English in Southeast Asia
English in Southeast Asia
Varieties, Literacies and Literatures

Edited by

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Assisted by

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CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING
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This book commemorates ten years of English in Southeast Asia Conferences. The conference series is the result of collaboration among member universities from nine countries: Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Philippines, Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Thailand and Indonesia. Since 1996 the conference has been held annually and has been hosted in rotation by a member university in different countries. As a world language with different varieties, English has acquired specific statuses and roles in different disciplines, geographic locations and social spheres. To be fully functional, learners of English must be familiar with their respective specific and local variety without abandoning the general and global nature of English. The learning and teaching of English requires the identification and understanding of the relevant statuses, roles and varieties as well as their texts and the contexts. The English in Southeast Asia conferences have focused on themes relevant to these concerns; this present volume includes work by educators who have contributed to the conferences over the past decade. As such it represents a summary of work relevant to the changing role of English in the Asia Pacific region.

The Varieties section includes chapters on phonology, dictionary making, syntax, code-switching and the communicative strategies of speakers from countries of ASEAN. It begins with a chapter in which the monophthong vowels of Singaporeans of the three main different ethnic groups – Chinese, Indian and Malay – are measured and compared. David Deterding first examines whether the different ethnic groups are able to identify each other from the way they speak and then measures and compares the monophthong vowel qualities of all three groups. These are then compared with measurements of the vowels of Bruneian, Hong Kong and Malaysian speakers. The second chapter provides a first hand account from one of the world’s leading lexicographers of the development of dictionaries of Asian Englishes. Susan Butler describes the problems encountered in such an enterprise. As she points out, “A dictionary can only survive under a certain set of circumstances. It takes more than just an enthusiastic lexicographer. There must be a response from the community showing recognition of the dictionary as a faithful account of their language. In Asia, there are a number of obstacles to that sense of recognition.” She describes and evaluates a number of approaches that she and her colleagues have adopted and gives illustrations from a number of different dictionaries. In Chapter 3 Andrew Moody uses the four currently available international corpora of
English (ICE) which describe Asian Englishes (Hong Kong, India, the Philippines, and Singapore) to investigate whether these derive their norms from British or North American varieties of English, or whether the process is more complex than norms simply being provided from older varieties of English. His focus is on selected verb forms and he also looks at the use of conjuncts.

Chapters 4 and 5 are both co-authored by James McLellan and Maya David and both deal with aspects of code-switching. The first, Chapter 4, provides a general review of code-switching research in Brunei and Malaysia and the second, Chapter 5, describes and illustrates examples of nativised English that occur in newspaper reports in the Malaysian and Bruneian English language press. The authors identify a major unresolved issue as being whether it is possible to consider code switching as a third code, separate from both Malay and English. The evidence they provide suggests that this might indeed be possible. With regard to the English of Malaysia and Brunei, however, they also point out that many lexical items that might have been explicitly marked or flagged as being from Malay now appear with no explicit signalling. “Such code switches have become a regular feature in English dailies in these two regions. Over time they have become a part of the local variety of English signifying objects, ceremonies, titles, etc. which cannot be literally represented by English terminology.” They now form an integral part of the local nativised variety of English. In the final chapter of the section Andy Kirkpatrick describes the communicative strategies of people from ASEAN when they use English with each other as a lingua franca. He shows that, despite the different varieties of English that are involved and despite the different levels of English proficiency possessed by the speakers, their conversations generally run smoothly, driven by their desire to communicate on the one hand and to preserve the face of the interactants on the other. He identifies 16 communicative strategies which can be used by speakers and/or listeners to achieve this aim of smooth and non-threatening interactions.

The Literacies section includes chapters on ICT in English language teaching, Information literacy, issues of bilingualism, multilingualism in Southeast Asia, developments in English language teaching and education in Thailand and questions of heritage and identity with respect to English in Malaysia. The section begins with a chapter in which Towndrow presents a number of differing viewpoints concerning the implementation and evaluation of ICT in language education and identifies the difficulties in developing appropriate methods for assessing CALL. Purposes for software and media evaluation are then discussed, two different approaches to evaluating CALL are outlined and a third is explained and proposed for its positive qualities of application. Future challenges for software and media evaluation in terms of language pedagogy and practices are introduced in view of new the technologies
for learning that are changing the parameters of social and educational practices. Taking account of language students’ increasing facility in working with and learning with technology has serious implications for the way ICT will be used in language learning in the region and for the way technology-mediated language learning is to be considered effective and useful. In the eighth chapter Prescott begins by discussing the aspects of Information literacy that identify it as different from traditional literacy. The situation within Southeast Asia is examined and the different responses that countries in the region have made to the challenges posed by the growth of information are outlined. Evidence relating to students’ Information literacy and the situation in Southeast Asia, in particular, is next presented with some recent work involving university students and the Internet summarized. Students’ likely future Information literacy needs are for abilities that facilitate intelligent interaction with the wealth of available material which places obligations on teachers to incorporate development of these abilities in their classroom teaching. In Chapter 9 Pornapat Darasawong describes the history and development of English language teaching in Thailand emphasizing its development in the last decade. In this period social, political, and economic changes, as well as advanced science and technology, have made deep impacts on Thai society and traditional ways of life. Reforms in the Thai education system to enable the nation to cope with these changes have resulted in various projects which have affected many Thai educational institutions at both secondary and tertiary levels. The chapter also briefly discusses English language teaching in Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, ends with a projection of the future trends in English language teaching within the Indo-China region.

Karen Kow, in Chapter 10, documents the system of education in Malaysia and explores the role, status and function of English. In particular, the 2003 policy implementation of teaching of mathematics and science in English which aims at ensuring Malaysians can make full use of scientific and technical knowledge is discussed at some length. Questions about the role of the English language as a guarantee of upward economic mobility, whether English can be regarded as a heritage, or whether it should be seen as a threat to the national identity of Malaysians are considered. The chapter ends with further discussion of the question of identity and heritage in respect of the English language. In Chapter 11 Nesamalar Chitavelu argues that the concepts of affordances, lifeworld and local knowledge are important for multilingualism in Southeast Asia. She argues for research leading to greater understanding of the affordances of multilingualism to redress the imbalance in research attention; to build informative empirical data and to inform decision-making at public policy level and at the individual, familial and communal levels. She uses the sociological term lifeworld to denote how a multilingual environment can be described in terms of the customary ways of structuring the activities that take
place within it and also the patterned ways in which physical environments are functionally meaningful in different ways for multilinguals as compared to monolinguals. Finally, she stresses the need for multilingual Southeast Asians to undertake research as participant-observers of the phenomenon of multilingualism as it manifests itself and is lived in Southeast Asia. Gary Jones, in Chapter 12, reviews the bilingual education system in Brunei and tries to determine whether the system is “moving in the right direction”. In exploring this topic Jones deals with post colonial attitudes to English, the issue of nationalism versus nationism, identity loss and the challenges of various education problems such as inadequate training of teachers, inappropriate methodology and lack of suitable textbooks resources. The chapter also deals with three categories of concerns related to bilingualism; parental concerns, cultural concerns and ideological concerns and suggests that a situation of elite versus folk bilingualism has emerged in Brunei; described by socio-economic factors. The chapter concludes with a reminder that Brunei is only at the halfway stage in the forty year cycle reckoned to be the time frame for proper assessment of the success of failure of a bilingual system. While many of the original worries and fears have been overcome there is a pressing need to improve classroom pedagogy and to ensure more equitable benefits from the education system.

In the *Literatures* section there are chapters on new generation writings in English in Malaysia, the literature that young Filipinos read, the use of English in Malaysian newspapers with respect to general elections, the discourses of Asian English newspapers with particular reference to notions like “globalisation” and “global English” and ASEAN English on Internet websites. The first two chapters in this section represent two perspectives in approaching literature in Asia, namely, as reader and as writer. In Chapter 13, “New Generation Writings in English: Discursive Conditions and Literary Revival in Malaysia, 1996-2005,” Grace V.S. Chin presents literature from the perspective of writers of English. Chin examines the development and production of English language literature in postcolonial Malaysia between 1996 and 2005. She focuses on the emerging new generation of writers and how their works have led to the revival of literary writing in English in the new millennium. Chin stresses that the new generation writers are important in analyzing the national discourse that has evolved in postcolonial Malaysia and the manner in which political developments have affected the local literary scene. This chapter briefly looks at key historical movements and conditions that have contributed to the discursive shaping of the literary world in English today. In the end, Chin notes that a change in political stance toward the English language in the 1980s has contributed greatly to positive developments in the Malaysian literary scene. However, she also warns about problems that need to be resolved if these
positive developments are to prosper and persist. In the next chapter, “The Literature Filipino Students Do Not Read,” Martin looks into the literary canon, curriculum, and teaching practices in Philippine high schools today. She begins the chapter by presenting a brief review of literature education in the Philippines during the American colonial period. The second part of the chapter details her study which specifically addresses questions about the literary texts required by Filipino high school literature teachers, the literary texts read by Filipino high school students on their own, and the extent to which Euro-American and Filipino literature occur or do not occur in literature education in the Philippines today. Martin finds that more than a hundred years after American soldiers first taught English to Filipino schoolchildren, Philippine literature education today continues to privilege texts of American and European origins.

The Media section consists of three chapters on media in South East Asia. In Chapter 15 Azirah Hashim and Norizah Hassan analyse news discourse on the last general elections in Malaysia as presented in one of the English newspapers. The authors show that certain rhetorical and linguistic features are employed in constructing the texts and are used to convey the intended messages of the main political parties. Their analysis shows that these different sub-genres have common communicative purposes and goals aimed at influencing and persuading the readers and are sensitive to socio-cultural and socio-political issues. The Malaysian variety of English is also highlighted in this study. The chapter by Kingsley Bolton discusses the discourses of Asian English newspapers focusing on notions such as “globalisation” and “global English” in the Asian context. Bolton examines Asian English language newspapers and explores how approaches from corpus linguistics and discourse analysis may be applied in the processes of analysing and understanding these texts. Finally, the chapter revisits Marshall McLuhan’s pioneering work on understanding media to evaluate the cliché of “the global village”. In Chapter 17, Anthea Fraser Gupta investigates the ways in which the ten ASEAN countries used English on-line in February 2007. The use of English on-line is related to their historical relationship with English as well as to their economic status. A hierarchy of Anglophony in the ASEAN countries can be observed with countries that were colonised by Anglophone nations maintaining English as an internally vital language, and the other countries using English to reach foreign residents in, or with an interest in, the country.

David Prescott, Andy Kirkpatrick, Azirah Hashim, Isabel Martin
PART I:

VARIETIES
CHAPTER ONE

THE VOWELS OF THE DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN SINGAPORE

DAVID DETERDING

Introduction

Over the past decade, interest in Singapore English, and also the Englishes of other countries in South-East Asia, has burgeoned. Furthermore, the easy availability of computer software has made it straightforward to record and measure speech, with the result that nowadays description of regional varieties of English is increasingly based on the measurement and analysis of substantial quantities of data. Here, some new measurements of the vowels of Singapore English are presented and then compared with other recently-published results for varieties of English in South-East Asia.

For Singapore English, it has long been observed that there is a tendency for speakers to have no distinction between the long/short pairs of vowels /iː~/ɪ/, /ɔː~/ɒ/, /ɑː~/ʌ/, and /uː~/ʊ/ as well as the two non-close front vowels /e~/æ/ (Tongue 1979:28, Tay 1982, Brown 1988, Bao 1998, Lim 2003, Wee 2004), and measurements (Hung 1995, Deterding 2003) have confirmed most of these observations.

These measurements have mainly focused on the speech of ethnically Chinese Singaporeans, as they constitute the overwhelming majority of the population of Singapore, but this overlooks a significant dimension in the variation found in Singapore English, as 14% of Singaporeans are ethnically Malay and 9% are Indian (Singapore Department of Statistics 2006), so it is important to consider the extent to which the speech of Malays and Indians differs from that of Chinese.

A few previous studies have compared the vowels of the different ethnic groups. Suzanna and Brown (2000) showed that, although all speakers in Singapore tend to merge /e/ and /æ/, this tendency is strongest for Malays and least evident for Indians, which suggests there may be some differences between
the vowels of the different groups. Similarly, Deterding (2000) reported that, although both Chinese and Malay Singaporeans tend to produce /æ/ and /ɒ/ without much diphthongal change during the vowel, there is a small difference between the two groups in the pronunciation of /æ/. However, Deterding (2005) found that egg rhymes with vague and not with peg for virtually all young Singaporeans regardless of their ethnic background, and this is evidence for the emergence of a unique variety of Singapore English which is shared by all groups and which is becoming increasingly independent of any external model (Schneider 2003).

Despite this apparent emergence of a distinct Singaporean variety of English, Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2000) showed that listeners can identify the ethnic background of young educated Singapore speakers with a high degree of accuracy on the basis of just ten seconds of conversational speech, so it is clear that substantial differences remain between the English of the different groups. Lim (2000) suggested that the main difference lies in the intonation, possibly because the final pitch peak occurs later in the utterance for Malays, and Tan (2002) reported that Chinese, Malay and Indian Singaporean listeners react differently to the perception of stress when pitch, amplitude and duration are manipulated, confirming that there are indeed differences in their intonation.

Although it seems that intonational differences are key to the ability of Singaporeans to identify the speech of the three main ethnic groups, it is possible that vowels and consonants also play some part. After briefly considering the identifiability of the ethnic background of speakers of Singapore English, this paper will investigate the monophthong vowels of the three groups in Singapore. It will also compare the results with measurements of the vowels of other speakers of English in the South-East Asian region, to consider the extent to which there are common features of pronunciation across the region, as has been reported by Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006).

Subjects

A total of 43 female undergraduate students at the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Singapore were recorded in January and July 2006. The subjects also filled in a brief biodata questionnaire, which in addition to questions about gender, age, and ethnic background, asked them to list the languages they speak, with whom, and the age at which each was learned. Two ethnically-Indian subjects indicated that they speak both Malay and English at home and neither claimed much knowledge of Tamil or any other Indian language, so these two subjects were excluded from the analysis. The existence of these two Indian subjects with a strong Malay background illustrates the diversity of the Indian population in Singapore.
Of the forty-one subjects whose data is analysed, twenty-five are ethnically Chinese, twelve are Malay, and four are Indian. Although this relative shortage of data for the Indian community is unfortunate, it accurately reflects the ethnic make-up of Singapore, where Indians are the smallest minority.

At the time of the recording, the average age of the subjects was twenty-two years, with the youngest being nineteen and the oldest thirty. All forty-one subjects were studying on the BA program at NIE, where they were training to become teachers. English was the chosen speciality in their studies for all them, and all are highly competent in English. Of the Chinese students, six gave English as their best language, six gave Mandarin Chinese, and thirteen stated an equal ability in the two languages. A few also claimed some ability in other varieties of Chinese, such as Hokkien or Cantonese, but this was never one of their best languages. Of the Malays, one gave English as her best language, two gave Malay and the other 9 stated an equal ability in Malay and English. Of the four Indians whose data is analysed, one gave English, two gave equal English and Tamil, and one gave equal English and Punjabi.

Data

The subjects were recorded reading the following text (the “Wolf” passage):

There was once a poor shepherd boy who watched his flocks in the fields next to a dark forest near the foot of a mountain. One hot afternoon, he thought up a good plan to get some company for himself and also have a little fun. Raising his fist in the air, he ran down to the village shouting “Wolf, Wolf.” As soon as they heard him, the villagers all rushed from their homes, full of concern for his safety, and two of them stayed with him for a while. This gave the boy so much pleasure that a few days later he tried exactly the same trick again, and once more he was successful. However, not long after, a wolf was looking for a change in its usual diet of chicken and duck, so it actually did come out from the forest and began to threaten the sheep. Racing down to the village, the boy of course cried out even louder than before, but as all the villagers were convinced that he was trying to fool them a third time, nobody bothered to come and help him, and so the wolf had a feast.

The use of a slightly longer version of this text is discussed in Deterding (2006), where it is shown that it works well for the measurement of the vowels of English, and in fact it is far more suitable for this purpose than the North Wind and the Sun passage (IPA 1999, 39) that has been used by the International Phonetic Association for nearly one hundred years.

The recordings were made directly onto a computer in the Phonetics Laboratory at NIE, using CSL hardware (Model 4500, Version 2.7.0) from...
KAY Elemetrics with a high-quality Shure SM48 dynamic microphone placed a few inches from the mouth of the speakers.

**Identifiability**

A short extract of about ten seconds was taken from the data of twelve of the subjects: five Chinese, five Malays and two Indians. (It is unfortunate that the data from only two Indians could be used, as the other two Indians were classmates of the listeners.) The extract was identical in all cases:

Raising his fist in the air, he ran down to the village shouting “Wolf, Wolf.” As soon as they heard him, the villagers all rushed from their homes, full of concern for his safety.

The twelve extracts were then played in random order to a group of 20 third-year undergraduates, thirteen Chinese and seven Malays, who were asked to identify the ethnic group of each speaker as Chinese, Malay or Indian. The overall correct identification rate was 85%, which is almost as high as the 90% for conversational speech reported by Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2000), even though the latter included no Indian speech. Furthermore, the identification rate found here is much higher than the 59% found for a read passage in Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2000), and it is also somewhat higher than the 73% reported for conversational speech by Lim (2000). The individual results are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified as</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 1, it can be seen that the Chinese speakers were identified most accurately, with 94% correct identification. The Malays were also on the whole identified correctly, though the 86% figure falls below that for the Chinese. In contrast, the Indians were identified least accurately, with only 57.5% correct answers. This is the same pattern reported both by Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2000) and by Lim (2000), and indeed it reflects the comments of the participants that they could easily identify the Chinese and Malay speakers but had much more difficulty with the Indians. However, a word of
caution is appropriate here with regard to the Indians: one of the two Indian
speakers (the one whose best language is English) was correctly identified by all
20 listeners while the other was only identified correctly by 3 of the 20 listeners
(most of the others guessing her to be Malay, even though in her biodata she
indicated equal use of Tamil and English). So it seems that there may be a
prototypical kind of speech for Indian Singaporeans even if only some of them
actually exhibit it.

Although one should be careful about drawing conclusions from results for
just one or two speakers, the pattern suggested here confirms that of previous
studies, viz. that Singaporeans find it most difficult to identify the ethnic
background of Indians. It seems that the Indian community in Singapore is
indeed the most diverse, with some people originating from south India and
speaking a Dravidian language such as Tamil or Malayalam, others coming
from north India and speaking an Indo-European language such as Punjabi or
Hindi, and still others using Malay at home.

It might be tempting to conclude from Table 1 that the higher identification
rate for the Chinese speakers arises because the majority of the listeners were
Chinese. However, if we consider the results for the two groups of listeners
separately, we find that the higher identification rate for the Chinese speakers is
not in fact related to the ethnic background of the listeners. The results for the
thirteen Chinese listeners are shown in Table 2, and those for the seven Malays
are shown in Table 3.

Table 2 Identification rate (%) for the Chinese listeners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified as</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Identification rate (%) for the Malay listeners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified as</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Tables 2 and 3 we can see that the Malay listeners identified all the
Chinese speakers correctly, and in fact they outperformed the Chinese listeners
in this respect. Moreover, for both sets of listeners, the same pattern is found:
the Chinese are the most easily identifiable, followed closely by the Malays, while the Indians are the most difficult to identify.

In the early 1980s, Platt and Weber (1980, 46) and Platt et al. (1984, 6) both reported that it was not possible for the ethnic background of younger speakers of English in Singapore to be identified. Then, for data recorded in the mid-1990s, with read speech Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2000) found an identification rate of 59%, and with conversational data Lim (2000) reported 80% for Chinese and 75% for Malays. Now, with data recorded in 2006, we find yet higher identification rates (apart from the Indians), and this suggests that there has been a greater separation of the English spoken by the ethnic groups in Singapore in recent years. One possibility is that, as English is becoming used more and more widely in Singapore, not just in schools but as a home language as well, greater ethnic diversification is developing. Schneider (2003) proposes five major stages in the emergence and establishment of new Englishes, and the final stage is labelled “differentiation” as new subvarieties develop to reflect group identities. It seems that Singapore English may be approaching this fifth stage.

Overall, we can conclude that there are indeed distinct patterns of speech for the different communities in Singapore which listeners can easily use to identify the ethnic background of speakers with a high level of accuracy. We will now investigate whether these differences show up in the pronunciation of monophthong vowels.

**Measurements of Vowels**

For the data of each speaker, at least three tokens were measured for each of the eleven monophthong vowels of RP British English. Although the adoption of British English as the starting point provides us a convenient foundation for the description of vowels, it is a contentious issue. Mohanan (1992) makes a strong case for the description of the phonology of each variety of a language in its own terms and without reference to other varieties, and with regard to grammar, Alsagoff and Ho (1998) show that, if we always compare Singapore English with British English, we miss important features such as distinct meanings for *already*. And indeed, the assumption that British pronunciation of words provides a basis for the description of Singapore English is problematic. The selection of words for the description of each vowel will be discussed in some detail below, particularly with reference to /e/, /æ/ and /ɔː/.

All the tokens were selected to avoid preceding /w/, /r/, and /j/ and following /ŋ/ and /l/, as all these consonants have a substantial influence on the quality of the vowel (Deterding 1997). However, the Wolf passage is explicitly designed to provide plenty of suitable vowels which can be measured in a range of
phonological environments that avoid these preceding and following consonants. Indeed, a slightly longer version of the passage has been shown to work well for the acoustic description of the vowels of RP British English (Deterding 2006), providing a close match to measurements from unscripted connected speech broadcast by the BBC (Deterding 1997). Table 4 shows the vowels selected for measurement, grouped according to the pronunciation expected in RP British English. For polysyllabic words, the syllable containing the vowel that was measured is underlined.

Table 4 Words selected for measurement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/iː/</td>
<td>sheep, ev[en], feast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɪ/</td>
<td>fist, this, chic[ken], did, conv[in]ced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/e/</td>
<td>she[pherd], next, get, ple[asure], suc[cessful]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/æ/</td>
<td>plan, exact[ly], actu[ally], began</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʌ/</td>
<td>up, comp[any], fun, much, duck, come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɑː/</td>
<td>dark, afternoon, after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɒ/</td>
<td>flocks, hot, not, bother[ed]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ɔː/</td>
<td>thought, more, course, before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʊ/</td>
<td>foot, good, look[ing]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/uː/</td>
<td>afternoon, soon, two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/z/</td>
<td>heard, concern, third</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each token of each vowel, the first and second formants were measured by means of LPC formant tracks overlaid on computer-based spectrograms derived using Praat software Version 4.3.12 (Boersma and Weenink 2005). There were few difficulties in obtaining these values, though in six cases (two each of the Chinese, Malay and Indian data) there was no vowel that could be measured in the first syllable of chicken as it was absorbed by the preceding /ʃ/, so measurements for these tokens were omitted. This kind of absorption of vowels is common in connected speech, though it is rather more usual in unstressed syllables, especially those with a schwa (Shockey 2003, 22). In a few cases, a word was misread: one Chinese speaker read they instead of this, one Malay had near instead of next, one Chinese omitted the word up and one Indian read up as about. In addition, one Indian speaker pronounced concern with the stress on the first syllable with the result that the second syllable had a syllabic nasal. All these tokens were also omitted from the data. Measurement of
The Vowels of the Different Ethnic Groups in Singapore

The first two formants was possible for nearly all the other tokens, though the second formant could not be measured for one token of *more* by a Chinese speaker, and heavy aspiration of the initial /k/ prevented measurement of the formants in two Chinese tokens of *company* and one token of *come*, so all these tokens were also excluded. The averages for the Chinese, Malay and Indian subjects were then calculated.

The average formant values can be plotted on a graph of the first formant (F₁) against the second formant (F₂), where the first formant provides an indication of the open-close quality of the vowels and the second formant reflects their front-back quality (Haywood 2000, 147; Ladefoged 2001, 176). For the purposes of plotting the formants, the values are converted from Hertz to the auditory Bark scale using the formula suggested by Zwicker and Terhardt (1980). The average values for the Chinese speakers are shown in Figure 1, those for the Malays are in Figure 2 and for the Indians in Figure 3.

![Figure 1 Plot of the first two formants for the vowels of 25 Chinese Singaporeans](image-url)
Chapter One

Figure 2 Plot of the first two formants for the vowels of 12 Malay Singaporeans

Figure 3 Plot of the first two formants for the vowels of 4 Indian Singaporeans
Comparison of these figures suggests there is almost no difference between the vowels of the three main ethnic communities in Singapore, and by and large they confirm the overall patterns reported for Singapore English in earlier research: /e/ and /æ/ are close together, though we will discuss these two vowels a little more below; similarly /iː/ and /i/ are close together, especially for Chinese and Malays, though it is possible that the four Indian subjects maintain a greater distinction between these two vowels; /uː/ and /ʊ/ are also close together for all three communities and especially for the Malays; and there is also little distinction between /æː/ and /æ/, though we need to be careful about concluding too much from this as these two vowels are distinguished mostly by means of length rather than vowel quality in RP British English (Deterding 1997). The only surprising result is that a distinction seems to be maintained between /ɔː/ and /ɒ/, in contrast to all previous observations that these two vowels tend to be merged in Singapore English. We will discuss this issue further below.

The biggest difference between the three speech communities is that /ɜː/ is more fronted for the Malays. We will address this issue first before considering the status of /e/ and /æ/, /ɔː/ and /ɒ/ and finally /uː/ and /ʊ/.

/ɜː/

One possibility to explain the less fronted /ɜː/ for the Chinese and Indian subjects is rhoticity, as the three words measured for /ɜː/ all include a potential postvocalic /r/: heard, concern and third. Although most Singapore English is non-rhotic, following the pronunciation of most varieties of British English where /r/ occurs only before a vowel, an increasing number of young Singaporeans do have a rhotic accent, perhaps as a result of the pervasive influence of American movies and music. Indeed, Poedjosoedarmo (2000) reported that, for a group of educated young Singaporean subjects reading a passage, 24% of the Chinese used a postvocalic /r/ at least once while only 12% of Malays did, so it seems that this tendency is stronger among the Chinese than the Malays. And indeed, of our forty-one subjects, six Chinese, one Malay and two Indians (one a speaker of Tamil and the other a speaker of Punjabi) exhibited some rhoticity.

The main acoustic affect of postvocalic /r/ is to lower the third formant (Haywood 2000, 203; Ladefoged 2001, 213), but it also tends to affect the other formants to a certain extent, especially the second formant. However, if we exclude all the tokens of /ɜː/ from the subjects who exhibited rhoticity, this in
fact has almost no effect on the results, so it is not clear why the Malays have a more fronted /æ:/.

An issue arises in connection with rhoticity: if the subjects are using a truly American accent, the choice of words for analysis is flawed, as \textit{after} and \textit{afternoon} should be included under /æ/ rather than /æ:/, and all the examples for /o/ should be included under /æ:/ as American English generally does not have the /o/ vowel (Wells 1982, 473). However, even for those Singaporeans whose pronunciation is partially rhotic it is rare to adopt a completely consistent American accent, and in fact none of the subjects studied here had /æ/ in \textit{after} or /æ:/ in \textit{hot} and \textit{not}.

\textit{/e/}

Although the lack of distinction between /e/ and /æ/ in general confirms the reports of previous research, we need to be very careful about the words that are used for analysis. Deterding (2005) has shown that, for nearly all Singaporeans, \textit{egg} and \textit{bed} have a close vowel, rhyming with \textit{vague} and \textit{made} respectively rather than with \textit{peg} and \textit{fed}, and if words such as these are included in the data for /e/, this distorts the results. Indeed, closer examination of the individual words measure for /e/ reveals exactly this problem.

Figure 4 shows a scatter plot for the vowels of \textit{next} and the first syllable of \textit{shepherd} for all forty-one subjects, and it is quite obvious that \textit{next} has a more front and slightly more close vowel than \textit{shepherd} for nearly all the subjects. In fact, only six subjects (two Chinese and four Malays) have a vowel in \textit{next} that clearly belongs with \textit{shepherd}, though three other tokens (one from each of the three groups) are fronted but not close.
To investigate the quality of the vowel in *next* further, two Chinese subjects were asked to read the sentence:

I will send you the text next September.

On listening to these recordings, it was immediately clear that the vowel in *text* is quite different from that in *next*. In fact, *next* probably has the same vowel as *makes* or *takes*, while *text* has the same vowel as *send* and the second syllable of *September*, and this confirms that, just as with *egg* and *bed*, the vowel in *next* does not belong with the other tokens of */e/* for the overwhelming majority of Singaporeans.

Further examination of the values indicates that some (though not all) speakers have a close vowel in *get* as well, though the vowel in *shepherd*, *pleasure* and *successful* is nearly always relatively back and open. Therefore, for plotting the quality of */e/* we should exclude *next* and *get* and just use *shepherd*, *pleasure* and *successful*. It is unfortunate that all values for */e/* now occur in polysyllabic words, but that is better than including vowels that clearly do not belong.

*/æ/*

We also need to be careful about the words that are selected for */æ/*. Figure 5 shows the scatter plot for the vowels in *plan* and *began* for all the speakers, and
it can be seen that, for some of the speakers, began has a substantially more close vowel than plan. Of the thirteen subjects with this relatively close vowel in began, eight are Chinese, three are Malay and two are Indian.

Two students were asked to read the following sentence, and it was confirmed that, for some speakers in Singapore, began rhymes with regain and does not have the same vowel as plan (as it would in most varieties of English).

He began to regain his sanity.

Although the majority of subjects do not have this close vowel in began, a significant minority do, and given that for them it is clearly not the same vowel as that in plan, we should exclude it from the average values calculated for /æ/.

/ɔː/ and /ɒ/

We also need to consider the words that are investigated for /ɔː/. Figure 6 shows a scatter plot of the vowels in before and thought for all forty-one speakers, and we can note that before is more back and more close than thought, and only one token of thought (from a Malay speaker) has this close back
quality. In fact, the same pattern occurs with *more* and *course*, as *more* tends to have the same vowel as *before* while *course* is similar to *thought*. It seems, therefore, that the vowel tends to be more close and more back when there is no following consonant.

![Figure 6 Scatter plot of before and thought](image)

However, before concluding that there is a different vowel in *before* than *thought*, we need to consider whether this is a natural process that affects speakers of English in general. Figure 7 shows a similar scatter plot for *before* and *thought* for five female RP British English speakers, and we can see that, while the vowel in *before* is certainly more back than that in *thought*, it is not more close. So it seems that what is distinctive about Singapore pronunciation is that the open/close quality of /ɔː/ depends on whether there is a following consonant or not.
This pattern is distinct from that for *next*. Above we noted that *next* has a close vowel while *text* has a more open vowel, and this suggests that it is not possible to predict which vowel will occur on the basis of the syllable shape. In contrast, we can predict the occurrence of the close or open variant of /ɔː/, as there is a close vowel if there is no following consonant. In other words, the close vowel is an allophone of /ɔː/ and not a separate vowel. However, for the purposes of plotting vowel quality, we need to be aware of these two allophones.

We might briefly consider influences on Singapore English that might have resulted in the close vowel in *before* and *more* and the more open vowel in *course* and *thought*. One potential source of influence might be from Chinese languages. Mandarin Chinese is unlikely in this respect as the only possible syllable-final consonants in Mandarin are /n/ and /ŋ/ (Duanmu 2003). However, some other Chinese languages such as Hokkien and Cantonese do have final plosives, and even though in Singapore today these languages are not widely spoken by young people, historically they have had a strong influence on Singapore English.

For Cantonese, Zee (1999) notes that /ɔ/ tends to be lowered in syllables that end with a plosive, so it is indeed possible that this is an influence on Singapore English.
For Hokkien, the picture is less clear. For the Taiwanese variety of Hokkien, Chung (1996, 2) lists six non-nasalized monophthongs, including the relatively close /o/ and the more open /ə/, but of these, only /o/ can occur with a following consonant, including /k/ (1996, 75), so we can consider whether the quality of /o/ in Taiwanese Hokkien is influenced by a following consonant. Taking words from Taiwan Language Committee (2005), we have gok (國 “country”) with a final /k/ and gho (五 “five”) and ko (塊, “[measure word for] dollars”) with no following consonant, and we can compare the quality of the vowel in these three words. A 50-year old female subject who grew up in south-east Taiwan was recorded reading the following sentence three times:

在外國五塊
di ghua-gok gho ko
(“In foreign country, five dollars.”)

The quality of the vowel in gok, gho and ko was measured, and it was found that there is little difference between them, a conclusion that is confirmed by careful listening. So it seems that Hokkien is not an influence on Singapore English with regard to the quality of the vowel being affected by the existence of a following consonant, unless the version of Hokkien spoken in Singapore is different in this respect from Taiwanese Hokkien.

We should also consider the possible influence of Malay. In Standard Malay there are five vowels, including the mid back vowel /o/, but this vowel cannot occur in word-final position except as a result of deletion of final /r/ (Teoh 1994, 17). As the Malay spoken in Singapore is generally non-rhotic and so final /r/ is indeed omitted, it is not clear whether there is a contrast in the quality of final and non-final /o/ in the Malay spoken in Singapore. In addition, Maris (1980, 5) states that [ɔ] exists in Malay as a variant of /o/, but it is not stated whether this variation is determined by syllable shape or not.

In conclusion, the most likely influence on the pronunciation of /ɔː/ in Singapore English is Cantonese, but more research is needed to investigate this issue further.

/*ə/ and /ʊ/

We have seen that the quality of /ɔː/ depends on whether there is a following consonant in the syllable. We should now consider the quality of /ʊː/ to find out if there are different allophones of this vowel as well, depending on the syllable shape. Figure 8 shows the scatter plot for soon and two for all forty-one subjects,
and indeed we find a similar pattern for two, in which there is no final consonant, with the vowel tending to be further back.

![Scatter plot of soon and two](image)

Figure 8 Scatter plot of *soon* and *two*

Figure 8 shows that just four tokens of *two* have a relatively front quality, three of which are from Malay speakers and one from an Indian. In addition, the two tokens of *soon* with the most back quality are from a Malay and an Indian, so it seems that the tendency for a less back vowel in *soon* compared with a fully back vowel in *two* is strongest among the Chinese speakers.

**Summary for Singapore English**

We can now summarize the findings for Singapore English. There seems to be little difference in the quality of the monophthongs for the three main ethnic groups, except perhaps that Malays have a more fronted /ɜː/, so the undoubted differences in their speech patterns must lie either in the pronunciation of their consonants or, more probably, in their intonation.

However, overall there are clear idiosyncratic patterns that extend throughout Singapore English: *next* tends to have a close front vowel compared to *shepherd, pleasure* and *successful*; *more* and *before* also have a close back vowel compared to *thought* and *course*; and *two* has a more back vowel than