Chapter 4
Glocal English in Singapore? A Re-exploration of the Localization of English

Anne Pakir

Abstract This chapter re-considers the notion of 'glocal English' or 'glocalism' in discussing the use of English in Singapore. As a global language, English has developed in interesting ways via social media and the Internet all over the world. However, it is only in special polities such as Singapore where it is used as the 'working language' of the country for a multilingual population base, that English has developed into a phenomenon that has to be studied, better understood and perhaps given a label such as 'glocal English.' The chapter will contribute to the ongoing discussions of what it means for English to be a global language and how it adapts as 'a communicative tool of immense political, ideological, and economic power'(Kachru, *Kontalinguistik,* 1996, pp. 906–913) in global-local tensions (e.g. commerce, trade, finance, industry, science and technology versus intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic communication within Singapore). In the shifting perspectives of what English is (really global or truly local?), what it does (for and in education), and how it is used in this country (globally and/or locally), the paper hopes to elucidate the dimensions of teaching and learning English in the Singapore context and perhaps more widely in an Asia-Pacific context.

Keywords Glocal english · English-knowing bilingual communities · Ascendant bilinguals · Singapore · Glocalism · Multilingualism · Language education · Languages in education

4.1   Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to re-consider the spread of English as a global language and its impact on an ethnically and linguistically diverse nation that uses English ubiquitously as a lingua franca for both international and national purposes.

A. Pakir (✉)
Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore,
3rd Storey, Unit 03-03, Shaw Foundation Alumni House, 11 Kent Ridge Drive,
Singapore 119244, Singapore
e-mail: irohead@nus.edu.sg

Exploring what it means for English to be a global language and how it adapts as an immense communicative tool in global-local tensions, this chapter elucidates the kinds of responses from local users of English in Singapore, giving rise to the possibility of examining a notion such as 'glocal English'.

In other words, Glocal English is a unique concept to be explored in the Singapore context where English is used by three distinctive ethnic groups (Chinese: 74 %, Malay: 13 %, Indian: 9 %) and "Other Races": 3 %. Singaporeans (3.29 million) and Singapore Permanent Residents (0.53 million) live in a dynamic 21st century global city, engaging for most of the day in the working language English although they have "ethnic mother tongues" officially designated as Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil and speak several other languages from their multilingual repertoire.

The history of language education and languages in education in Singapore since its independence in 1965 has been marked by a strong bilingual policy, promoting English as the cornerstone, as the medium of education, for all levels of schooling, while compulsory second language provision is at the same time made for the three different ethnic groups in schools: Chinese (Mandarin), Malay (Malay language), and Indian (Tamil language mainly but including options for Hindi, Punjabi, Guajarati, Bengali, and Urdu).

English-knowing bilingualism, defined as proficiency in English and a working knowledge of one's ethnic mother tongue, instilled after five decades in the centrally controlled Singapore schooling system, has given rise to a new phenomenon: that of an ascendant English-knowing bilingual community that draws upon its local roots and cultures to express its own non-English values and multilingual identity. Wei (2000, p. 455) defines an ascendant bilingual as "someone whose ability to function in a second language is developing due to increased use." I define an ascendant English-knowing bilingual community as one that functions increasingly in English but, because of its collective association with other languages and cultures (mainly Asian in this case), taps these links for identity and rootedness. Ascendant English-knowing bilingual communities offer excellent sites for studying glocal English.

4.2   The Idea of English

The rapid spread of English throughout the world witnessed in the last three decades of the twentieth century was accompanied by intense scholarship that tried to establish paradigms for studying the phenomenon. English figured prominently at the top of the applied linguistics agenda whether as an object of enquiry in language education or as a commodity of desire among eager learners of the language with implications for culture and development, pedagogy, and frameworks of study. Furthermore, the rise of the internet generation gave mobility and portability of English an added dimension—that of changing functions, values and meanings of English in the midst of globalization and acceleration brought about by instant connectivity across the world.

"Which English?" "Whose English?" "Who are the proper English?" and "Quo vadis English?" were questions of debate and controversies that drew opposing

conclusions. The English as an International Language (EIL), World Englishes (WE) and the more recent English Lingua Franca (ELF) paradigms, produced scholarship of different foci in the teaching and learning of English and the research (Pakir 2010). For example, WE, which celebrates linguistic diversity and the approach that languages change and adapt, argues for multiple standards and recognition of the pluricentric nature of English. The WE (or Kachruvian) paradigm introduced the idea of three concentric circles of English-users: the Inner Circle (mainly found in the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), the Outer Circle (mainly composed of speakers from former British and American colonies and territories with some familiarity and experience of English), and the Expanding Circle (mainly foreign learners of English). Older proponents of EIL, many found in the Inner Circle, focused on language proficiency and the importance of producing near-native like speakers of the language. On the other end, ELF promoted a new concept of English as a contact language "for groups of English speakers having different first language backgrounds", thus agreeing that the world will see pluricentric Englishes but with an ELF core.

These various categorizations of views of what it means for English were inevitable. As Halliday so aptly described it, English has this dual role, "both as an international language (one among many) and as the (only) global language" and hence "it is not surprising that it figures prominently in applied linguistic activities, with language education at the top of the list. It is prominent even in mother-tongue education … But in second or foreign language teaching it easily predominates" (Halliday 2007, p. 8).

The interesting phenomenon is that as these strands of scholarships overlap and criss-cross, the later EIL exponents such as McKay (2010) argue that what is needed is "a comprehensive view of English use that takes into account the local linguistic ecology and recognizes the hybridity of current English use".

4.3 English in Singapore

In Singapore, the most comprehensive and dynamic idea of English can readily be found. Serving as a global language of trade, commerce, science and technology, English in Singapore has an outward orientation and observes international language standards for teaching, learning, and occupation-related networking. However, as a local language for interethnic communication (and in growing cases for intra-ethnic communication) English in Singapore has a domestic orientation, developing linguistic and discourse features that characterise the local speakers of English, displaying standard as well as non-standard discourses.

Thus we find two opposing directions (as identified variously by Pakir (1994, 2001a, b); Rudby (2001); Wee (2003); Bokhorst-Heng (2005); and Chew (2006)) regarding the development and idea of English in Singapore. A global and yet local language, English is an unusual lingua franca in Singapore, a country that promotes extensive English-knowing bilingualism and one that is becoming an ascendant English-knowing bilingual community. Competing norms, internationally

standardized for the global orientation versus locally indigenized English for a global orientation (Pakir 1994, 2001a, b) have developed over several decades of pervasive English use in Singapore. The identification of Singlish, a variety of English immediately recognizable as Singaporean and often described as non-standard, has been the subject of scrutiny and news commentaries/reports. For example, a recent news clip reported that Yale-NUS professors, teaching at a new liberal arts college that opens at the National University of Singapore in August 2013, took a crash course in "Singapore's unique colloquial language" (Lee 2013, p. 10). The faculty members (including some from the United States, India and Australia) were willing to do whatever they could to understand the society they were joining "and that includes being able to understand and correctly interpret what is being said around us", said Charles Bailyn, Dean of the Yale-NUS College. The widespread use of English in Singapore by so many different ethnic groups has led to cultural mixing and hybridity in the language and a variety has emerged that can be "taught" or "caught" in Singapore.

4.4 Glocalization and Singapore

Different ideological perspectives on international spread of English and English as an emergent lingua franca include that of Graddol (1997, p. 33) who posited the static and traditional import-export model versus the post-modern/globalised model. The first emphasised the necessity of one or (at most) two standard models of the English language with clearly defined English language skills to be taught to learners. The second, and more dynamic model, speaks to the modelling of language and culture in terms of flow: communication flow and counter-flow, producing a tension between the global and the local. Within the latter modelling, different norms of English will evolve over time. At the societal level, one can recognise a distinctive trend going global and yet remaining local as a response to shifting times (glocal became an acceptable English word around the time of this discussion and debate, within the decade of 1975–1985). At the sociolinguistic level, I suggested that the tension between global and local resolves itself in the emergence of Glocal English, one that is internationally oriented but locally appropriate and at the same time, one that could be locally oriented but globally understandable. An English in Singapore that is internationally intelligible but requires explanation for linguistic features that reflect deeply rooted substratal language influences.

4.5 Identification and Definition of Glocal English

Two illustrations will suffice, one from a Singaporean poet writing in English ("A poem not too obiang", Leow 1995) and the other, a rap song ("SAR-vivors", Phua Chu Kang 2003) used in educating Singaporeans in how to defend themselves against a dangerous bird flu virus that brought about some deaths in Singapore in

2003. They both demonstrate the use of glocal English—internationally intelligible and acceptable, but rooted in Singaporean sensibilities and local cultures.

Leow's (1995) "A Poem Not Too Obiang"
From fiddlesticks and By Jove
I pick my words to find
Alamak
Stirring spicily on my tongue….

Why should I not drink
Teh tarik and discuss
Lee Tzu Pheng
(without putting them in italics)
Among friends who read but
Tread on the trappings of blind
Milton and Shakepearean worship?

Like the prata man's
Flips and flaps of the dough
Taking shape with each dose
Of local flavour
I look for my place
In a Singaporean life

My place in the sun
Is certainly not too LC
For some others' meringue pies
And afternoon tea.

Glocal English is also evident in the lyrics of the rap-song featured in a YouTube video by Phua Chu Kang, a local comedian brought in to be "Uncle Phua CK" to teach Singaporeans to be SAR-vivors! (http: effectmatrix.com). The SARS outbreak in Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore (among other places) in 2003 required local populations to respond by following sanitary habits, and Singapore's fight against the virus in a publicity blitz led by Phua Chu Kang, the well-recognised sitcom local actor, enabled the local population to fight the virus which gave rise to the identified Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Much of the language incorporates local idioms ("then at least got hope"; "play play", "think no one see you?"), pragmatic particles ("lah", "leh") and loanwords mainly from the Chinese and Malay languages ("kapui", "kena", "tahan").

4.5.1   The Use of Singlish (Glocal English) to Help Contain the Sars Virus in Singapore 2003

Phua Chu Kang's SAR-vivor Rap Lyrics
Some say 'Leh', some say 'Lah'
Uncle Phua says, time to fight SARS
Everybody, we have a part to play
To help fight SARS at the end of the day!
Wash your hands whenever you can
Wash with soap, then at least got hope

When you get home, take a bath quickly!
Kiasu a bit, be safe not SAR-RY!
Try not to travel to SARS Countries
Wait a few months lah, wait and see.
Why you rush to catch that plane?
Use internet lah, USE YOUR BRAIN!

Getting protection from this virus
Means getting healthy, inside us!
Don't work too much, until you're sick
Get exercise and get yourself fit!
Good nutrition and vitamins
Help you to pass the immunity challenge
Eat your proteins, carbo and fibre
Then you can be a…. SAR-VIVOR!!

Chorus
PCK say don't PLAY PLAY
Or this stupid SARS is here to stay
But we can fight this, you and me
Help fight SARS in our country!
SARS is the virus, that I just want to minus
No more surprises if you
Use your brain! Use your brain! Use your brain!
Can't SARS me, baby
And I don't mean maybe
You must be steady, just.
Use your brain! Use your brain! Use your brain!

Some say 'Leh', some say 'Lah'
Spread kaya, but don't spread SARS!
Everybody, we have a part to play
To help fight SARS at the end of the day!
If you're sick don't go to work
Even if your boss is a jerk!
Don't be a hero and continue working
Wait the whole company 'kena' quarantine!

Wear a mask when you see doctor
See the same one, don't be a doc-hopper!
Wait at the clinic, stay in one spot
Don't spread your germs at the coffeeshop
Think you got SARS? Call 9-9-3
Ambulance will come for free
To check you up at Tan Tock Seng
Where they know about SARS like I know Ah Beng

Hey, if you 'kena' home quarantine
Don't go out, except in your dreams!
'Tahan' a while and cooperate!
Don't give everybody a big headache

Chorus
Some say 'Leh', some say 'lah'
Keep the place clean, and keep out SARS

Everybody, we have a part to play
To help fight SARS at the end of the day
Keep our country clean and green
Because nowadays, the germs are mean
Don't leave food for stray dogs or cats
Unless you want to keep their germs as pets

Cover your mouth if you cough or sneeze
You think everyone want to catch your disease?
Don't 'kapui' all over the place
You might as well 'kapui' on my face!
Don't throw your tissues all over the shop
Think no one see you, so you don't stop?
Make me sick when people don't care
Make you sick when you breathe the air

Even when things are getting better
Don't do things and become a regretter
Think SARS is gone? Your head ah!
But listen to me, and we'll be ok lah!

Glocal English in Singapore is easily identifiable as in the two examples given above. More problematic, however, is its definition. In 1999, I attempted to define a glocal language as "globally appropriate but culturally relevant". In terms of the sociolinguistic realities of Singapore, English will remain its most global language (until perhaps Mandarin becomes a strong contender in the future). But along with other English-knowing multilingual speakers throughout the world, Singaporeans have turned the language into a multifaceted one, serving both global and local needs. Going glocal (that is, going global while maintaining local roots) makes for greater awareness of intercultural and cross-cultural exchanges. The term "Glocal English" can be defined as English that is global and yet rooted in the local contexts of its English-knowing bilingual users. Glocal English is a language that has international status in its global spread but at the same time expresses local identities. In developing a new role as a global-local language, English supports local users and their uses for it, while serving to connect the world. This phenomenon of Glocal English is most often to be found in the countries where English has an institutionalized role, achieving range and depth in its spread.

The glocalization of English in Singapore results from different kinds of cultural demands made on English and in the population's response to globalist and localist tensions. As Alsagoff avers (2007, 2010), the variables of globalism and localism produce cultural models of orientation that reflect contemporary patterns of English use in Singapore: in globalism—economic capital, authority, formality, distance, and educational attainment; in localism: socio-cultural capital, camaraderie, informality, closeness, community membership. Glocalization of English in Singapore suggests that language and identity are intertwined and fluid. Alsagoff (2010) offers a model variation of the use of an indigenized English in multilingual multicultural speech communities—"developed from a perspective that allows us to see language as a meaning-making and identity-creation resource in a culturally grounded manner" (p. 126).

4.6   Some Concluding Questions

An Asian multilingual population in a dynamic twenty-first century global city us-ing English as a global language and a local language, as an international lingua franca as well as an intra-national one, has become English-knowing and an as-cendant English knowing bilingual community. The way this community uses the global language English presented an opportunity to reconsider the concept of Glo-cal English.

In light of the shifting perspectives of what English means to Singaporeans (re-ally global or truly local?), what it does (for and in education), and how it is used in this country (globally and/or locally), the chapter raises the question of how the language is to be taught in Singapore schools (Pakir 2000). Can we hope to eluci-date the dimensions of teaching and learning English in the Singapore context and perhaps more widely in an Asia-Pacific context? There will be the challenges to education and pedagogy and the expected ideological debates, for example, teach-ing only standard English (and suppressing Singlish or ignoring Glocal English); assessing English proficiency in Singapore with an external reference framework only; and examining role models presented by "native" versus "non-native" teach-ers of English in Singapore.

In the light of the above re-consideration of glocal English in Singapore, we are left with further questions: Are the current paradigms of teaching and learning Eng-lish sufficient for today's world, or do we need to radically re-think, re-formulate and re-examine our assumptions about what we do as researchers and practitioners in the enterprise of teaching English? Secondly, what can the current controversies among scholars working in different paradigms tell us about international English language education? And finally, how can we apply the answers to specific con-texts, such as those found in the Expanding Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Inner Circle as identified by Kachru?

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