

A BRIEF SURVEY OF SINGAPORE FICTION

NATIVIZATION IN PROCESS

by Phyllis Ghim Lian Chew

1.1. Rationale

Today, English is used differently throughout the world. Not only do words carry different implications and meanings in e.g. London, India and Lagos but the structure and rhythm of sentences are different. This is seen when we compare Mark Twain with Jane Austen or Norman Mailer with E. M. Forster. If such a difference has developed between American and British style, greater difference can be found in Indian, African etc. styles. In African literature, e.g., one is conscious of the influence of tribal language upon stress and rhythmic pattern, of traditional oral literature on organisation and the way meaning is conveyed as well as the presence of tribal proverbs and pidginized expressions. This may be a wish to be exotic but can also be essential to the imaginative coherence with which society and its values are depicted in writing. In the West Indies, there is the importance of Creolization and the sophisticated playing off of various registers of English against each other. It is thus worthwhile to examine the use of the English language in Singapore through its literature because just as in the countries with the New Englishes, this literature contains in itself a uniqueness not only in style but in language that deserves closer examination.

There has also been very little research in this area. Platt (1980) has a chapter entitled "English literature in Singapore and Malaysia" but only a few pages devoted to prose. Lee and Ban (1977) has an article on Singapore literature but it is only on poetry and even then, poetry from the literary angle. Yap's articles (1971, 1976) on prose writings are relevant but they miss the important "new phase" of Singapore fiction which can be said to have begun in 1973 and which is still continuing.¹

Moreover, it is certainly not too soon for the world to be aware that there is such a phenomenon as "Singapore fiction" and to ask what if any is the pedagogical potential of such fiction.²

1.2. Limitations and Definitions

It must be noted that fiction by Singapore Writers of English (SWE) comprises only a small percentage of the total literary creative effort that exists in Singapore since Singaporeans also write fiction in Mandarin and Malay.³ Fiction is also only one facet of creative literature, the other two major ones being drama and poetry. Here, fiction translated into English from Malay and Mandarin will also be excluded from the study.

The term SWE does not include expatriate writers who are only resident in Singapore for a few years and who lack a Singapore identity - linguistically and non-linguistically.⁴ For them, Singapore is only another exotic setting for a plot. The central character is usually European. Somerset Maugham e.g. concentrated on an all-white society in a Singapore as an outpost of the East.

Although fiction since the Second World War will be reviewed, those from 1945-1959 will be given a fleeting glance, those from the 60's, a cursory examination and those from the 70's a more thorough analysis. This is because I feel that it is only in the past decade that Singapore fiction has begun to get over the more obvious teething problems faced by their predecessors and seems more comfortably operating in the Singapore idiom.⁵

The term "fiction" includes short stories, novellas and novels. It excludes the numerous autobiographies written in this period.⁶ Autobiographies predominate perhaps because in a society searching for an identity, a commonality, the task of a novelist remains formidable.

There is a lack of social history, of basic information on how our forebears lived, how lifestyles developed - an understanding which is a vital complement to imaginative writing.

The term "nativization" denotes a process whereby an institutionalized variety of English becomes acculturized or closer to the sociocultural context or to use Kachru's (1982:42) term "context of situation". This contributes to the deviations from what originally might have been a linguistic norm. A nativized language such as Singapore English (SE) is marked by:

- a. an extended range of uses
- b. an extended register and style range
- c. a nativization of its registers and styles both in formal and contextual uses
- d. a body of literature with contextual characteristics which mark it as localized (Kachru 1982:35)

SE is a fine example of nativized English with all these characteristics. Thus, a look at SE in fiction provides us an opportunity to study the nativization of English with different mother tongue groups and to capture the processes of indigenization. An understanding of the communicative strategies of a multilingual society can also be attained.

1.3. A Survey of Singapore Fiction: some difficulties

From 1946 to 1959, novels by SWE were influenced by the memory of the Second World War and by the threat of Communism.⁷ The message tends to predominate and the characters have largely a functional role. There was little or no attempt to assimilate the locale and life in Singapore.

Gradually, by the 60's, there was an emergence of a greater and

more articulate attempt to assimilate local life and to unify local idioms and speech patterns.⁸ In novels by Ong (1964 & 1965) e.g., the interpolations on Chinatown or padi fields appear to be the best bits the writers have to offer. In some ways, this problem is due to uncertainty as to who the audience is. To a Singaporean, a point may appear to be over-written; to others, a point may appear undeveloped. The writers consequently has the difficulty of knowing when to start saying certain things and when to stop. Such a writer is similar to the talkative host who invites you for dinner and then forgets to give you anything to eat.

These attempts to unify local idiom and speech patterns were also done self-consciously and awkwardly (Yap 1976). When Ong describes the aspect of an interracial marriage between a Chinese and an Indian in a little Malaysian village, he does it in an ill-fitting rhapsody:

"Lili's friendship with Marian matured into love as the months flew by, like an apple in spring budding out and mellowing in the warmth and richness of autumn."

(Johnny Ong, Sugar and Salt, p. 222)

The book is also scattered with unnecessary epithets such as

Chinese New Year and Malay kampong. Ong's two novels, the best the 60's can offer, are also unfortunately, platitudinous.

The influence of English literature is once again seen in Pillay's (in Singh, 1970) story. Here the Singaporean officer is called "Smithey" and his speech is not only "British" but also a cliché - an inappropriate style in a story with a serious orientation.

"You big buffoon, come here!" ordered the Sergeant. "How many times must you be told that you must keep your boots clean and polished, and you must look smart doing drills and above all you must be alert ..."

(K. Pillay, Condemned Till Death, p. 21)

Again, in Ngoh's story (in Koh, 1973), a Singapore business executive answers the phonecall from his wife in a most unSingaporean fashion:

"Ngoh speaking" "Hello it's me honey, I want you to come back immediately after office. The kids are unmanageable, the maid wants to quit, the bills are piling up the ..."
"Okay, I'll come. Anything else?" "No" "I'm rather busy now. Goodbye honey."

(Ngoh, The Dawn of the 21st Century, p. 80)

In Yeo's (1978) two volumes of stories, which has been recognized as the beginning of a distinctive voice for Singapore fiction, S. Rajaratnam's "The Tiger" is somewhat archaic in flavour, occasionally writing like a latter-day Kipling while Rebecca Chua's "A Character searching for a definition" and Chandran Nair's "Leta" shows art setting out to create literature rather than art setting out to imitate life.

There is also a tendency to proselytize e.g. in Lim's description of drug-addicts:

"The authorities concerned needed a convulsive shake-up of conscience. Alas, the world has not yet reached the stage, being confronted with more pressing and shocking problems relating to basic human rights trampled on by international blackmail, shameless aggression and horrifying attempts at genocide. Fanatical fascism was on the march."

Lim Thean Soo, Destination Singapore, p. 23)

All this is quite irrelevant to the thrust of the author's story, and unfortunately leads to a turgidity of style and a rather melodramatic air.

To compound of these difficulties, the aspiring writers had no support from critics who tended to judge the value of a writing as indistinguishable from its grammaticality and to define grammaticality as the norms of "standard English".⁹

However, the difficulties that these writers had to resolve when writing arose from the fact that they were providing a first frame for the experience of a Singaporean in fiction. The start of Indian fiction after all was also marked by stilted and cliché-ridden prose (Gridhar 1982:291).

In the seventies, several works appeared which promised to portray a distinctive voice for Singapore fiction.¹⁰ Catherine Lim and Wong Meng Voon, e.g. operate distinctly in the Singapore idiom but are careful not to resort to folksy characters who utter their speeches with "I say man" and "Allamah" (Do such characters really exist?). Their characters as well as their language and the situations in which they find themselves are also unmistakably Singaporean - and not uncomfortably so either. It appears then that Singapore is now ready for a take-off.

1.4. The Singapore language situation

Linguistically, Singapore society represents a prototype of what Rustow (1968) describes as having a language pattern involving a variety of unrelated languages each with its own tradition. As a compromise between the three major ethnic groups, the government decided in 1965 that there would be four official languages in the new republic - Malay, Chinese, and Tamil - to represent the three major races of Singapore, and English because of the colonial background and the international status of the language.¹¹ This, together with the existence of more than a dozen dialects, makes Singapore as one of the countries with the most complicated linguistic make-up (See Appendix A for the typical verbal repertoire of a Singaporean).

There is also the use of high (H) or low (L) varieties:

H varieties - SE (acrolect), Mandarin, Malay

L varieties - SE (mezolect, basilect), Bazaar Malay, any Chinese or Indian dialect

This means that Singapore is not only multilingual but polyglossic.

Where SE is concerned, one witnesses a variety ranging from at one extreme, a simplified and almost pidginized dialect of English to a formal variety of English, differing little in grammar and vocabulary from standard English, though with more substantial difference in phonology. The H form is used by well-educated upper-income group of people while the L form is used by people of limited education, with lower social and economic status. A middle level (M) share features of both dialects and is in widespread use (See Appendix B). H speakers use L features when factors such as familiarity, intimacy or solidarity are emphasized (Richards and Tay 1977).

A SWE thus finds himself in a situation where the contrast of languages or dialect or of the H, M and L variety of a language between different speakers (or the choice of one or other form at a given moment) may carry its own dramatic significance. In fact, it has been shown that a change in location, a change in topic or participants or a change in the role relationship of the interlocutors affects choice of a language as well as its respective H - L varieties (Platt 1980:121). Any sensitive writer cannot help but be aware of these multilingual-polyglossic aspects as he sets out to create life in Singapore society.

Not surprisingly, due to the complexity of the situation and the inherent difficulties in portraying this, most SWE have made their characters speak a standard English throughout. In Yeo's (1978) two volumes, e.g. there are very few examples of locally flavoured English. In S. Rajaratnam's "The Tiger", even the speech of the Malay kampong people is represented in standard English. Notwithstanding, a fiction is emerging where the author shows an awareness of the sociolinguistic factors of an interaction and where SE has been used realistically.

2. NATIVIZATION IN FICTION

2.1 Nativization in Narrative

In order to nativize, to extend the potential of the English language to suit the sociocultural context, SWE have found it necessary to use various literary devices.

In order to solve the problem of nomenclature, i.e. finding words for culturally bound everyday objects, some resort to borrowing: aqua (effeminate man), dum-dum (a fool), jaga (watchman), etc. with glosses embedded in the text or as a footnote. In the following, glosses are not only embedded in the text but also have an accompanying footnote:

"On the first day children go to school they should cut those things to make them clever, first of all t'sung (spring onion) with the head and the tail cut off to leave a hole through it, meaning you will quickly see the point of things; then suan (leak) which means you will be quick at counting."

(Tan Kok Seng, Son of Singapore, p. 19)

footnote:

- * T'sung, a pun on the word meaning "clever"
- * Suan, a pun on the word "calculation" meaning to be good at mathematics.

This obviously impedes the flow of the narrative and constitutes a too conscious attempt to bridge the cultural gap. A better device is contextualizing the new item by embedding it in a passage that makes the meaning of the term self-explanatory:

"Some were playing pak kow, shouting jubilantly at each triumph and cursing the vilest language at each deal of poor cards."

(Lim Thean Soo, Ricky Star, p.8)

The reader guesses that "pak kow" refers to a card-game just as "towkay" refers to an employer of some kind:

"His chore was to distribute tiffin carriers of cooked food and rice to some of the lighterman. However, his towkay's business was wanning because the workers preferred to eat cheaply at numerous itinery stalls along the riverside."

(Lim Thean Soo, Ricky Star, p.9)

This may lead to the inclusion of more details but the greater integration of the new item (as well as its unobtrusiveness) into the context makes it worthwhile.

Calquing (literal translations of words and collocations from a foreign language - in this case, the languages of Singapore) is another device used by SWE to convey modes of feelings and thinking peculiar to the Singapore milieu: double-headed snake (translated from Chinese with a metaphor of the treachery of snakes and the additional failings of a double-headed one), a five-foot way (from Chinese, meaning not only a pavement but also one existing near shophouses having a continuous covered passage-way parallel to the street at ground level). In the following, "Red Hairs Garden" is a literal translation of Hokien "Ang Moh Huay Hng" with connotations that the garden is grand, huge, alien, built by Europeans and frequented by them. If Tan had used "Botanic Gardens" instead, the associations connected with the original Chinese term would have been lost:

"A weekend after we had taken the Pr. 6 examination, the teacher announced that after two weeks we would visit the Nanyang Siang Pau, Southeast Asia's largest Chinese daily newspaper, to see how a printing press works, after which we would have a picnic in Red Hairs Garden."

(Tan Kok Seng, Son of Singapore, p.33)

Calquing enables the SWE to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement which English cannot do and to create the cultural atmosphere of his work. Not all calques are successful as some may lack the connotations of the original. Good calques e.g. "double-headed snakes have "transparency", ie. both local and foreign readers can deduce their meanings with a fair amount of accuracy.

Proverbs abound perhaps as a carry-over from fictional style in Chinese or because Chinese parents and teachers habitually give proverbial sayings in the training of the young:

"Often I used to hear my mother repeat the proverb "All under heaven cannot be at peace." Putting it another way in Chinese, the proverb says, "All under the sky cannot be flat." In my own special way of explaining it to myself, the earth could never be flat. One could try to move the mountains into the sea in an attempt to flatten the earth; but the earth is 3/4 ocean and only 1/4 land. Try to flatten the earth, and I would be the first person to be washed away.

(Tan Kok Seng, Son of Singapore, p. 29)

The "Three Sisters of Sz" also begins proverbially but in a rather Singaporean fashion - with the lack of an article before "Chinese":

"Chinese have a saying that to build up the young is a provision for old age. This saying exists no more."

In "Son of a Mother", big brother tells younger brother that "We Chinese say, to eat a man's rice, so must you work for him." (Michael Soh, Son of a Mother p. 34). The presence of such proverbial sayings give the book a characteristically local flavour.

Scattered randomly in some prose writings is seen the SE tendency to abbreviate committees, organisations, place, etc.:

"The telephone interrupted the 2 ACL's (Assistant Commissioners for Labour)"

(Goh Sin Tub, "Virginia and the Dirty Old Man", p. 9)

"There we changed into an STC bus taking us into the city."

(Tan Kok Seng, Son of Singapore, p. 32)

In an age where time means money, abbreviations like the following are commonplace: the U (Singapore University), KK (Kandang Kerbau, a well-known maternity hospital), DOE (Director of Education).

Because the choice of a language, dialect or lect can betray relationship, social status, degree of formality and place of interaction of the interlocutors in a speech situation, it is common for a SWE to refer occasionally to what language a certain character is speaking in:

"My teacher was a stout middle-aged woman who spoke to us in Malay Then I took the slate out of my bag and wrote on it all the Arabic numerals I had earlier learnt. When the boy sitting next to me saw what I was doing, he felt very uneasy. Then he suggested, "We are not supposed to know how to write. School means listening to teacher's story only", he said in Hokien.

(Edward Phua, Sunny Days in Serangoon, p. 9)

The Chinese teacher spoke in Malay because this was the time of the Japanese occupation and the school, a rural one. The boys spoke in Hokien indicating rapport as well as their alienation from the formal school environment. In the following, Tan's account of his early days in Kuala Lumpur exemplifies the code-switching aspect among the L varieties of a multilingual society:

" "I am Ah Kim," she said. "I'm the cook's wife." In return I introduced myself. We spoke to each other in Kuala Lumpur Cantonese. Having introduced ourselves, Ah Foo, the cook, appeared on the scene with his shopping basket. In a mixture of Hainanese and Hokien, he asked:

"Are you taking me to the market?"

I nodded ...

He said:

"This is my wife. She is Hokien. I myself am from Hainan." I then understood why he spoke in a mixture of languages. Luckily, I knew both."

(Tan Kok Seng, Man of Malaysia, p. 6-7)

Similarly, Wong gives an account of the friendship between a Malay and a Chinese and the language problem they encountered: from one of "a fowl and a duck" (note the transparency of the calque here) to one of fluent Teochew for both:

"The biggest gap between them was language: Liu Ching-tuan spoke Fukienese whereas Mohamad spoke only Malay. These two were like a fowl and a duck; they simply could not communicate without the help of gestures.

In about 1963, Mohamad had been unemployed for a long time and his whole family was in despair. At the time, consequences would have been unthinkable had it not been for Liu Ching-tuan who ran around to whoever could help and managed to get him some money and a job as a road construction worker. Since then Mohamad had held Liu Ching-tuan in high esteem. Moreover, as a result of his frequent contact with Teochew workers, Mohamad was soon able to speak fluent Teochew. Once the language barrier was down, their friendship grew in leaps and bounds."

(Wong Meng Voon "By the Traffic Light," p. 46)

Their friendship progressed because Teochew is comprehensible to a Fukienese. Thus, we see the role of intermediary languages between two interlocutors of different races.

An insight into a multilingual-polyglossic society is seen with Ong's comment on the speech variety of Mr. Ooi, a school teacher:

"Besides Mr. Ooi inadvertently thought in English, have studied it since he was seven years old. He used his Hokien only to the servants and his wife about the menu of the day or for general gossip, which he never enjoyed anyway. One might even suspect he was slightly embarrassed to use Hokien."

(Ong Choo Suat, "Checkmate" In Yeo 1978, p. 47)

The reference to Hokien here also suggests that Mr. Ooi may use other speech varieties in other situations.

Indian, Chinese and Malay names are recognisable. But the dialect grouping a particular Chinese (or Indian) might belong to might not be. Thus, names of characters give subtle clues as to characters' linguistic background. This would sometimes be used for dramatic significance in the plot. We know that "Hsiao Ying" would refer to a Mandarin speaker (in Wong 1981:221), Ah Hong, a Hokien (in Soh 1973) and Ah Boh, a Cantonese (in Lim 1978:27). Helen Rodrigues (in Yeo 1978:28) would be a typical Eurasian name while Chinese characters with English names such as Augustus Wong (in Yeo 1978:9), Johnny Chai (in Yeo 1978:28) would be English-educated and usually "Western-orientated".

It is interesting to note that occasionally and unintentionally, the SWE might lapse into SE:¹²

"At Chap Moh Aik Hin, the manager was having it out with the clerk."

(Lim Thean Soo, Ricky Star, p. 12)

"As finishers, it was from our class that the teacher chose the players. By luck the teacher chose me to play an old man."

(Tan Kok Seng, Son of Singapore, p. 36)

"Chu Lin was waiting in her Red Volkswagen 1200 in front of Cheong Kee Restaurant when Kim got down from the bus."

(Johnny Ong, Run Tiger Run, p. 42)

"Having it out" in the first extract, "by luck" in the second and "got down" as well as the lack of an article before "Cheong" in the third offers clues to the writer's nationality.

2.3.2. Nativisation in Dialogue

This section focuses on the language of the fictional characters themselves and the methods and contexts in which that language is conveyed.

As mentioned, most SWE are capable of speaking and writing standard English, but this is not true of their fictional characters. Indeed the difference between the style of the narrative and the voice of the fictional character is often developed with the intent of heightening incongruity. This incongruity may be emphasized for a comic effect. Catherine Lim's composed narrative juxtaposed with interjections of comments by A.I. Velloo as he reads the daily newspaper is comical and entertaining. Some of the interjections:

"My nephew, he studying to be a doctor in Britain. He got scholarship, brilliant chap."

"What, what?" Hospital fees to go up? Where got meaning for this? How can the poor pay high hospital fees? Where is democratic country if poor suffer all the time? Tchah!"

"What the government doing? Rape here molest there, killing, murder, little children, always to suffer."

(Catherine Lim, Little Ironies, p.25-27)

Often the difference between the fictional dialogue and the author's prose is to generate realism as well. In "Taximan's Story", Lim makes use of a variety of basilectal SE for the whole short story as spoken by the taximan. This is a clever innovation as the basilectal variety of SE is an active component of most Singaporean's linguistic range and therefore can represent the educated as well as the less educated users (Platt 1980: 244). The speech of the taximan is full of the features of basilect SE: lack of to be, verbs not marked for 3rd person singular and past tense, lack of subject pronoun, lack of definite and indefinite articles, pronoun copying and expressions such as "last time". The first few lines set the atmosphere:

"Very good, Madam. Sure. Will take you there in plenty good time for your meeting, Madam. This way better, less traffic, less car jams. Half hour should make it, madam, so not to worry. What is it you say, madam? Yes, yes, ha, ha, been taximan for twenty years now, madam. Long time ago, Singapore not like this - so crowded so busy. Last time, more peaceful, not so much taximen, or so much cars and buses."

(Catherine Lim, Little Ironies, 1978)

Here an SWE has succeeded admirably in making her protagonist tell his own story in language as authentic as it is nonstandard.

Focussing by changing the order of constituents in a sentence is a common feature of SE (Platt 1980:73):

"One subject they pay it"	}	preposing the direct or indirect object
"Certain medicine we don't stock in the dispensary"		
"Such man I despise"	}	inversion of subject/object

Some examples in dialogue:

"I can't stand this muddle any longer. Now go away, you!"
(Tan Kok Seng, Son of Singapore, 80)

"Father everyday he will tell me to study hard and get good marks, but even though I study very hard, cannot remember or concentrate."
(Catherine Lim, Little Ironies, 67)

Focussing may also affect other elements within the sentence such as referring to the subject of the sub-clause:

"My brother, where do you think he will go?"
(Michael Soh, Son of a Mother, 43)

or to an adjective complement:

"Is very fun I find dancing"
(Lim Thean Soo, Destination Singapore, 40)

Usually, dialogues are marked by the infusion of native-language syntactic patterns. (Platt 1980:20):

from Chinese: "This one can wear with many things."
from Malay: "Not good like that, afterwards people talk."
from Indian: "You wait here I will go and come."

Such speech belong usually to those who have little chance to use their English in everyday conversations, i.e. the older generation.

Goh's "Virginia and the Dirty Old Man" has an Indian employer's speech:

"Sir, you see, sir. This girl, Virginia, she's no angel, sir. I employ her as my secretary. She big flirt. She flirt with all my staff. Even my office boy! Her favourite trick is to get you to take her to lunch. Then she start her tricks. She try this on all men in my store. She cause many, many quarrels. So I decide she go. Thus I sack her for bad behaviour?"

(Goh Sin Tub, "Virginia and the Dirty Old Man" in Yeo 1978)

In the following, we have a Mandarin rebuke from a mother to a child:

"Ah Yue, aren't you afraid of falling to death? Climbing so high hah? Are you thinking of going to see the King of the Underworld?"

(Wong Meng Voon "A Gambler's House" in Wong 1981:118)

An English mother would not have used "hah" or the reference to the "king of the underworld", a paraphrase from Mandarin.

In the following, the reader knows that the servant is Cantonese and a superstitious one because only a superstitious Cantonese would use "Choy" instead of "Cheh" ("Cheh" -used by Hokien, Teochews and the Straits Chinese):

"The servant said "Choy!" several times with vehemence, the interjection being invested with the power of warding off the evil effects of such a rash utterance."

(Catherine Lim, Or Esle the Lightning God and other stories, 95)

Sometimes it is not clear from the speech which dialect the character is speaking in although it is clear she is speaking in Chinese. The following has a familiar Chinese ring about it. Here a mother quarrels with her daughter-in-law:

"So you dare speak this way to your old mother-in-law. You see the grey hairs on my head, and you dare speak to me this way? You who are going to be a mother yourself! You take care!"

(Catherine Lim, Or Esle the Lightning God and other stories, p 187)

Such transference of mother-tongue thought and speech patterns into English also serves to overcome the problem of "linguistic alienation" which plagues non-native writers. It bridges the cultural gap and makes the use of the alien medium more acceptable to the non-native speakers themselves. Of course, when carried to extremes, there is the problem of comprehensibility. SWE must thus thread the fine line between the perils of incomprehensibility on one hand and nondescriptiveness on the other.

In the following, Mrs. Samy is evidently on familiar and informal terms with Fanny because of the use of "lah". The "lah" particle marks solidarity and rapport between participants and has its own complex sociolinguistic rules (Richards & Tay 1977):

"She knocked at the bar girl's door. It was not locked.
She shouted, "Fanny, Fanny, its Mrs. Samy lah. Are you
in?" "

(Lit. Thean Soc, Ricky Star, p. 103)

Here, the use of the particle is not only of sociolinguistic significance but also gives a local flavour to the prose.

3. "GOOD FICTION" AND PEDAGOGY

3.1. "Good Fiction"

A good African writer is defined by Achebe (1965) as one who:

"... brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. It will have to be a new English, still in full commitment with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its African surroundings."

This advice is relevant for any non-native writer of English, not necessarily African.

In the Singapore context, a good writer can be said to be one who has a sharp ear for dialogue, a good eye for details and a sensitivity to character. He is also one who can write a fiction with a local flavour but who can at the same time avoid the pitfalls of folksiness and provincialism. He should preferably be able to write in both SE ($H \rightarrow L$) and standard English because although standard English has prestige and respectability, SE with its $H \rightarrow L$ range will afford him a wide style and register range within which he can function. This will enable him to enjoy appropriateness, intimacy and solidarity with local readers. However, if he uses SE, he should use it only in a framework of standard English. This is important if the book is to be used in schools; otherwise, basic features of SE instead of being portrayed as the L variety of SE will become the model for SE. This will ultimately lead to an SE which is internationally unintelligible.

Catherine Lim is an example of a good SWE whose highly effective use of a Singapore idiom is definitely above the threshold of English as it is understood internationally. Her use of language also matches her themes which are predominantly Singaporean, such as the clash of old and new values in a traditional society.

4.2. Pedagogical Implications

Singapore can be termed an ESL country, that is, English is a medium of instruction in its schools. The performance target is the educated native-speaker or the educated speaker of SE. English is learnt not only for communication with native-speakers but also with local countrymen. In the past decade, English is fast replacing Hokien and Bazaar Malay as the lingua-franca among Singapore's many races (Kuo 1977). Thus, SWE, who represent one of the most acute sensitive observers of a culture and who have been struggling to fashion English into a suitable medium for the expression of Singapore's immediate social and cultural reality can help to promote language learners' perception for a feel of their culture, tradition, thought patterns and social concerns. This point is relevant in fact for all new nations trying to carve out a national and cultural identity and whose citizens use English both internationally and intranationally.

Second, for the expatriate teachers (of which there are many in ESL/EFL countries)¹³ who want to appreciate the language and culture of their students, non-native English literature offers them a unique shortcut by which they can acquire this essential knowledge and understanding.

Third, there is presently a shortage of suitable indigenized teaching materials. Imported literary texts from the U.K. and U.S. are sometimes not suitable for the learning of language or literature in the Singapore (and indeed in any other non-native) school context. The use of the better works by SWE would help overcome this problem. Some of the stories in Little Ironies (Lim 1978), for instance, can take its place in standard anthologies offered to high school students anywhere in the English-speaking world. Certainly, students would be able to identify more with

texts which are contextualized into the native sociocultural milieu rather than current existing ones by Hardy, Austen and Shakespeare.

In fact, literature and not just non-native literature or Singapore literature is relevant for language learning because a) it challenges the student to extend the scope of his language beyond simple codification, b) it enables him to know what is possible and feasible in usage and what is appropriate and customarily done in contexts of use; and, c) it gives him insights into how communication is achieved in the fictive world and the potential of this in ordinary social life (Widdowson 1983). By opening the world of literature to our students, we open up to them the resources of language.

Finally, as local literary activities find themselves into the curriculum, the new literature motivates students to take up the pen themselves and provides a model for accepted norms when they do so (Moag 1982:278).

As non-native literature in English grows, their growth also provides linguists a unique opportunity to study the nativization of English in different regions and to compare the similarities and differences of such nativization.

NOTES

1. One reason for little work done on fiction could be because there has always been more poets than novelists. Not surprisingly, Singapore poets are better known internationally. In fact, up to 1977, there had been more than a dozen individual collections of poetry but no individual collection of short stories by a single author. From 1978, prose took the lead from poetry and the literary scene has been lively with new fiction by SWE.
2. If one looks at the books written by literature professors on "Commonwealth literature", one may notice mention of literature from Africa, the Antipodes, South Africa, Ireland, the Caribbean, Canada, Australia, Nigeria, Kenya, India, New Zealand but none from Singapore/Malaysia. No doubt Singapore creative writing is a relatively new phenomenon but their existence and potential should at least be noted.
3. Of fiction published yearly by SWE, the majority are in Mandarin (61%), English (20%) and Malay (19%). The number of copies sold per book have also always been more if the book was written in Mandarin. However, books by Catherine Lim is fast changing this situation. (Figures from Commentary, Journal of the University of Singapore, Vol. 3, No. 3, Jan 75)
4. Books by expatriate writers include:
 - Mark Derby (1959), Sun in the Hunter's Eyes
 - Elleston Trevor (1961) The Pasang Run
 - Tom Kaye (1962) David, from where he was lying
 - H. E. Later (1964) The Delicate nature
 - Katherine Sim (1957) Malacca Boy
 - Sylvia Sherry (1966) The Street of the Small Night Market
 - Han Su Yin (1953) And the Rain my Drink

A typical story would comprise for example of a planter from up-country waiting under the lazily circling fans in the long bar of the Raffles hotel. The planter is dressed in white linen and he is in love with the wife of another planter and the Chinese barman is going to be witness to the scene.

5. This rather recent development may be one reason why Singapore fiction has been slow to gain recognition from the rest of the literary world.
6. For example: Francis Thomas, Memoirs of a Migrant
N. I. Low, Chinese Jetsam on a Tropic Shore
Yeap Joo Kim, The Patriarch
Ruth Ho, Rainbow Round my Shoulder
Tan Kok Seng trilogy: Son of Singapore
Man of Malaysia
Eye on the World

As Tan's trilogy offers an instance of themes expanding outwards and away from the autobiography, I will be treating it as autobiographical cum fiction and will be examining his works.

7. After the Second World War, there was a Communist insurgency in Malaya (up to 1957). The most well-known SWE on this theme was Chin Kee Onn and his three books were: (1946) *Malaya Upside Down*
(1952) *Ma-rai-ze*
(1961) *The Grand Illusion*

Books by expatriate writers on the war in Singapore and the insurgency includes: Harry Miller (1954) *Menace in Malaya*

E. Specker Chapman (1949) *The Jungle is Neutral*

Anthony Burgess (1958) *Time for a Tiger*

(1958) *The Enemy in the Blanket*

(1959) *Beds in the East*

James Clavell (1962) *King Rat*

Leslie Thomas (1966) *The Virgin Soldiers*

8. Some early attempts at fiction with a local flavour were:

Herman Hochstadt (1959) *The Compact*

Edwin Thumboo (1963) ed. *The Flowering Tree*

Johnny Ong (1964) *Sugar and Salt*

Johnny Ong (1965) *Run Tiger Run*

9. See e.g. review by Lee Tzu Pheng, "Review of Michael Soh's *Son of a Mother*" in *Focus*, July 1974 and Doreen Rajaloo's review of G. J. Fernandez, "Abode of Peace" in *Singapore Book World*, Vol. 7 1976. (These kindsof reviews are still unfortunately going on).

10. Of the seventies, 1978 marks a watershed: it saw the publication of four volumes of prose:

Catherine Lim, *Little Ironies, Stories of Singapore*

Lim Thean Soo, *Ricky Star*

Robert Yeo (ed.) *Singapore Short Stories, Vol. 1*

Robert Yeo (ed.) *Singapore Short Stories, Vol. 2*

11. The Republic of Singapore Independence Act of 1965 includes the following section laying out the language policy of the New Republic: a. Malay, Tamil, Mandarin and English shall be the official languages of Singapore

b. The National Language shall be the Malay language provided that no person shall be prohibited from using or teaching or learning any other language; and that nothing in this section shall prejudice the right of the Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in Singapore.

12. Fortunately this does not occur too often - except perhaps in Michael Soh's novels. Soh's deviations from standard English seem to result from inadequate learning of the language rather than as a deliberate experimentation.

13. Currently, about 32% of graduate teachers in Singapore are expatriates (Ministry of Education Annual Report, 1982)

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APPENDIX A

Typical Repertoire of a Singaporean Chinese:

It usually includes	It may include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The native Chinese dialect b. The dominant Chinese dialect c. Additional Chinese dialect(s) d. Bahasa Pasar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. English f. Baba Malay g. Bahasa Malaysia/Malay h. Mandarin

Typical Repertoire of a Singaporean Malay:

It usually includes	It may include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Bahasa Malaysia/Malay b. A regional Malay dialect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. English

Typical Repertoire of a Singaporean Indian:

It usually includes	It may include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. An Indian language b. Bahasa Pasar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Bahasa Malaysia/Malay d. English e. Another Indian language f. A dominant Chinese dialect

Claimed Understanding of different languages by various ethnic groups

Ethnicity	Percentages who can understand				
	Hokien	English	Malay	Mandarin	Tamil
Chinese	91.1	41.2	45.8	69.5	0.1
Indian	5.1	66.3	95.9	0.1	86.7
Malay	6.2	60.1	100.0	1.7	1.7

Source: Platt (1980), pp. 139 - 141

APPENDIX B

The sub-varieties of Singapore English - a summary

There is, of course, a gradation along the scale but for convenience's sake I shall divide the speech continuum into an acrolect, a mesolect and a basilect. Some of the defining features of each of the three sub-varieties are:

- a. Acrolect: Mainly phonetically distinguished from other varieties of English, e.g. by different stress patterns, vowel length and quality, partial realization of final consonant clusters, etc.
- b. Mesolect: All the points mentioned above plus: variable lack of final stop or substitution by glottal stop, variable realization of the plural marker, variable realization of third person singular present tense marking, variable realization of the copula, indefinite and definite articles, etc.
- c. Basilect: A higher percentage (even up to 100 per cent) of non-realization of the previously mentioned features, the replacement of the standard English tense system by an aspectual system, pronominal deletion, object preposing, pronoun copying, use of got as a locative verb, and so on.

Source: Summarized from Platt (1977), pp. 84 - 85