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# **Speak Good English Movement in Singapore**

## **Reactions in Social and Traditional Media**

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## **Abstract**

The first Speak Good English Movement, SGEM, took place in 2000, and has been organized annually ever since. Speaking a “standard” form of English is considered to bring increased personal power. However, the SGEM wants the Singaporeans to use “standard” English in their private life as well. A decade after the beginning of the campaign, a Speak Good Singlish Movement was started. Based on studies of language and identity, it is understandable why some Singaporeans might feel the SGEM threatens their identity. However, the reactions towards the campaign are mainly positive. For the purposes of this analysis, Twitter messages, Facebook pages, and newspaper articles from The Straits Times were collected. The SGEM has hailed both direct and indirect praise and criticism in both social and traditional media: Five newspaper articles praise the campaign while five criticize it; the results are nine and seven respectively for social media. This thesis looks at reactions towards the SGEM in both social and traditional media, analyzes how these reactions might relate to the ideas of the power of language, its variety and the relation of language and identity.

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### References

## 1. Introduction

The first Speak Good English Movement, SGEM, took place in 2000, and in 2011 the campaign was organized once again (Speak Good English Movement [SGEM], 2011c; Soh, 2011). The Speak Good English Movement not only wants people to use “Standard English” in a professional setting, but in their private life as well. It is, however, undefined what constitutes a “standard” form of English. The SGEM campaign office, according to its own website, produces materials and organizes workshops, seminars, contests and programs together with The British Council, the Society for Reading and Literacy, and the Singapore Retailers Association (SGEM, 2011b).

A decade after the first SGEM movement, the Speak Good Singlish Movement - a reaction to the government’s campaign - was founded on September 11, 2010 (Speak Good Singlish Movement [SGSM], 2011). On October 14, 2011 the Facebook page of the Speak Good Singlish Movement had 2586 members, in contrast to SGEM's 360 (SGSM, 2011; SGEM, 2011a). It seems that the Speak Good Singlish Movement manages to activate more people on Facebook than the Speak Good English Movement.

It is suggested that speaking a standard form of “correct” English brings "increased personal power and social equality for everyone" (Thomas, 2004, p. 187). The Singapore politicians and SGEM officials seem to follow a similar train of thought in their arguments: Goh Chok Tong, the Prime Minister when the campaign began, said that, for Singapore to become "a global and a first-world economy, it [is] essential that the Singaporeans speak good English," and earlier a Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew called Singlish a "handicap" (as cited in Balamurugan, 2001).

Prime Minister Gok Chok Tong identified five reasons why the movement was necessary in his inauguration speech at the first SGEM campaign. These were 1) more than half of the children in Singapore are not exposed to English at home; 2) some primary school pupils have difficulties identifying “good English from Singlish;” 3) Singlish is used among secondary school students

when discussing with their peers; 4) polytechnic and university students have been found to use Singlish in semi-formal situations; and 5) popularization of the use of Singlish in the media has been found to be one of the factors that fosters its usage (as cited in Speak Good English Movement 2011c).

While Tong stresses the qualitative aspect of English in Singapore from a communicative perspective and lists aspects that hinder learning of “good English” in Singapore, communication is not the only function of a language. Language also serves as a marker of one’s identity (Hoon, 2008, p. 59). If Singlish marks Singaporean identity, it is understandable why some Singaporeans might feel that the movement aspires to take away a part of their identity. From that understanding, it is interesting to see what sort of reactions the campaign creates in its target audience.

## **1.1 Aim**

The aim of this thesis is to look at references, attitudes, and representations towards the SGEM campaign in both social and traditional media, analyze how these reactions might relate to the ideas of the power of language, its variety and the relation of language and identity.

The thesis will look at the opinions and attitudes presented about the Speak Good English Movement during a time period from August 1, 2010 to October 31, 2011. This period includes two SGEM campaigns: one in September 2010 and another in September 2011. Additionally it includes the founding of the Speak Good Singlish - countermovement in September 2010.

## **2. Theoretical background**

Varieties of English can be divided into *native varieties* and *nativized varieties*. Nativized varieties are spoken in areas where English was not originally spoken and where it has been influenced by local languages and cultures. English varieties spoken in the UK, America and Australia are often

considered native and the other Englishes nativized. Kirkpatrick defines three criteria for classifying a variety as native: 1) a native variety has been around for a longer time; 2) it has influenced the nativized varieties; and 3) the distinction is partially based on prejudice: a native variety is spoken by a predominantly white nation (Kirkpatrick, 2007, pp. 5-6).

## **2.1 English and Singlish in Singapore**

The English language arrived to Singapore together with the British during the early nineteenth century, and the first English-medium school was established in 1823. Ever since, the presence of English in Singapore has been in continuous growth (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 119-121). Consequently, the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction at schools has been in decline. In 1959 “enrolment in Chinese- and English-medium primary schools was 27,223 and 28,113 respectively [. ... B]y 1978, only 5,298 entered Chinese-medium schools while enrolment in English-medium schools had increased to 41,995” (AsiaOne, 1998). The leadership of the PAP, Singapore's ruling party People's Action Party, in the 1960s was largely British educated and had "little or no emotional connection to Chinese language or culture [... and] saw Chinese-medium education as a conduit for communist subversion" (Kuhn, 2008 p. 315-317). The only Chinese-medium university, Nanyang University, was converted to English-medium in 1978 and merged with the University of Singapore to form the National University of Singapore in 1980 (AsiaOne, 1998). Since 1987 English has been almost the sole medium of education in Singapore (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 121).

The government's aspiration for its citizens to speak a standard, but undefined, form of English can be seen to be economically driven. However, Singlish, like any language or variety spoken at a certain geographical area, acts as a marker of identity (Hoon, 2008, p. 57). Singapore has a language policy where English is the first language, and the three other official languages are Mandarin, Malay and Tamil (Hoon, 2008, p. 58; CIA, 2011). This policy can be seen as linguistic instru-

mentalism, due to the political, geographical and economic advantages of the aforementioned languages. However, while "Singlish has little instrumental value on a global stage, [...] it serves as an essentially society-wide marker of Singaporean identity" (Hoon, 2008, p. 59).

While the government now focuses on the use of English in Singapore, in 1980s the government organized a campaign to change the way Singaporeans used Chinese. Since the form of Chinese spoken by the ethnic Chinese in Singapore was mainly Hokkien, the government launched a Speak Mandarin campaign in the 1980s, which was highly successful in promoting the use of Mandarin in Singapore (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 121).

## **2.2 Language attitudes and identities**

Advocates of Standard English generally stress the importance of one shared variety of the language as a base to ensure mutual intelligibility and language "purity." Honey (1997) defines Standard English to be a language "which is used in books and newspapers all over the world" (p. 1).

Honey's standpoint is that linguistic equality and a language's ability to represent all necessary functions in a given society is a myth (Honey, 1997, pp. 12-13). From such a perspective, where "causing children to learn [S]tandard English is an act of empowerment which will give them access to a whole world of knowledge and to an assurance of greater authority in their dealings with the world outside their own homes," a language can hinder one's development and thought (Honey, 1997, p. 42).

Teaching a language that is useful outside a child's community is beneficial, but different groups of people have spoken, and will continue to speak differently. Nevertheless, this does not mean that one cannot speak and write another variety - or a completely different language - fluently. Suggesting that an ability to speak one variety of a language denotes inability to speak another vari-

ety is not very different from suggesting that a speaker of another language will not be able to learn English.

People can usually speak more than one variety of a language, and these varieties are suited to different contexts. Language serves three distinct functions: communicative, identifying, and cultural. Depending on the context, one may have to diminish one or two of these functions in favor of another (Kirkpatrick, 2007, pp. 10-11). Kirkpatrick (2007), describing the identity-communication continuum, suggested that those who complain

that Singaporeans who speak Singlish do not speak proper English fail to understand that language serves these different functions and that the variety of language spoken will differ depending on the function it is serving [...] This does not mean that these Singaporeans can only speak in this way (p. 11).

In an environment where two or more languages are widely spoken, such as in Singapore, speakers may switch between the languages within a conversation. The “phenomenon, known as *code switching*,” can be divided to *situational code switching* [due to a change in situation], and *metaphorical code switching* [due to stylistic function] (Sridhar, 1996, p. 56). Code switching is “functionally motivated” and does not denote lack of competence. “A common mode of code switching is the switching of languages within sentences; which some researchers [...] refer to as *code mixing*” (Sridhar, 1996, p. 57). Code mixing is different from borrowing, which is “usually restricted to single lexical items,” and does not presuppose bilingual competence (Sridhar, 1996, p. 58).

### **2.3 Interlanguage fossilization**

While many scholars of World Englishes suggest that institutionalized varieties of English from outside the United Kingdom and United States are comparable to the British and American varie-

ties, many see the differences rather as errors. This view suggests that the language spoken in these areas is an “*interlanguage*” - a “*learner language*” that has not reached the target level, or a “*fossilized language*” (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 66-67).

"[T]wo characteristics of second language acquisition make it substantively different from the acquisition of a first language: *transfer* and *fossilization*" (Odlin, 2003, p. 457). Transfer “is the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (Odlin, 2003, p. 436). These learner languages, or interlanguages, “are believed to be systematic, natural languages in their own right” (Ortega, 2009, p. 82). While they are formed in a learning process in-between the target language and the first language, they are more than just a sum of the two; they are shaped and constrained by some natural human tendencies to work out a language, and include similar patterns that children use when they learn their first language (Ortega, 2009, pp. 81-82). Natural languages are languages “that [have] evolved naturally as a means of communication among people” (Collins English E-Dictionary, 2006).

Fossilization was first introduced by Selinker in 1972, and "has become widely accepted as a psychologically real phenomenon of considerable theoretical and practical importance" (Long 2003, p. 487). It is a “permanent non-nativelike state” of language, which may be caused by “physiology, psychology, cultural difference, cognition, or feedback” among other reasons in the language learning process (Long, 2003, p. 488; Huang, 2009, pp. 75-76). Selinker defined fossilizable linguistic phenomena to be “linguistic items, rules, and subsystems which speakers of a particular NL [natural language] will tend to keep in their IL [interlanguage] relative to a particular TL [target language]” (as cited in Long, 2003, p. 488).

Long (2003) has identified four issues with research on fossilization: “assuming, not demonstrating, fossilization; selection of inappropriate learners for study; basing findings on insufficient

data; and using inadequate analyses” (p. 487). Since testability of permanence of the state of language is an issue, Long prefers the phenomenon of stabilization: “permanence is the only quality distinguishing fossilization from stabilization” (Long, 2003, p. 490). Selinker (1993) recognizes this issue, and suggests a division into “*permanent*,” and “*temporary*” fossilization: “at any point in time it is nonetheless very difficult, if not impossible, to tell, at a particular point in time, if a learner's stabilized IL is in fact fossilized.” Thus it is common in SLA discussion to distinguish theoretically “permanent fossilization” from “temporary fossilization” of the IL” (p. 16).

### **3. Methodology and Data**

In order to collect reactions from the traditional media in Singapore, LexisNexis Academic News was used as a source of article data due to its wide selection: it covers over 750 newspapers (LexisNexis, 2011a). LexisNexis Academic News has a full coverage of the leading Singaporean broadsheet The Straits Times articles from May 1, 1992, to the present (LexisNexis, 2011c). Newspaper articles from The Straits Times, accessed through LexisNexis database, are used to represent the traditional media due to its wide circulation in Singapore. The Straits Times is the most widely read newspaper in Singapore and had a circulation of around 365,800 in 2010 and a readership of 1.23 million (Singapore Press Holdings, 2011; The Straits Times, 2011). Singapore has a highly regulated media environment, where censorship is common. It is forbidden for citizens to have private satellite receivers and their internet access is regulated. The press tends to practice self-censorship, due to the government's punishments for perceived attacks on officials who are also known to have sued foreign newspapers. Lately a part of the political debate in Singapore has found its place online, “but those who post political material are expected to register with the authorities” (BBC, 2011).

Facebook and Twitter were chosen to represent social media due to their popularity. Facebook is the “world’s largest social network, with 800 million users worldwide as of September 2011.” Every day its users upload 250 million photos and comment or “like” 2 billion times (The New York Times, 2011). Twitter has over 300 million users, who generate over 200 million tweets per day (Taylor, 2011; Twitter, 2011).

### **3.1 Method of data collection**

The data was collected during the months of October and November 2011. For traditional media LexisNexis Academic News search engine was used. Content was searched with the exact search phrase “Speak Good English Movement” from The Straits Times between August 1, 2010 and October 31, 2011 to make sure that both news and teasers published just before the 2010 campaign, and reactions after the 2011 campaign would be included in the data.

Tweets were searched from Topsy and Peoplebrowsr social media search engines. Topsy is a historical Twitter search engine which “enables businesses [...] to apply social intelligence to real-time decisioning.” They archive for example Twitter posts and their Application Programming Interfaces, APIs, which permits applications and tools to communicate with another program, database, protocol or a combination of these, allow publishers and marketers to make decisions based on data hailed from social media (Topsy Labs, 2011b; PC Magazine, 2011). Peoplebrowsr is a social network monitoring search engine and a tool which provides APIs for marketing, data mining, analytics, campaign purposes and software. Peoplebrowsr is an industry leader in collective intelligence technology and their database includes 1000 days, and 100 terabytes of social media posts (LinkedIn, 2011).

Additionally, Facebook was searched for “Speak Good English Movement,” and “Speak Good Singlish Movement.” Pages and their descriptions, amount of members or likes and commenter amount from Facebook count as data in this thesis.

### **3.2 Data**

A search for "Speak Good English Movement" in LexisNexis Academic News returned 327 results, out of which 36 were published on or after August 2010. A majority of these, 29, were published by The Straits Times (LexisNexis, 2011b). Out of these, six are letters from readers, thirteen are directly about the campaign or a related topic, six talk about other topics but mention the Speak Good English Movement, and four are simply advertisements about events or campaign events.

A search on Topsy returned 140 tweets for search phrase "Speak Good English Movement" (Topsy Labs 2011a). Peoplebrowsr produced 323 tweets for the past year for the same search phrase (Peoplebrowsr, 2011). Out of the 463 tweets in total, 458 were in English. This is likely due to the search method: the exact wording “Speak Good English Movement” was searched.

Peoplebrowsr’s database also shows the timeline of the tweets, with two peaks within the last three years: one in autumn 2010 and another in autumn 2011. These peaks go together with the campaign dates in September 2010 and 2011 respectively (Peoplebrowsr, 2011).

A total of five pages were found on Facebook, and two of those are dedicated to the Speak Good Singlish counter-movement and three of them to the Speak Good English Movement.

### **3.3 Method of data analysis**

This essay is data-driven, ie. the data was collected first and then potential variables were searched for to look for patterns in the data from traditional media and social media respectively. The data was divided into that of the social media and the traditional media. Facebook and Twitter have been

looked at separately. Data from Twitter through Peoplebrowsr and Topsy have been combined in one spreadsheet, with duplicates removed and the data was analyzed as one batch. Data from the newspapers and Twitter was looked at on an article / message basis, and was analyzed whether it depicted the SGEM positively or negatively. The articles were also divided into articles that present local events or advertise the movements, articles that describe events that have already happened, and readers' posts. The pages found on Facebook already show on their titles and their descriptions whether they are for or against the Speak Good English Movement.

The total amount of Twitter messages from Topsy and Peoplebrowsr in the data is 463 and after removal of duplicates and messages that are in a language other than English, the total amount of individual tweets came to 346. These tweets were given the following attributes: positive/negative/potentially sarcastic presentation of the Speak Good English Movement, commercial/non-commercial, re-tweet/original and the final destination of the target link.

Data from Facebook, Twitter and The Straits Times that was found to have a positive/negative/sarcastic presentation about the Speak Good English Movement was put under further linguistic investigation. It was determined whether the text critiques or praises the SGEM directly or indirectly, whether there was code mixing or code switching present, and whether the connotations regarding the SGEM could be entailed or whether they would have to be implied. With Twitter messages it was also looked at whether the deixis was clear, or if there was several possibilities regarding the referral point of the utterance.

Due to the identifying function of a language and Singapore's multilingual environment, instances of code mixing and code switching play an interesting role in unfolding meaning from the data sourced from both traditional and social media. Moreover, since message length in Twitter is heavily restricted, and thus its users have to convey their message to their audience in a compact form, clarity of the deixis plays an important role in determining the target of the reaction.

## **4. Data analysis and results**

The data analysis is organized so that traditional media and social media are looked at separately. Reactions from both traditional media and social media have been divided to positive and negative reactions towards the SGEM. After this, quantitative data and analysis of the findings in relation to the theoretical background is presented.

### **4.1 Reactions in traditional media**

Out of the 29 newspaper articles or reader responses, nine have either positive or negative connotations about the Speak Good English Movement, most of them being stories from the readers. Five have a positive description of the campaign and four negative. The rest are very neutral in nature, but also do not criticize the campaign in any way. Six of the stories have suggestions that are in line with the Speak Good English Movement's targets, meaning that they are telling readers how to speak better English.

The reactions in traditional media include some dialogue as well. As an example, Colin Goh in his article "Speak better through love" relates the SGEM to his 2 1/2 year-old daughter's use of Singlish. He disagrees with the idea that one's parents must speak consistent good English with their children for them to be able to use the language: "we've also encountered many folks who speak and write perfectly decent English, who have parents who can't speak any English whatsoever." He also says that one does not need anything "remotely approaching the Queen's English to get ahead in life. Just ask Arnold Schwarzenegger, George W. Bush, Sarah Palin or any rapper" (Goh, 2011). The SGEM chairman Goh Eck Kheng responded to Goh's article. He wishes to note that "the Speak Good English Movement is not promoting Queen's English but Standard English that is understood around the English-speaking world." Kheng claims that "many school children

probably return home to an environment where English is spoken poorly[, and that Singaporeans] hear more broken English or Singlish spoken on the streets than before” (Kheng, 2011).

Unlike the aspects presented by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong regarding the reasons to start the SGEM campaign, the articles from The Straits Times seem to focus on how the way Singaporeans speak English could be changed from interlanguage to "good" English. While the Prime Minister seems to assume that the "state" of English in Singapore might become permanently fossilized, reactions in traditional media only relate to temporary fossilization.

#### 4.1.1 Positive reactions

All but one of the articles or reader responses from The Straits Times show through the use of personal pronouns that it is the author's opinions that are being given to the reader. This is most likely the case because three of them are reader responses, one is an interview, and one tells about the author's nephew. Only the interview lacks personal pronouns referring to the author. The interview, however, includes a direct order to the reader: “The next time you see a sign written in poor English, don't just walk by. Instead, paste a sticky note over it, correcting the grammatical error.” The author has also chosen to emphasize a point by writing “full stop,” before a full stop, at the end of a sentence describing this year's tagline “Get it Right” (Chean, 2011).

A few letters from the readers suggest ways to make one's language better, such as one from a reader who suggests that one should not use the word “pax” to refer to customers (Fatt, 2010). Neither Collins or Longman English dictionaries have a definition for “pax,” but a search in the English Language and Usage section on StackExchange shows that it is mainly used in the travel industry to count passengers. A user had asked other users on the site what the use of “pax” means after reading an apartment ad in Singapore listing a condition of “max 5 pax” (Stack Exchange, 2011). Thus it seems that in Singapore, *pax* can be used synonymously with *customer* or *people*, but

outside Singapore it is a hyponym for *customer* or *people* - which act as its superordinates i.e. “the sense of the superordinate [ - *customer* or *people* - is] being included in the sense of the hyponym [*pax*]” (Maienborn, 2010, p. 459).

Two readers’ responses speculate with the reasons behind the “incorrect” use of English in Singapore. One reader suggests that the government should be rigorous about English language education from a young age since “[f]or one to speak good English with proper diction and grammar, one has to be trained from young age, like from preschool.” She also suggests that when she went to school, oral English was a part of their curriculum, but that she does not see that happening today. She seems particularly unhappy with the service industry: “Many a time [sic], we come across sales personnel who do not understand what their customers want” (Salim, 2010). Another reader suggests that the problem why people speak “bad English” is because in the television, “Ah Beng” characters who speak “exaggerated Singlish” are being presented to the audience which sends a message to the young people that “bad English” is cute and that it is useful because it sells. There are two instances of code switching in the text: “Ah Beng English” and “Ah Beng characters” (Siong, 2010). The readers seem to suggest that the language currently spoken in Singapore is an interlanguage, which can be seen from the notions “proper diction and grammar,” and “bad English.”

#### **4.1.2 Negative reactions**

One article mentions how the author noticed a quote from Caribbean poet Derek Walcott among the posters at food courts of Singapore. It says: “The English language is nobody’s special property. It is the property of the imagination; it is the property of the language itself.” The article can be read to include the implicature that she prefers “Oxford English” from the author’s notions of devouring Shakespeare, criticism of the quality of English language used in the parliament, and incorrect use

of “weightage” in Singapore. The author states that multilingualism sets the Singaporean “distinctiveness as individuals and as a society.” The article lists examples to point how there are untranslatable concepts in other official languages of Singapore, which can be understood to justify some of the code mixing in Singaporean English: “There will always be some emotions, some states of being, that we can only express in another Asian language.” While the author does not directly criticize the Speak Good English Movement, the text implies so. The article questions the targets of the SGEM, and praises the multilingualism of Singapore and defends code switching (Oon, 2010).

In another article an author interviews comic artist Daniel Wang, who says he does not “wish to become target practice for the Speak Good English Movement. If I have to rewrite any dialogue, then there’s no point” (Nanda, 2011). No direct criticism towards the SGEM can be read in the article, but if becoming a target of the movement implies something negative, one can assume that the artist does not appreciate all the efforts and tactics of the campaign.

## **4.2 Reactions in social media**

Out of 20 tweets that have something to say about the SGEM, nine have a positive message about the campaign. Some of the Twitter users have commented on an article or another tweet and have added their opinion. Some simply speak about the campaign. Eleven of the tweets can be categorized into two categories: those seven that depict the Speak Good English Movement negatively and those four that might have sarcastic remarks about it. None of the positive Twitter messages include any code mixing or code switching, but two of the negative tweets deploy code mixing and one potentially sarcastic tweet has code switching.

Twitter offers a possibility to resend other users’ messages, which is called re-tweeting. Out of the total amount of tweets after duplicates were removed, 135 are re-tweets. The most popular re-tweet is user Miyagi’s message: “Speak Good English movement engages grassroots level with”N-

abeh Talk Properly Can or Not?" as new slogan" (Miyagi, 2010) which has been re-tweeted 21 times.

Several newspapers and other traditional media have started to post their recent news on Twitter and these messages were shared by other users to their followers on 46 occasions. The tweets have been sent by 284 individual usernames: 157 of them are from individual, ie. non corporate or shared, users; 71 from corporate or other non-individual users; and the rest have either been deleted or it cannot be established whether they are individual users or not. Corporate users seem to send more tweets per account than individual users: there is an average of 1.46 tweets per corporate account, and 1.13 per individual accounts in the data. It is also notable that there are no negative reactions from corporate accounts in Twitter.

#### **4.2.1 Positive reactions**

Regarding the tweets, one account holder said: "It truth, u know" when re-tweeting an article from The Straits Times headlined "Speak Good English Movement calls for Singaporeans to be role models" (Irahsmile, 2011). The tweet itself is ungrammatical and lacks a verb, and the reference "it truth" is unclear in its exact meaning: what exactly is the truth? Thus the positive reference towards the campaign can only be implied from the message. The same applies to a tweet "Love it," which is re-tweeting a tweet advertising "List of Common English Errors in Everyday Situations | Speak Good English Movement" (Ilsanitariumii, 2011). The deixis is unclear, as it cannot be identified whether "it" in this case refers to the list of errors or the SGEM movement.

It is not, however, necessary to imply all positive messages in the tweets. For example a tweet calls SGEM a "GREAT campaign," which is a clear assertion, and the positive meaning of the tweet can be directly entailed from what was said (Charissaseet, 2010). Another direct praise comes from user Sozotweets: "SOZO supports the Speak Good English movement" (Sozotweets, 2011).

Three pages exist on Facebook with the title “Speak Good English Movement,” out of which one is the official page, one is an interest group, and one a community. The Speak Good English pages had a total of 657 members. The official page describes that the campaign wishes to “encourage Singaporeans to speak grammatically correct English that is universally understood.” The interest group includes a description sourced from Wikipedia and the community has only a link to the SGEM website. A total of 36 Facebook users have mentioned one of these pages. Facebook search also found a page titled “Speak Good English !!! Not Singlish,” which has 8 members (Facebook, 2011).

#### **4.2.2 Negative reactions**

Reactions towards the campaign included a fair amount of profanity. One example is a tweet that commented on an article from The Straits Times: “role models for FTs? what bullshit” (Inthebigfish, 2011). Another tweet comments on the same article: “talk cock only mah” (Termosrudin, 2011). Both tweets criticize the campaign message directly, but their negative meaning has to be implied. While “talk cock” may simply be use of profanity, it can also refer to Talkingcock.com, a website which includes a dictionary of Singlish. Termosrudin’s message also includes code mixing, as can be seen as the utterance ending “mah.” Also another article has received criticism from two users. One user, linking to the article, asks “is this needed” and another answers “no need lah” (Tommi\_tagawa, 2010; Harrytsirait, 2010). The latter tweet also includes code mixing.

Two tweets include direct criticism towards the campaign. One Twitter user says: “Yea, sg gov focuses too much on e Speak Good English movement, some of us younger generation can’t even speak Chinese anymore” (Iuhis, 2011). It can be directly entailed from the tweet, that the user wishes the government to focus on something else. Another user says that the SGEM is “a lame

campaign anyway,” also in which case it can be entailed that the user does not have a positive image regarding the Speak Good English Movement (Jennyteo, 2010).

Facebook has two pages about the Speak Good Singlish countermovement, which have a total of 2899 members. On October 14, 2011, 186 people had commented on the wall of the “official” Speak Good Singlish page (SGSM, 2011).

### **4.3 Results**

It can be noted that both the articles and the tweets are more positive than negative towards the campaign. Furthermore, the articles have more constructive criticism than the tweets. On Facebook, the Speak Good Singlish Movement counter campaign seems to be more popular in terms of amount of members than the Speak Good English Movement.

When looking at both Twitter messages and traditional media, it can be noted that most activity seems to take place around the campaign dates in September. There also seems to be a correlation between the dates when Twitter messages have been posted compared to the dates when the campaign has been brought up in traditional media. The average amount of tweets on days when the movement has been mentioned on traditional media is 7.44 times higher. On a day that there is a tweet about the campaign, the average amount of newswire, newspaper or television mentions is 2.25 times higher.

The traditional and social media have different restrictions that affect their content. While the average word count for the articles is 798, it is 17 for the Twitter messages due to Twitter’s 140 character limit (Twitter, 2012). The most likely reason why profanity exists on the Twitter messages, but not in the newspaper articles, has to do with censorship. Censorship in social media and in the internet is fairly nonexistent in most Western countries.

Over half, 240, of the Twitter messages have a link to a webpage. The most commonly shared link in the Twitter messages is to The Straits Times Online article titled “Speak Good English Movement calls for Singaporeans to be role models” and there are 37 tweets pointing to this article. There are 0.91 links per tweet from corporate accounts compared to 0.63 from individual accounts. A total of 49 tweets point to various pages on the official SGEM webpage, thus sharing the message of the campaign - either positively or negatively.

It is visible both in the reactions from traditional and social media that the SGEM manages to raise strong emotions. Proponents of the campaign seem to emphasize that “bad English,” or Singlish are simply learner interlanguages and if nothing is done regarding the matter the speakers’ use of it may get permanently fossilized. Positive reactions to the SGEM campaign included no code switching or mixing, but both were present in the criticism. On the contrary, much of the criticism highlights the Singaporean linguistic diversity and the identifying function of Singlish. As mentioned in the theoretical background, the Singaporean government has proactively worked with the language situation in Singapore for a long time, and based on the data some citizens are getting worried about the future of Chinese in Singapore.

## **5. Conclusion**

This thesis has looked at different reactions towards Singapore’s Speak Good English Movement campaign on both traditional and social media. The emphasis has been to see whether the reactions are positive or negative, and see whether there is a difference between traditional media and social media. For the purposes of the analysis, Twitter messages, Facebook pages and newspaper articles from The Straits Times were collected from August 2010 to October 2011. To conclude the main findings of the analysis, it is evident that the campaign is praised and criticized in both social media

and traditional media. In social media, there is a counter campaign that does not exist in traditional media.

The use of profanity in some of the Twitter messages seems to suggest that some people have strong, negative, feelings towards the campaign, which is likely related to the use of Singlish as a marker of Singaporean identity. Perhaps since The Straits Times is part of that traditional media and has links to the nation's ruling party, it seems to co-operate with the campaign and does its part in spreading the message. However, there have also been negative views published in the newspaper for example in form of a column article which suggested that it is not necessary for a person or child to learn a language at home in order to speak it fluently.

There is a clear correlation between the campaign dates for both 2010 and 2011 with the references to the campaign in both traditional media and social media. While during the time between the campaigns there might be none or only a few tweets, around the campaign dates the number of tweets per day rose significantly. It is worth noting that a majority of the references towards the campaign in traditional media are from Singaporean newspapers.

Only newspaper articles, Facebook pages, and Twitter messages in English have been used as data for this essay; given that the movement is about the use of English in a multilingual environment, this might have effects on the results of the study. It would be worth further research to see how reactions towards the campaign differ when they have been written, for example, in Mandarin or Hokkien Chinese or another language spoken in Singapore. This should show for example, whether the ethnic Chinese of Singapore have a different viewpoint towards the campaign.

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