

From post-creole continuum to diglossia: the case of Singapore English

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Singapore English, a recently nativised (Gupta 1994) variety of English, has often been analysed in terms of a continuum (Platt 1975; Pakir 1991; Poedjosoedarmo 1995). A more recent approach (Gupta 1994; 2001) regards this variation as one reflecting a diglossic situation: Standard (Singapore) English is H(igh), Colloquial Singapore English ('Singlish') is L(ow). This paper presents findings from ongoing research into these two approaches.

The current study investigates the speech community's use of Singapore English's inherent variation. Specifically, data collected from fieldwork shows that there is a preference for using more acrolectal or H variants in formal settings than in less formal ones, where basilectal or L variants are preferred. The distribution of percentage rates according to situational settings seems to favour the diglossic view proposed by Gupta.

I conclude by suggesting that these different sociolinguistic typological approaches, rather than being mutually exclusive, represent the variety at different stages in its history: the post-creole continuum (DeCamp 1971; Platt 1975) seems to be giving way to a two-tiered variety, not least because of the advent of new technologies, which have increased the (written) use of 'Singlish' (Gupta 2001), much to the chagrin of governmental policy-makers.

References

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