

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides background of the research, statements of research problems, objectives of the research, significance of the research, scope and limitations of the research, and definition of key terms.

A. Background of the Research

Singapore, a linguistically diverse and multicultural nation, has long been the subject of phonological inquiry due to its unique sociolinguistic landscape. There are four official languages in Singapore: Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English, that play a crucial role in the linguistic landscape of the country. The Republic of Singapore, for strategic geopolitical reasons (Ang & Stratton, 2018), officially recognizes Malay as its national language, with its presence prominent in various facets of Singaporean culture, including the national anthem and official documents. However, while Malay holds a vital place in Singapore's identity, English has emerged as the predominant language for business, administration, and international communication. There are two varieties of Singapore English: Singapore Standard English (SSE) and Colloquial Singapore English (CSE), also known as Singlish.

Singaporean Standard English is a dynamic and ever-evolving linguistic variety spoken by Singaporean locals. As claimed by Leimgruber (2011), it is a localized form of Standard English; it differs little from other Standard English versions around the world. SSE reflects the historical and sociolinguistic complexity of the nation, being influenced by various linguistic backgrounds,

including British colonialism, Chinese, Malay, Tamil, and other languages spoken by Singapore's diverse population.

Apart from SSE, there is also the colloquial version known as Colloquial Singapore English (CSE), which speakers, government language planners, and even linguists refer to as "Singlish". It refers to a colloquial variety of English spoken by many Singaporeans in informal contexts. Since the study of world Englishes emerged (e.g. Greenbaum, 1998; Richards & Tay, 1977), Singlish has been documented as one of the most well-known post-colonial variants of English (Gonzales et al., 2022). Singlish, as a lingua franca, is not just a convenient language meant to facilitate communication between various ethnic groups, claims Alsagoff (2010). Tan (2017) states that languages like English, Malay, and Tamil, as well as Sinitic languages like Hokkien, Mandarin Chinese, and Cantonese, are the sources of key linguistic elements of CSE, including its phonology, syntax, and lexis. These ethnic groups' accents have a significant influence on how Singlish's phonological characteristics are shaped. Singlish is distinct from standard English varieties due to its intonation, rhythm, and pronunciation patterns influenced by Chinese, Malay, and Tamil accents.

One of the most distinct features of Singlish is the variations of its English consonants articulation. Singlish has consonant inventory that slightly differs from the consonant inventory of Standard English. A number of consonants: /f/, /θ/, /t/, /v/, and /w/, is prominent characteristics of Singaporean English, according to Kalaivanan et al. (2020). Understanding the articulation of English consonants in Singaporean English within the digital media context is crucial for several reasons.

First, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Singaporean English phonology and sociolinguistics, expanding the understanding of the unique linguistic features and variations present in the speech of Singaporean locals. Additionally, it clarifies how language variation and communication styles are affected by digital media, providing insights into how people adapt their articulation for online platforms.

Several studies have explored the phonological characteristics of Singaporean English. A study by Imatufariq et al. (2022) looked into the differing phonological features of Singlish with one particular objective of determining how Singlish vowel pronunciation varies from Standard English and possible influences on this pronunciation. A study conducted by Deterding & Hvitfeldt (1994) provides a descriptive overview of Singapore English Pronunciation in comparison to Standard Southern British, emphasizing the diverse range of pronunciation among Singaporeans across different educational backgrounds and situational contexts. Anttila et al. (2008) also contributed to this field of research by examining the phonological processes and variation in Singapore English consonant clusters, providing quantitative data to support their true and systematic nature. Additionally, Kalaivanan et al. (2020) conducted a study that provided an investigation that focuses on whether ethnic distinctions in Singapore English consonantal production are becoming more uniform.

Several researches on digital media language variation that are highly relevant to this study have also been conducted. Utami et al. (2022), have conducted a study that describes usage and speaker variations in language on YouTube

podcasts. One study conducted by Natsir et al. (2023) has also examined the impact of social media on linguistic evolution, recognizing its critical function as the main means of communication in today's progressively digitalized community. Lee (2019) investigated the positioning and use of English(es) in digital communication in relation to other languages, the pragmatic functions that English and other languages serve, and the effect of linguistic choices on identity construction within the context of digital communication. Additionally, Sun et al. (2021) used the Web of Science Core Collection and the program CiteSpace to perform an extensive bibliometric examination of linguistic studies on social media.

While studies have explored language variation and linguistic evolution in digital media environments, none have specifically examined the articulation of English consonants by Singaporean locals in this context. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this research gap by providing a detailed phonemic analysis of English consonant articulation in selected TheSmartLocal YouTube videos. By focusing on individual consonant sounds and their articulation by Singaporean speakers in digital media settings, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the phonological features of Singaporean English in contemporary online communication platforms.

A collection of relevant YouTube videos from TheSmartLocal channel will serve as main source material for this inquiry. The selected videos portray a variety of conversational and situational circumstances. Among these videos are: 1) "Do Singaporeans Want To Migrate? | Hot Take"; 2) "We Stayed In Singapore's First Ever Bus Hotel | Out Of Office"; 3) "#LifeatTSL – Jereld's Newly Renovated 4-Room

HDB House Tour (+ Q&A!)”; 4) “Can NUS Students Solve These Primary School Math Questions? | Hot Take”; and 5) “What Is Like Working At The Gardens By The Bay? | The Part Timer.”

The selected videos from TheSmartLocal platform offer a diverse representation of language and communicative scenarios commonly encountered by Singaporean locals. These videos provide an array of conversational contexts, which makes them useful tools for analyzing the way Singaporean English consonants are expressed in the ever-changing digital media landscape. This approach is instrumental as it highlights the phonemic distinctions of Singaporean English, particularly when contextualized within the distinctive sociolinguistic landscape of online platforms.

B. Statement of Research Problems

1. What are the specific patterns in the articulation of English consonants demonstrated by Singaporean locals in selected TheSmartLocal YouTube videos?
2. How does the articulation of English consonants by Singaporean locals on TheSmartLocal YouTube videos compare to the phonemic inventory of Standard English?
3. How do the patterns of Singaporean English bring out the articulation of English consonants by Singaporean locals on TheSmartLocal youtube videos?

C. Objectives of the Research

1. To examine the specific patterns and variations in the articulation of English consonants demonstrated by Singaporean locals in selected TheSmartLocal YouTube videos;
2. To compare the articulation of English consonants by Singaporean locals on TheSmartLocal YouTube videos with the phonemic inventory of Standard English; and
3. To investigate the impact of the patterns of Singlish on the articulation of English consonants by Singaporean locals on TheSmartLocal YouTube videos.

D. Significance of the Research

1. Theoretical Significance

This study holds theoretical significance by contributing to the understanding of the phonological aspects of Singaporean English. By examining the articulation of English consonants by Singaporean locals in TheSmartLocal YouTube videos, it expands the knowledge of the phonemic patterns and variations present in this unique linguistic variety.

2. Practical Significance

a. To Singapore Visitors

For people visiting or residing in Singapore, familiarity with Singlish facilitates smoother communication and fosters stronger social connections with local residents. Mastering Singlish enables them to navigate daily interactions,

whether engaging in casual conversations, seeking directions, or conducting business transactions, with greater confidence and ease.

b. To Language Educators and Curriculum Developers

The findings can inform about the specific articulation patterns observed in Singaporean English. This knowledge can be utilized to develop effective teaching materials and strategies that cater to the needs of Singaporean English learners.

c. To Language Therapists and Professionals

The study can benefit speech-language therapists and professionals working with individuals who speak Singaporean English as their first language. Understanding the specific articulatory patterns and variations can aid in accurate assessment and intervention for individuals with speech sound disorders or those requiring accent modification.

d. To Language Learners

For language learners especially Indonesian students who are eager to explore the subtleties of English, particularly Singlish, the findings of this study offer valuable insights into the specific articulation patterns and phonemic features characteristic of Singlish, a variant deeply intertwined with Singaporean culture and identity. For Indonesian students seeking to broaden their understanding of English language varieties and cultural contexts, this study provides a unique opportunity to explore the vibrant linguistic landscape of Singapore to enhance their language proficiency and intercultural communication skills.

e. To Communication and Media Industries

TheSmartLocal YouTube videos are popular among Singaporeans, and an understanding of the articulation patterns used in these videos can help content creators, broadcasters, and media producers ensure effective and culturally appropriate communication with their audience.

E. Scope and Limitations of the Research

1. Scope of the Research

The scope of this study encompasses the examination of the articulation of English consonants by Singaporean locals specifically in selected TheSmartLocal YouTube videos. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns and variations in the production of English consonants within this particular context. The study considers a range of English consonants, including both single consonant sounds and consonant clusters, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phonetic characteristics present in the speech of Singaporean locals.

2. Limitations of the Research

Despite the valuable insights it aims to provide, this study has certain limitations. Firstly, the analysis is limited to TheSmartLocal YouTube videos, which may not represent the entire spectrum of Singaporean English spoken in other contexts. Therefore, the findings is not generalizable to all instances of Singaporean English articulation.

Secondly, due to the nature of YouTube videos, the speech samples used in the study is not spontaneous or representative of natural conversational speech. The

presence of a camera and the awareness of being recorded could influence the speech patterns and potentially lead to a modification of pronunciation.

Another limitation pertains to the reliance on auditory analysis of speech samples. While efforts are made to ensure accurate transcription and analysis, the subjective nature of auditory perception may introduce some degree of variability and subjectivity in the interpretation of the data.

Lastly, this study does not delve into the sociolinguistic factors that may influence the articulation of English consonants, such as age, gender, or level of education. The focus is primarily on the phonemic analysis of the speech samples.

F. Definition of Key Terms

1. Articulation

The structuring of airflow to produce certain sound kinds is known as articulation (associated to manner). In the context of this study, articulation refers to the physical process and coordination involved in producing speech sounds, specifically English consonants, by Singaporean locals, which includes the precise movements and positioning of the articulatory organs such as the tongue, lips, and vocal cords to shape the airflow and create distinct sounds.

2. English Consonants

The English language's consonants are a wide class of speech sounds that are made with some degree of blockage to airflow, or they can be produced with an obstruction in the airstream, according to Muhammad (2023). In English, there are twenty-four consonants. However, seven of them are called sonorants because they are similar to vowels in some ways (such as sonority and continuation): /m/, /n/, /ŋ/,

/l/, /r/, /j/, /w/. Since the airflow is usually greatly impeded when the sounds are articulated, the word “obstruent” is limited to the pure seventeen consonants: /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, /dʒ/, /tʃ/, /d /, /h/. In the English language, sonorants and consonants work in similar ways. The airflow blockage of each set of sounds varies (Ahmed, 2023). These sounds can be produced using a variety of articulatory configurations and can be identified by characteristics like voicing, place of articulation, and manner of articulation.

3. Singaporean Locals

“Singaporean locals” are individuals native to Singapore, either by birth or upbringing, deeply rooted in the local culture and community. Linguistically, they speak Singaporean English, a distinctive blend of English influenced by the nation's multicultural environment, incorporating elements of various languages spoken in the region. Culturally, they embrace traditions, celebrate multicultural festivals, and relish the diverse cuisines reflective of Singapore's ethnic mosaic. With a strong sense of national identity, they take pride in Singapore’s history, landmarks, and symbols, actively participating in community activities and contributing to the vibrant fabric of Singaporean society, epitomizing the nation's rich diversity and resilience.

4. TheSmartLocal

TheSmartLocal is an independent media publisher and online platform that specializes in providing travel and lifestyle content catered to Singaporeans. It encompasses various forms of media, including YouTube videos, which are

audiovisual content uploaded and accessible on the widely-used online video-sharing platform, YouTube.

5. Phonemic Analysis

Phonemic analysis involves the systematic examination and identification of distinctive speech sounds known as phonemes within a particular language or linguistic variety. In the context of this study, phonemic analysis focuses on investigating the patterns and variations in the articulation of English consonants by Singaporean locals in TheSmartLocal YouTube videos, aiming to discern the specific phonetic features and characteristics exhibited in their speech.