the nation to the highest and widest degree. English is the official working language of Singapore. The state characterises English as the language of science, technology and the global economy, giving it linguistic capital (Alsagoff, 2010; Heng, 2012). English is also the medium of instruction in education and has been so for the past 30 years. Furthermore, the English language is seen as a neutral inter-ethnic lingua franca that allows for communication between all Singaporeans while avoiding the privileging of any one racial group over another (Heng, 2012). This divergence between state discourse and language policy creates an odd linguistic situation. A typical Singaporean Chinese English speaker enters the nation's education system at the primary or even the preschool level. While he or she may have spoken another language at home, they are then immersed in an English-speaking environment. If he or she speaks English as a home language, as a growing proportion of Singaporeans do, it is an extension of the linguistic environment they are already comfortable in. English as the dominant language – or in fact, the only language save for rare occasions – will be a state of affairs that remains unchanged as they advance through the various pathways available to them in the education system. Once this speaker enters the working world, he or she will continue to use English in public and private domains. If this speaker becomes a parent, he or she will ensure that their child is a proficient English speaker, given the linguistic capital the language possesses. Thus, the majority of Singaporeans now would have either experienced a major language shift to English during their youth or would have been born into an English-speaking family to become proficient English speakers themselves. In fact, there is a growing number of Singaporeans who are native English speakers by technical definition (Low, 2015).

Here, the underlying reasons for the difference in the experience of linguistic insecurity and exercise of linguistic ownership between younger and older respondents now becomes clear. This is another notable finding from our survey: younger respondents are consistently more secure in their English language use than their older counterparts. The younger respondents are likely to be Singaporean Chinese who were born into an English-speaking family and are therefore more self-assured English speakers. More importantly, what this gulf between rhetoric and policy translates into is precisely the findings of this paper: a Singaporean English speaker who exercises their linguistic ownership of English and is secure in their use of the language, but perceives other Singaporeans as poor speakers of English. It is clear that the typical Singaporean, through the mechanisms of the state's own language policy, is moulded into a highly competent English speaker. However, he or she is also inundated with the message that Singaporeans are poor English speakers on a constant basis through a myriad of channels. The speaker is likely self-assured in their abilities as an English speaker and knows that he or she is not one of the poor English speakers being described. It then follows that other Singaporeans are the poor speakers that the state is describing. The result is then a speaker who is secure in their use of the language and exercises ownership of the language, but feels that the other speakers in their community are inferior to himself/herself. The perceived poor language ability of the other speakers in the community therefore also gives birth to the misconception that there exists an equally inadequate variety of English that is inferior to the English that is spoken by speakers of the Inner Circle nations. This is an unusual form of artificial linguistic insecurity, one not borne from the internal psyche of the speakers themselves, but one that has been administered to them through external discourse.

The linguistic insecurity documented in this study can perhaps be said to be a new species of an old animal. Conventional linguistic insecurity, such as the one first documented by Labov (2006) and later observed in other communities (Owens & Baker, 1984; Preston, 2013), typically operates along social lines, and that is, speakers who are linguistically insecure view speakers in the higher social classes as the superior speakers. This is not unlike the term *cultural cringe*, first introduced by Phillips (1958) in the Australian context, later applied to attitudinal studies by Bayard, Weatherall, Gallois, and Pittam (2001), to describe people dismissing their own cultures as inferior to the cultures of other countries. The linguistic insecurity displayed in Singaporean society, however, is more than a *cultural cringe*, and may be related to the linguistic insecurity of the post-colonial experience.

What then ties *linguistic insecurity* to *linguistic ownership*? The link between the two concepts is seen most clearly in post-colonial nations that have institutionalised the language of their past colonial masters. It is the notion of *linguistic ownership* that drives this new brand of *linguistic insecurity* documented in this paper. In fact, it is in sociolinguistic discussions on post-colonial nations that *linguistic ownership* appears most often. As mentioned, Widdowson (1994) was among the first scholars to attempt to define the term and he was doing so in the context of the spread of the English on an international scale, a spread that was fuelled by and large by British colonialism. Since then, most scholarship on the concept has been about the ownership of the English language more than any other language (Higgins, 2003; Hutton, 2010; Norton, 1997). Tupas and Rubdy (2015) have similarly touched on the concept of *linguistic ownership* as localisation of the English language in post-colonial communities. To speakers in post-colonial English-speaking communities, of which there are many around the world, what *linguistic ownership* used to mean is that the 'native' speakers of English own the language. The very metaphor of *ownership* also lends itself naturally to this conventional notion of *linguistic ownership*. After all, when one owns something, one has exclusive rights to and control over that item. As such, it would only make sense to a 'non-native' speaker that it is the 'native' speaker that has the right to control the use of the language as it belongs to them. The natural conclusion that follows is that 'native' speakers therefore have the right to manage how 'non-native' speakers around the world use the language. However, as has been extensively discussed in this paper, this way of thinking about linguistic ownership only serves to further disempower speakers. We have shown, in our conceptualisation of linguistic ownership, that it is indeed possible to think about it *without* having to engage with legitimacy and authority of others. And more specifically in post-colonial contexts, there is a need to resist the traditional and disenfranchising notion of *linguistic ownership* so as to allow speakers of different Englishes around the world to have the confidence and security to use their language.

NOTE

[1] Here, the participants based their perceptions on their own personal experiences, levels of exposure to other accents, as well as media stereotypes.

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