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The discursive construction of new citizen identities in Singapore

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how new citizens reconfigure dominant indexes of citizenship to claim status as legitimate new citizens of Singapore. New citizens are expected to resolve a tension that underpins public discourses in Singapore society: while the statal narrative of multiculturalism countenances new citizens to have perceivable markers of difference, everyday discourses expect new citizens to assimilate into the 'Singapore core'—a term used in Singapore that denotes a homogeneous understanding of what it means to be Singaporean. By adopting a metapragmatic approach, this article identifies three common indexes of citizenship that new citizens negotiate to resolve this contradiction: language, loyalty, and legacy. By reconfiguring common markers of citizenship in Singapore, new citizens are able to discursively construct a type of citizenship that they can legitimately claim and contribute to. This expands common understandings of the notion of citizenship in Singapore society. (Citizenship, language ideologies, multiculturalism, metapragmatics, Singapore)*

INTRODUCTION

Recent sociolinguistic research on citizenship regards 'citizenship' not just as a fixed political category that people are supposed to fall into, but as a product of negotiation that can be sociolinguistically mediated and discursively constructed (Milani 2017; Cooke & Peutrell 2019; Khan 2019). While many studies have been done in the field of language testing for citizenship purposes (Extra, Spotti, & Van Avermaet 2009; Hogan-Brun, Mar-Molinero, & Stevenson 2009), the role of language in citizenship and asylum procedures (Blommaert 2001), the representation of citizenship in public media texts (Bennett 2018), and citizenship narratives (De Fina 2003), there is a lack of sociolinguistic research that zooms into the articulations of citizenship by new citizens (see Khan 2019 for a notable exception), especially from non-Western contexts. This article participates in the ongoing debates on language and citizenship by examining the perspective of new citizens[1] as reflected in the way they discursively construct citizenship. This perspective is important because it reflects the unique position of new citizens in society: despite having proven their worth as deserving recipients of citizenship, they

continue to face discrimination and othering because of their transnational connections and visible racial and linguistic differences from local-born citizens.

In this article, I investigate how new citizens negotiate tensions in and between dominant discourses about citizenship. The dominant discourses I refer to encompass articulations of citizenship from different members of society, such as statal narratives, public media texts, and resonant sentiments of 'ordinary' citizens. The variegated, ambiguous, and conflicting premises of these discourses reveal contradictions that new citizens ought to resolve. For instance, while previous studies on citizenship regimes have illustrated how statal discourses tend to impose unrealistic and unreasonable expectations on immigrants, statal narratives may also serve as dynamic resources that new citizens can use as they construct their new citizen identities. These tensions are particularly salient in Singapore, where new citizens are expected to unilaterally negotiate the conflicting discourses regarding multiculturalism both from the state and public discourses that underpin definitions of legitimate (new) citizenship. These equivocal definitions of citizenship and the ideological spaces they occupy become the crucible for the production of citizenship stances. Hence, this article views citizenship 'from below' (Monforte, Bassel, & Khan 2019): by listening to the voices of the new citizens themselves, we can appreciate how regimes of citizenship 'are interpreted, reacted to, and acted upon in by ordinary citizens in everyday life' (Miller-Idriss 2006:561).

To make this point, the analysis focuses on how new citizens claim status as legitimate citizens of Singapore by reconfiguring indexical relations between the notion of citizenship and semiotic resources based on their understanding of their positionality in society. In particular, I unpack how new citizens reconfigure the indexicality between citizenship and three signs: language, loyalty, and legacy. I do this by illustrating how new citizens tweak these three indexes to reconcile conflicting discourses about citizenship in, and portray themselves as legitimate new citizens of, Singapore. This paper contributes to the bourgeoning literature on the sociolinguistics of citizenship in, from, and about non-Western and postcolonial contexts (Stroud 2015; Milani 2017; Lim, Stroud, & Wee 2018) by demonstrating how the Singapore case can strengthen our understanding of citizenship, multilingualism, diversities, and differentiation.

NEW CITIZENSHIP IN SINGAPORE: TENSIONS, ANXIETIES, AND DISCONTENTS

Singapore is a highly developed, multiracial, and multilingual global city-state in Southeast Asia. Its diversity, multiracialism, and multilingualism are best epitomized by the government's official race-based categorization of its inhabitants: the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, Others) model. The four racial categories are the basis of Singapore's official languages: Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, and (Standard) English, the lingua franca that is not assigned to any racial category. Because of its low fertility rate and reliance on human capital, Singapore

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depends on immigration to maintain a population that can sustain its status as a regional economic hub. Annually, 15,000–25,000 new citizenships are granted: according to the Department of Statistics, 22,550 were granted Singapore citizenship in 2018—a significant part of Singapore's 2018–2019 0.8% population growth. To put this into perspective, there were only 32,413 citizen births in the same year. Because of the considerable number of new citizens in recent years, citizenship has become a sensitive topic in Singapore, resulting in clashing ideologies about the position of new citizens in society.

Hill & Lian (1995:246–47) argue that Singapore's approach to citizenship and integration is based on the 'founding myths of Singapore': pragmatism, multiracialism, and meritocracy. Pragmatism stresses that Singapore should come up with practical ways of addressing problems—in this case, the unsustainability of a low population. Meritocracy, the principle of bestowing rewards upon the crème de la crème, is evident in the supposedly credential-based 'eligibility requirements' of the citizenship application process. Finally, multiracialism is the practice of assigning people to racial categories—the rationale behind Singapore's CMIO system—while stressing the need for racial harmony. While the government does not release statistics on the countries of origin of new citizens, government officials have repeatedly made pronouncements that immigration will preserve the racial composition of Singapore, which lead to the belief that the number of new citizenships granted per year is pegged to the CMIO system. These principles produce tensions that underpin conflicting articulations of citizenship in Singapore society.

The first tension revolves around meritocracy: do new citizens really deserve their Singapore citizenship? On paper, Singapore has a straightforward and merit-based citizenship application process, called 'registration', for those who do not have claims to Singapore citizenship by birth or descent. The Constitution sets only five registration requirements: good character, residence in Singapore for a whole year before the submission of the application, a total of at least ten years of residing in Singapore within the past twelve years before the application, intention to reside in Singapore permanently, and 'elementary knowledge' of one of the four official languages. Upon the in-principle approval of their applications, applicants must complete the Singapore Citizenship Journey (SCJ)—a program consisting of an online course on Singapore history, politics, and culture; an experiential tour of landmarks in Singapore; and a sharing session between applicants and community leaders. It is only after the completion of the SCJ that applicants are invited to attend the Citizenship Ceremony, where they receive their Singapore identity cards and officially become Singapore citizens. Essentially, this process puts forward the idea that acquiring Singapore citizenship is highly selective, that the ever-watchful state enforces rigorous control over immigration, and that successful applicants are those who already embody the ideal Singapore citizen.

In reality, these requirements have numerous gray areas. First, the intention to settle in Singapore cannot be concretely measured, though it is believed to be primarily assessed through economic contributions (e.g. having viable jobs)—allowing

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applicants to prove their own merit as deserving recipients of Singapore citizenship because they contribute long-term financial gains to Singapore (Immigration & Checkpoints Authority Singapore n.d.). Second, there are no language tests to prove one's linguistic proficiency. Also, Singlish, the de facto mother tongue of many Singaporeans (Wee 2002), is excluded from official policy despite its importance in everyday life. Third, the SCJ's design as a course that must simply be completed instead of passed has been regarded as just an 'additional hoop that potential citizens must jump through' (Lim 2014:204). These gray areas complicate our understanding of the statal narrative of meritocracy by latticing it with the notion of 'deservingness' (Monforte et al. 2019:25), a value that 'defines a set of specific characteristics of the "deserving citizen" and separates this figure from the "undeserving Other"'. While the completion of the registration process officially signifies the new citizens' meritocratic achievement of their citizenship, it does not completely dismantle prevalent beliefs that new citizens are not deserving enough due to the disjunction between statal narratives and public sentiment.

Exacerbating the problem is the inability of registration to reconcile multiculturalism and assimilationism (see Extra et al. 2009), another tension produced by contradictory articulations of citizenship. While new citizens are expected to 'adapt to our way of life, while enriching the diverse experiences, skills and capabilities in our society' (National Population and Talent Division 2013:4), they are not explicitly asked to abnegate their cultural beliefs and backgrounds (Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth n.d.). Ortiga (2015:961) further claims that 'multiculturalism serves as the normative standard to evaluate migrants' capacity to assimilate into Singapore society'. The Singapore case seems to depart from Fortier's (2013:697) claim that 'social cohesion, integration, and respect for national values have now displaced multiculturalism and recognition as principles guiding the ways that governments "manage" migration and particularly the integration of immigrants'. The tension between state-endorsed multiculturalism and the expected adherence to local norms establishes the ambiguity of multiculturalism in Singapore: it is an all-encompassing term that subsumes cohesion, integration, respect for national values, and even assimilation.

Because of the state's inability to operationally reconcile its assimilationist and multiculturalist inclinations, new citizens are often questioned whether they are indeed compatible with the 'Singapore core'—a term commonly deployed in public discourses that stands for a homogeneous understanding of what it means to be Singaporean. In 2011, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong remarked:

> [W]e have to preserve a Singaporean core in our society. We need immigrants to reinforce our ranks, but we must maintain a clear majority of local-born Singaporeans who set the tone of our society and uphold our core values and ethos. (cited in Lim 2014:205)

Statements such as this are a double-edged sword. While they may counter local anxieties about immigration, they may also dangerously reinforce the dichotomous relationship not just between locals and migrants but also between local-born and

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non-local-born Singaporeans by assigning distinctive social expectations to people based on their citizenship status. Arguing that local-born Singaporeans represent the Singaporean core implies that non-local-born Singaporeans do not. This inevitably facilitates the construction of asymmetrical normative expectations from local- and foreign-born citizens, and worse, fuels anti-new-citizen rhetoric.

Despite their fulfillment of the requirements of the registration process, new citizens continue to be 'view[ed] with suspicion' (Lim 2014:203). They are often characterized as people who only think of Singapore citizenship as a 'stepping stone to greener pastures' (Chong 2014:218): new citizens only value Singapore citizenship because it would make it easier for them to eventually settle in other countries. This belief, commonly used to accuse new citizens of being unwilling to espouse Singapore's core values, affirms Johnson's (2010:501; cited in Merolli 2016:961) claim that 'people who are suspected of not having the correct feelings, including those accused of making a point of their difference… are problematised and identified as legitimate subjects for critique, fear or suspicion'. Because this sentiment repudiates the impossibility of policing and measuring affect to ensure 'good citizenship', given that no test can accurately quantify one's love of and attachment to a country (D'Aoust 2013; Merolli 2016), new citizens are compelled to nonetheless demonstrate their commitment to Singapore in their everyday conduct to offset such suspicion. By the same token, local-born citizens consider high regard for National Service (NS), a two-year military conscription program for male Singaporeans, as a marker of integration of new citizens (Leong & Yang 2014). This is reminiscent of Bishop's (2017) observation in the United States that naturalized citizens are expected to voluntarily risk their lives for the nation, which is not typically required of local-born citizens. In a sense, (good) citizenship and even Singaporeanness—notions that ideationally are not synonymous yet are often conflated—are viewed as gradable values that people must affectively strive to maximally realize.

This extends to language proficiency since language palpably relates to affect and identity. New citizens are often criticized in public media as people who do not speak English, or even Singlish, well and are hence 'less Singaporean'. This is an evident contradiction to the state's downplaying of the importance of Singlish in society (Wee 2005) as seen in the absence of a Singlish test (or any language for that matter) in the registration process. Moreover, it perpetuates the 'fantasy of English proficiency' (Fortier 2013:704), which is the belief that speaking English can uncannily ensure integration. This does not seem to apply to local-born Singaporeans—for instance, the legitimacy of non-English-speaking (e.g. the elderly) or non-Singlish-speaking (e.g. the 'posh') Singaporeans as citizens is unchallenged. Finally, new citizens are also expected to be simultaneously global and local (Montsion 2012) whereas local-born Singaporeans can choose to be either: to be desirable to the state, new citizens must remain being globally oriented while embracing Singapore's local life. This simultaneous orientation must be cautiously balanced: they may be construed as pretentious and insincere if they overdo their

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localness and as inauthentic and illegitimate if they excessively embrace globalness. Underpinning these anxieties is the implicit idea that local-born Singaporeans remain the default generics of the definition of legitimate Singaporeanness. Thus, it can be argued that while Singapore's brand of multiculturalism provides new citizens with enough space, albeit vaguely, to maintain their transnational backgrounds while adhering to the Singapore core, everyday discourses about new citizens seem fixated on orienting to local-born-centric norms.

The tensions above reveal a few insights. First, the definition of a legitimate, deserving, and desirable Singapore citizen remains contentious in Singapore society. Specifically, the problematic pragmatic, multiracialist, and meritocratic justifications of the registration process are exacerbated by everyday understandings of deservingness, authenticity, and desirability. Second, the Singapore case departs from dominant sociolinguistic work on government-sanctioned citizenship regimes which heavily draw on Western contexts. For instance, because of the material conditions surrounding citizenship in the West, the literature on language testing and citizenship application procedures (e.g. Extra et al. 2009; Hogan-Brun et al. 2009) have focused on how statal narratives and ideologies about citizenship can disenfranchise citizenship applicants because they orient to state control more than the actual experiences of applicants. The Singaporean context shows that the lack of testing requirements produces a different yet comparable set of problematic assumptions and repercussions, compelling new citizens to select particular articulations that help them claim legitimacy. The vagueness of Singapore's immigration policy does not denote that it is not oppressive at all because whether such strategies are truly effective at promoting inclusion is another matter. Rather, this means that in the realm of the everyday, anxieties and discontents are rooted in tensions between articulations of citizenship in Singapore. For this reason, despite being already legitimized by the state, new citizens need to constantly negotiate contradictory discourses about citizenship in Singapore to fend off suspicions about their legitimacy as Singaporeans. To become good citizens, they must be global yet local, different yet similar, new yet authentic. This study thus offers an investigation of the strategies that new citizens use to semiotically claim status as legitimate citizens of Singapore.

THE NEW CITIZEN PERSPECTIVE: A METAPRAGMATIC INVESTIGATION

Recent sociolinguistic studies on citizenship regard citizenship not just as a legally defined category but as a product of sociolinguistic negotiation. Research on citizenship language testing (e.g. Extra et al. 2009) and regimented immigration encounters (e.g. Blommaert 2001) sheds light on the ideological underpinnings of linguistic gatekeeping, which show how citizenship regimes aim to mitigate potential risks that linguistic differences may pose on society—although, as Khan (2019) pinpoints, much of supposed linguistic gatekeeping actually reveals way more than

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the 'linguistic' due to the conflation of the 'linguistic' with larger ideologies about citizenship. Studies on the representations of immigrants and citizenship categories in public media texts (e.g. KhosraviNik, Krzyżanowski, & Wodak 2012) illustrate how public discourses reflect and contribute to the further alienation of migrant groups. Finally, research on citizenship narratives (e.g. De Fina 2003) and the politics of making claims through the invocation of citizenship (e.g. Stroud 2015) examines how inequality can be contested discursively.

These studies show how sociolinguistics can enrich our understanding of citizenship by emphasizing how different articulations of citizenship relate to one another, and how they influence the experiences and ideologies of the people who are subject to these discourses on an everyday level. They also demonstrate the need to scrutinize both the legal aspects of citizenship and the possibility of invoking or performing citizenship to achieve certain goals. As Fairclough, Pardoe, & Szerszynski (2006:98, emphasis in original) argue:

> One way of reading this emphasis on citizenship as a communicative achievement is that it is an attempt to get us away from preconceptions about what citizenship IS, and to force us to look at how it's DONE—at the range of ways in which people position themselves and others as citizens in participatory events.

While there are material facts about the status of new citizens that cannot be ignored (e.g. unlike local-born citizens, they had to apply for their citizenship), it is worth investigating how new citizens DO citizenship in interaction. Although there are a plethora of sociolinguistic investigations of immigration and citizenship, there are relatively few studies that concentrate on the articulations of citizenship by new citizens themselves. Those that do so set their attention on the process of becoming a citizen and still approach the journeys of new citizens with respect to regimented citizenship discourses, such as citizenship tests and ceremonies (e.g. Byrne 2012; Cooke & Peutrell 2019; Khan 2019). While this direction is valuable, it focuses on statal ideologies instead of banal understandings of citizenship. Moreover, this direction yields more questions. How do new citizens manage their perceived 'newness'? How do they resolve dominant contradictions about citizenship? How do semiotic resources facilitate that negotiation?

To answer these questions, I adopt a metapragmatic approach to citizenship. According to Silverstein (1993:41–42), metapragmatics is the process of meaning-making based on signs that refer to the pragmatic dimension of language—the dimension of indexicality. He regards signs as coming from a 'presupposed context' that may have 'entailed consequences'. In other words, signs come from somewhere ('presupposed context'), and when they are used to point towards some aspect of the sign's context of use ('indexicality'), they can generate identifiable effects ('entailed consequences'). Various indexes may be collectively read as signs that refer to the same object based on the similarity of their contiguity to their objects. If they are deemed similar enough, they can be 'regimented' (Gal 2016) as part of the same 'semiotic range' (Agha 2007) of a higher-level

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sign: the metasign. Gal (2016:114) defines the metasign as 'one that regiments how it itself and other signs are to be interpreted; it is a framing. Language ideologies in all their more-and-less explicit forms do just this work'. The metasign expounds how similarity and difference are achieved by metasignalling; as Gal adds, '[s]imilarity and difference are like two sides of a coin; they result from mutually implicated sociolinguistic processes'.

The concept of the metasign can help us understand how new citizens position themselves vis-à-vis the conflicting articulations of citizenship in Singapore society. Their narratives about their own experiences with the notion of citizenship could unravel how they negotiate the tension between prevalent discourses about citizenship. I argue that ideologies about citizenship can be considered a metasign. It typifies object-signs such as language, loyalty, and legacy as part of its field of indexicality because of the explicit framing of citizenship narratives as about citizenship, and in some cases, because of the explicit framing by myself or my participants that the conversation was about citizenship. It imbues other signs associated with it with specific ideological meaning, and negotiating the meaning of those signs allows new citizens to reconfigure the definition of citizenship itself.

The metasign is instructive for several reasons. First, it allows us to concretely understand how people DO citizenship by probing the semiotic processes behind their articulations of citizenship. Second, it allows us to track the dynamism of the semiotic potential of indexes of citizenship—we can appreciate how signs can be tweaked by new citizens to claim legitimacy. Finally, it facilitates the understanding of the agentive role of new citizens in the discursive construction of citizenship. After all, '[i]ndexical relations are forged in individual's phenomenal experience of their particular sociolinguistic worlds' (Johnstone & Kiesling 2008:29). In other words, the metasign constructed by ideologies about citizenship—an inventory of concepts which are formally and normatively interwoven with citizenship—enables us to identify, investigate, and inspissate variegated meanings of citizenship in society and appreciate how they can serve as a crucible for new citizen identity work.

METHODOLOGY

The data I use in this article come from fieldwork with eighteen new citizens in Singapore conducted from January 2015 to April 2016. My decision to incorporate linguistic ethnographic methods (Rampton 2007) was driven by the need to examine the voices of the very people who experience the everyday aspects of their new citizenship.

Only one criterion was used during the recruitment of participants: they must have received their Singapore citizenship within the past ten years. I started the recruitment by exploring my networks—I started talking to my friends who were new citizens. They then introduced me to their families and friends who were new citizens as well. I also made several posts on my own social media profiles and in

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various online groups, such as 'expat' groups in Singapore. It is perhaps due to these recruitment methods that the participants I was able to recruit share similar backgrounds: they are well-educated, middle-class, and multilingual participants who felt comfortable with discussing their citizenship journeys with me. While I did not limit the countries of origin of my participants during the recruitment, I was able to recruit participants originally from Malaysia (five), the Philippines (five), India (two), China (two), Indonesia (one), Turkey (one), Germany (one), and Sri Lanka (one).

Semi-structured open interviews about my participants' experiences before, during, and after the registration process were conducted. In the analysis, I examined the content of the narratives, how they were said, and the relationship between myself and the interviewee: after all, I view interviews as a form of collaborative achievement (Talmy 2010). These interviews were complemented by ethnographic observations of my participants as they interacted with people they regularly encounter. My goal for doing so is to have a better understanding of the relationship between my participants' elicited interview narratives and their linguistic performances in naturalistic contexts. I visited them in their homes, hung out with them and their friends in various socialization activities (e.g. a football match), and kept in touch with them on social media, even after the fieldwork.

I audio-recorded all the interviews and several interactions; for the non-recorded interactions, I took fieldnotes. The fieldwork protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of my university. While this article focuses on the interviews, details from my observations are also used to complement my interpretation—furthering my ethnographic sensitivity towards the data that I analyze. Because of my linguistic background, all of the interviews and observations were conducted in English, although there were several instances of codeswitching to Singlish, a variety I understand. The Filipino participants had instances of codeswitching to Tagalog, a language I speak. All participants were given pseudonyms.

RECONFIGURING THE INDEXICALITIES OF CITIZENSHIP

In this section, I analyze three signs which emerged from the data: language, loyalty, and legacy. The examples used here recur in the dataset and are not isolated, unless otherwise stated. While my discussion is structured around these three signs, perhaps suggesting that they are separate from each other, I must clarify that they are intertwined and the divisions between them may be fuzzy. My goal here is to illustrate how the reconfiguration of the indexical relations between these themes and the notion of citizenship can reveal how new citizens self-present as legitimate new citizens, which may reproduce, reinforce, or resist established yet conflicting ideologies about citizenship in Singapore.

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Language

English and Singlish are topics that frequently surface in public discourses about citizenship in Singapore. While English is considered by the state as a neutral lingua franca (see Wee 2002) and Singlish is downplayed as a resource for local and unofficial interactions, proficiency in both is deemed integral to integration (cf. Kheng 2015). My participants reproduced this government rhetoric in the interviews. None questioned this status of English in Singapore: they all claimed that English is an absolute necessity for living in Singapore, whether as a new citizen or as a foreign resident. Additionally, they all asserted that only the communicative capacity to use, not the proficiency in or variety of, English matters. While this may be because my participants are English-speaking professionals, it is consistent with how the registration process and discourses about citizenship assign value to English. The discussion took a different turn when English was discussed in relation to Singlish,[2] which is the focus of this section. I examine metapragmatic comments made by two participants, Intan and Jolina.

Intan used to be an Indonesian citizen. During the fieldwork, Intan had already been a Singapore citizen for eight years. She moved to Singapore when she was in secondary school. She told me that she decided to apply for Singapore citizenship because of economic reasons: as a civil servant in Singapore, being a citizen provides her with more opportunities to advance her career. Intan and I talked about the role of language in the lives of new citizens: her responses gravitated towards English and Singlish. We see an example below.

(1) Intan: English "should be good enough" (A = Author, I = Intan)

A: So for new citizens, would it be good if they strive to learn Singlish, try to speak it, try to understand it or would it be fine if they don't, as long as they speak English?
I: I know some Caucasians who can speak Singlish and when they speak they sound like almost Singaporeans in a sense. So I think it's a good way to integrate. But I don't think Singapore government is so keen for people to learn Singlish. I mean all these movements, Speak Good English Movement, I don't think that's one of the key criteria that the Singapore government is looking for. I think as long as you speak English it should be more than good enough.

This extract reveals two points. First, Intan affirms the view that English is an absolute necessity since it is the language of everyday life. Second, she asserts that Singlish is just an optional add-on: while it has benefits (line 7), it is acceptable for people to not speak it as long as they speak English (lines 12–13). Furthermore, Intan's response to my question was centered on state discourses. She reproduces two statal narratives: the 'English as a neutral lingua franca' view and the Speak

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Good English Movement (line 10)—a government campaign that promotes Standard Singapore English and devalues Singlish as something less than 'Good English' (see Rubdy 2001). This allows her to justify her lack of Singlish competence by presenting it as sufficiently aligned with the state's stance on language. While Intan had been in Singapore for twenty years during the time of fieldwork, she told me that she only understands, and does not speak, Singlish and that she only speaks English and Bahasa Indonesia: she claimed that this always makes her stand out as someone who was not born in Singapore when she is with her non-Singaporean friends. Throughout my interactions with Intan, I found her speaking style to be quite Singlish. She used Singlish expressions (e.g. *wa lao* 'oh no'), particles (e.g. *lah*), and sentence structures (e.g. article dropping). However, I could also tell that she was not a native speaker of Singlish due to phonetic and prosodic differences. Thus, it appears that Intan was presenting herself as a new citizen who has fulfilled the absolute necessity (i.e. speaking English). Because she fulfills this necessity, not speaking Singlish is not a problem: it is frowned upon by the government after all.

In the latter part of the interview, she claimed that "if you meet someone who doesn't actually mind trying Singlish when it is not their language, I think is something commendable". This further highlights the optionality of Singlish: it is nice to have, but it is not as vital as English. This is an example of how Intan deals with the tension surrounding citizenship in Singapore. She sidesteps the impossible position of being expected to simultaneously be authentic to her own culture and global provenance (as indexed by English as a global language) and be rooted in Singapore (as indexed by Singlish) by appealing to the contradiction in public discourse about Singlish: while it may be a sign of local belongingness, it is also illegitimate and unworthy. As a non-native speaker of Singlish, Intan uses this optionality to legitimize herself as a good new citizen. This legitimacy may be undermined if she says that Singlish is absolutely necessary because she herself could not speak it well. These metapragmatic comments then reflect Intan's attempts to select aspects of the language and citizenship indexicality that match her positionality and prove that it is consistent with public discourses on citizenship.

The second example comes from my interview with Jolina, a former Filipino citizen, who had been a Singapore citizen for five years when she participated in the study. She applied for Singapore citizenship before entering university to qualify for a government scholarship. She claims to speak English, Tagalog, Singlish, and basic Chinese. While her Singlish accent has features that mark her as someone who did not acquire Singlish from childhood, such as her rhoticity (a feature of Philippine English), her friends nevertheless describe her as "Singlish enough". In the extract below, Jolina presents a view on Singlish that departs not only from Intan's comments but also from the rest of my participants.

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(2) Singlish as the top marker of Singaporeanness (A = Author, J = Jolina)

A: Oh, cool. Uhm, how important do you think is
Singlish, or sounding like a Singaporean, in a
standard or a non-standard way, in integration?
J: I think it's really important.
I think when you ask Singaporeans what defines them,
they usually say Singlish is the top marker,
without second thoughts.
And it's something very interesting, like you can
get away with looking like a particular race or
whatever, but once you speak then people know.
They might not know where you come from,
but they would know if you're Singaporean or not.

She characterizes Singlish as the defining marker of Singaporeans (lines 4–6). This marker reflects authenticity: she stated in the latter part of the interview that one can overdo attempts to speak Singlish and end up being "strange" or "very fake". Moreover, she asserts that Singlish can serve as a resource for the affirmation or contestation of racial identities in Singapore (lines 8–12). In fact, during the interview, she told me that her proficiency in Singlish has allowed her to pre-empt being mistaken for a maid by local-born Singaporeans due to her salient Filipino looks, given that Filipinos comprise a significant part of the foreign domestic worker population in Singapore.

Does Jolina claim that new citizens should speak Singlish? The transcript below suggests so. While she hedges at first (lines 3–6), she states a clear negative sentiment towards people who do not at least try to speak Singlish.

(3) Trying to speak Singlish and distancing (A = Author, J = Jolina)

A: So what do you think of new citizens who
don't even try [to speak Singlish]?
J: Well I think. I don't know. I don't know if they're
wrong, but I think they should try? [*laughs*]
I guess there's nothing wrong with not trying,
but I feel that uhhh, people, like, maybe, because
I'm a linguist, that I, I can say things like this,
but I feel like people who, who don't adapt to the
accent are like distancing themselves.
So I feel like if you move into a new place,
you would, the natural tendency is to adapt the way
that they speak, and then if you don't, then it's
like an effort on your part? Something like that.
[laughs] But yeah, I think everyone should just
try, it's quite fun, but I, I feel that just because
of the stereotypes of Singlish as well,
diba ['right']?

Jolina provides a view that none of my other participants discussed during the interview: not speaking Singlish is a sign of "distancing themselves" (line 9).

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She suggests that time spent in Singapore should naturally result in the acquisition of Singlish; if this "natural tendency" (line 11) does not happen, it means that the person is resisting it and is therefore distancing herself from Singapore. While she conditionally attributes this to her being a linguist—despite being prefaced by a hedge (line 6)—she continues her discussion by saying that "everyone should just try" to speak Singlish anyway (lines 14–15): "it's quite fun" (line 15) after all. This affective evaluation ("quite fun") can be seen as Jolina's way of positioning herself as someone who has done this: hence, she is not one of those people who distance themselves (line 9).

While Intan talks about the optionality of Singlish, Jolina talks about its necessity. Jolina softens her argument on distancing by introducing the value of trying (line 15)—a point that Intan also talked about. The examples above show that 'trying' to speak Singlish is desirable, which may even be equal to actually speaking Singlish given that actual performances of Singlish can backfire when they are judged by others as "fake" (Jolina). The metapragmatic reasons for this that my participants provided, such as the difficulty of mastering Singlish or its disputable usefulness, suggest that they believe that new citizenship is not about aspiring to pass off as a local-born citizen; rather, it is about trying to do their part as new citizens. In the case of my participants' accounts, new citizenship may not be about the complete approximation of (local-born) Singaporeanness; rather, it may just be about enoughness (cf. Blommaert & Varis 2015).

Hence, Jolina and Intan presented themselves as people who respect and have a sincere interest in Singlish, and even make efforts to speak it, which makes them legitimate new citizens. Although it is hard to pin down what 'trying' to speak a language entails, it is undeniable that trying is part of the subjective dimensions of my participants' identity claims. This view could give my participants—who are non-native speakers of Singlish—space to still claim status as good new citizens. This would not have been possible if the expectation was for all new citizens to speak 'authentic' or 'native-like' Singlish. Hence, this is a fine example of how the participants negotiate sameness and difference: it is a way of framing their linguistic inauthenticity not as a matter of disintegration but as something that can be considered evidence of 'trying'.

We can further unpack the implications of 'trying' on citizenship through the metapragmatic approach. The participants constructed themselves as good new citizens during the interview by reconfiguring the indexical relations between language and citizenship (e.g. Speak Good English Movement for Intan, Singlish as a marker of Singaporeanness for Intan and Jolina). My participants rework the indexical relationship between language and new citizenship (LANGUAGE ↔ CITIZENSHIP) through the notion of trying. While they reify the importance of Singlish to Singaporean identity, they also point out that people who cannot speak Singlish themselves should not be considered as bad new citizens as long as they remain respectful of Singlish. Given that this reconfiguration does not contradict Singapore's

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statal narratives on English and Singlish, they can be considered revised versions of the public discourses, yet within the typification of the indexes established by the said narratives. Moreover, such reconfiguration matches their backgrounds as people who cannot fully claim status as authentic Singlish speakers: when one cannot claim full authenticity, one can settle for 'trying'. Hence, 'trying' is still 'coherently' (cf. Jaffe 2016) understood in a semiotic sense as part of the language ↔ citizenship indexicality. These, I argue, are examples of how my participants make sense of citizenship on their own terms. They show us how statal narratives become auspicious resources for the contestation of everyday language ↔ citizenship indexicalities that are much harder to fulfill for people with transnational backgrounds. Through the 'trying is enough' view, my participants can employ statal narratives to fend off potential criticisms that they are illegitimate Singaporeans.

Loyalty

The second point I examine is the reconfiguration of the LOYALTY ↔ CITIZENSHIP indexicality. As discussed earlier, new citizens are frequently viewed with suspicion because they are adjudged as not loyal to Singapore. That new citizens are disloyal because they did do not go through National Service (NS)—a baseless claim—remains a salient topic in everyday discourses in Singapore.

Out of my seven male participants, four underwent NS before they became Singapore citizens as part of the requirements of their permanent residency. They believed that doing NS smoothened their citizenship application. In this section, I focus on one participant, Mevlut, who used to be a Turkish citizen and who did not go through NS but talked about this sign. He received his Singapore citizenship just two years before the fieldwork. Because he became a Singapore citizen in his late thirties, he did not have to enlist in the military, although his children will have to when they turn eighteen. During the fieldwork, Mevlut narrated that he feels strongly connected to both Singapore and Turkey. He said that Singapore is a good place for a Muslim to settle in because of its respect for Muslims (due to its Malay population) and its espousal of multiculturalism. However, Mevlut also pointed out incompatibilities between the two countries, which impacts how he positions himself in Singapore society. An example of this is Mevlut's involvement in activism in Turkey—he was a student activist and he maintained his support for activists throughout his adult life in Turkey. This is something that he had to forego when he decided to become Singaporean because of Singapore's uncongenial approach to dissent. To Mevlut, this tradeoff was worth it because Singapore provides him and his family with better opportunities.

The topic of loyalty recurred in my interview with Mevlut. We see an example below.

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(4) Mevlut and fighting for Singapore (A = Author, M = Mevlut)

A: How about your affiliation to Singapore, did it
get stronger? Or weaker? When you became a citizen?
M: As Turks, we are quite easy-going people. So we
adapt to different culture and different locations.
And back in my Circassian block, where we live and
we earn our living, we are always loyal.
So in 1865 when Russians forced the Circassians to
move to Turkey and killed millions of us,
So the Circassians fight for the Ottoman without
knowing their language. So same thing.
When I come here, I really become part of it.
So when talking about the war, most of my colleagues
say if Singapore goes to war, I go China, I go
Australia. I said I am staying, I will fight,
then they said, what if Singapore fight with
Malaysia? Or any Muslim country.
The question is if I care?
My family is here. So I fight for my country.
So I will fight for this. I'll become part of it.
So the feeling is still there for my mother country.
But I am part of this society and
I will fight for it until the end.

Preceding this extract was a discussion that Mevlut and I had about the effect of his citizenship change on his emotional connections with Turkey and Singapore. In this extract, he claims that he will fight for Singapore if a hypothetical war happens. While he repeatedly maintained in the interview that he still has patriotic feelings towards Turkey, this extract suggests a strategic presentation of himself to oppose suspicions of disloyalty. He even implies that he is more loyal than his local-born colleagues (lines 12–14). He uses his Circassian heritage (lines 5–11) to self-present as a loyal citizen of Singapore. He describes himself as someone who has (re-)rooted to Singapore—like the Circassians, natives of Circassia who were murdered and displaced from the Caucuses by the Russians. While Mevlut initially employs Circassian heritage to index his transnational background, he then uses it to portray himself as a loyal person who will serve and protect the country in which he lives, unlike his pragmatic or even opportunistic colleagues who would abandon Singapore in case of a war. Moreover, he anchors this loyalty in Singapore through his characterization of Circassian loyalty (lines 5–10), "When I come here [to Singapore], I really become part of it" (line 11). Thus, Circassian heritage becomes an index of his (re-)rootedness: reterritorialization does not negate loyalty.

Mevlut uses the loyalty ↔ citizenship indexicality to style himself as a good new citizen. What is noteworthy here is that it directly relates to the point on NS discussed above. Mevlut's claim that he will fight for Singapore oppugns the belief that new citizens who did not do NS are disloyal. While the parallelism of the terms he used to describe Singapore and Turkey—"my country" for Singapore and "my mother country" for Turkey—seems to imply equivalent feelings for

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both countries, he uses his family's presence in Singapore as evidence that he will fight for Singapore "until the end" (line 22). Moreover, Mevlut seems to challenge traditional notions of citizenship that are based on local provenance, race/ethnicity, religion (line 16), or language (line 10). It seems that for Mevlut, it is his family-driven sense of (re-)rootedness that conditions his view of citizenship. This claim of allegiance, argued through the discussion of being (re-)rooted in Singapore, enabled Mevlut to portray himself as a legitimate Singaporean.

Mevlut reconfigures the popular loyalty ↔ citizenship indexicality by expanding 'loyalty' through the incorporation of Circassianness. As discussed earlier, the loyalty ↔ citizenship indexicality in Singapore is used as a justification to view new citizens with suspicion (Chong 2014). This suspicion is perhaps aggravated by Mevlut's being Muslim—which his colleagues may consider as something that could dilute his loyalty to Singapore (lines 15–16). He metapragmatically performs allegiance to Singapore by alluding to the history of Circassians as victims of the Circassian War and recontextualizes Circassianness to his current conditions. While the provenance of Circassianness may seem to be disjointed from the context of Singapore, Mevlut forms an indexical connection between the two by using Circasianness as evidence of his loyalty to Singapore. The malleable definition of Singaporeanness due to the statal narrative of multiculturalism enables Mevlut to use Circassianness—something that supposedly makes him different from local-born Singaporeans and hence disloyal—as a sign of loyalty.

Moreover, Mevlut's comparison of himself to his local-born colleagues relates to the government's anxieties about the loyalties of its own (local-born) citizens because of Singapore's global and multicultural nature (Kluver & Weber 2003). Paradoxically, expectations about citizens fighting and dying for their country seem to be something that local-born Singaporeans may not necessarily deeply believe in themselves yet continue to impose on new citizens as a test of their loyalty (cf. Bishop 2017). Even though new citizens can rightfully claim that they did comply with NS laws (e.g. being conscripted themselves or committing their children to conscription), they might still be put in a position where they have to prove their loyalty to Singapore, even though the same is not expected of local-born citizens. Thus, we can say that Mevlut is expanding the semiotic range of the metasign constructed by ideologies about citizenship by using his Circassian heritage as a sign of his loyalty as a legitimate new citizen.

Legacy

The last theme I discuss is the reconfiguration of the LEGACY ↔ CITIZENSHIP indexicality. I examine how different indexes of legacy, which I define as poignant markers of cultural history and heritage, are used. Because new citizens have transnational backgrounds, they have access to legacy markers that local-born Singaporeans may not necessarily have. While the use of markers of legacy may be deemed

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FIGURE 1. Mevlut's jersey (encircled).

incompatible with the Singapore core due to their foreignness, they may conversely function as a means of constructing a legitimate new citizen identity because they are consistent with Singapore's brand of multiculturalism. Moreover, the use of indexes of legacy can expand the range of the metasign of citizenship ideologies by integrating new citizenship into its core, which redefines what it means to be Singaporean by reframing it in relation to new citizenship. In this section, I focus on an example from my interactions with Mevlut, whom I introduced in the previous section.

During the fieldwork, I went with Mevlut to one of his football games with his friends. The following account was documented in my fieldnotes. All of the players during this match were Singapore citizens, except for one Chinese and two Vietnamese players. What I first noticed that evening was Mevlut's shirt—a Türk Telekom jersey—which can be seen in Figure 1 above.

It captured my attention because Mevlut had claimed in the interview (which happened before this match) that new citizens should not publicly perform their difference. I briefly remarked: "nice shirt!". Because of that comment, Mevlut assumed I was a fan of Türk Telekom. I clarified that I was not: I do not even follow football. This made him ask me why I thought it was a nice shirt. I said, "I haven't really seen a Turkish jersey here in Singapore". He smiled at me and said, "it's the little things, you know?". I was uncertain what he meant so I just gave him a blank stare. He said, "the little things that make you not forget who you are, the little things about you that people see". Our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of his teammate and his family. When his family left and while Mevlut was walking towards the field, he winked at me and said, "See? Turkish Singaporean! Cool, right?".

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To make sense of this example, I turn to the metapragmatic approach. The wearing of the Türk Telekom jersey—a sign of legacy—can be described as a 'demeanor indexical', which Agha (2007:240) defines as 'any perceivable feature of conduct or appearance that contextually clarifies the attributes of actor to interactants'. They are 'actor-focal emblems; they clarify the demeanor of the one who performs the sign'. In this case, they construct an air of transnational identity that is aligned with Mevlut's self-image. Of course, the jersey alone does not inherently evoke legacy; anyone can buy and wear jerseys of teams from different teams/countries. What makes this example noteworthy is Mevlut's framing of this demeanor indexical as "the little things". This is a reflexive move that can be taken to mean as his careful and subdued negotiation of conflicting expectations about how new citizens should self-conceptualize (i.e. not forgetting who he is) or even behave in public (i.e. displaying his legacy). This allows Mevlut to construct a demeanor that he is reconciling his 'original culture', which was passed on to him by his foreign upbringing, and his 'Singaporean culture', which he has embraced as a new citizen. Because Mevlut's transnational background is an integral aspect of his being a new citizen, the use of his legacy simultaneously alludes to transnational provenance and his understanding of who he is and his position in Singapore society, thus typifying these indexicals as within the semiotic range of the metasign constructed by ideologies about citizenship.

These signs do not just relate to citizenship per se; they also allude to a particular type of citizenship: new citizenship. New citizens are put in a position where they have to find a synergy between sameness and difference, unlike their local-born counterparts whose differentiating markers (e.g. Chineseness) are indisputably woven in the imagination of the 'Singaporean'. While local-born citizens may not be challenged if they embrace other cultures that supposedly do not belong to them, new citizens must temper their affiliations with their 'original culture'—by doing "little things" instead of grandiose gestures—because they may be construed as people who undermine the Singapore core (cf. Johnson 2010). Through the strategic use of legacy markers, Mevlut was able to claim a position that reflects his new citizen status.

These acts, while not attempting to pass for a local-born Singaporean, still function as citizenship-based identity work because of the nuances of the Singapore context. Mevlut calls into being a specific subtype of identity: a legitimate hyphenated identity that is not a threat to Singaporeanness. The CMIO model would classify Mevlut as O—an ill-conceived category for people who do not neatly fall within the CMI. Because of this problematic nature of O-ness, Mevlut has to acknowledge his non-CMI-ness without overly highlighting his O-ness, because doing so could put him in yet another precarious position given that Os are considered a minority compared to CMIs. The unobtrusiveness of the "little things" allows Mevlut to cultivate the legacy ↔ citizenship indexicality by integrating legacy that supposedly excludes him from the Singapore core—a concept that celebrates

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Singaporean homogeneity and leaves little space for differentiation—into the imagination of what it means to be Singaporean.

While concepts such as the Singapore core and the CMIO model portray approximation of local values as the only legitimate way of becoming a good new citizen, the strategic use of legacy markers can open doors for new citizens to assert their legitimacy. This is because the reconfiguration of the legacy ↔ citizenship indexicality is consistent with the statal narrative of multiracialism and multiculturalism. It reconfigures, and not dismantles, Singapore's brand of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is not just about the protection of harmony between racial groups; it can include the pluralistic celebration of values brought about by contemporary material conditions in Singapore society, albeit in subdued and banal ways. By doing this, Mevlut can still make bold claims about his legacy without negating his being Singaporean. He typifies legacy as an index of new citizenship and Singaporeanness—as signs that are regimented as part of the semiotic range of the metasign constructed by ideologies of citizenship. This can be interpreted as his way of reappropriating the Singaporean discourse on multiracialism to legitimize himself as a new citizen. In other words, the statal narrative of multiculturalism then becomes the foundation of the expansion of what it means to be Singaporean: the type of Singaporeanness new citizens can be part of and contribute to.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I explained how my participants reconfigured indexes of citizenship—language, loyalty, and legacy—to claim status as legitimate new citizens of Singapore. It is the contradiction between the expectation that new citizens should assimilate to Singaporean culture and new citizens' constant positioning as simultaneously valuable and problematic, because of the rhetoric of multiculturalism, that makes my participants strategically claim that they are Singaporean in their own way.

To my participants, the complete approximation of local-born Singaporeanness is not the definition of a good new citizen; rather, it is about being Singaporean enough and contributing to Singapore on their own terms. To do this, my participants strategically reconfigure statal narratives on multilingualism and multiculturalism to fend off constraining public discourses and to construct identities that resolve the aforesaid contradiction. While 'the status of new citizens as one of "us" remains in doubt' (Byrne 2012:542), new citizens can nonetheless perform identity work that can expand the criteria for inclusion in the Singapore citizen label.

I also demonstrated how the metapragmatic approach can help us appreciate how typical indexes of citizenship may be tweaked in seemingly banal narratives—based on my participants' positionalities. This is important because of two reasons. First, the metapragmatic approach helps us understand how various signs become coherently understood as about 'citizenship'. This article shows why we cannot assume what signs can index good citizenship: we must view

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them from the perspective of the people who experience and employ them. Second, this article shows us the active role that people have in constructing, reconfiguring, and typifying indexicalities (cf. Johnstone & Kiesling 2008). New citizens can directly engage, through metapragmatic resources, the contradictions of public articulations of citizenship because of the unrelenting yet equivocal space that is Singapore citizenship itself. While the article highlighted the new citizen perspective, it is perhaps not amiss to wonder whether the very notion of citizenship itself—new or old—is inherently nested in different forms of tensions, which may imply that these ideological ambiguities are relevant not just to new citizenship. This buttresses the need to understand the metapragmatic contestations of contradictory discourses about citizenship.

In conclusion, the metapragmatic approach elucidates how people invoke, perform, and construct citizenship in their everyday lives. It sheds light on the ways new citizens claim status as legitimate citizens as a means of making sense of, and making others understand, who they are.

NOTES

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[1]In this article, I use *new citizens* because it is commonly used in Singapore. My participants also used this term to describe themselves.

[2]Sociolinguists have problematized the boundaries between languages. The discussion here about English and Singlish is based on what my participants talked about during the interviews—they viewed them as distinct systems. To my participants, *Singlish* can be a language, an English variety, an accent, a style, and others. I use Singlish instead of Colloquial Singapore English, which is commonly used in the literature, because it is the term that my participants used.

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