

# SQ SAAL QUARTERLY

MICA (P) 240/10/2007

No.81 February 2008

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## Report on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Singapore Child Language Special Interest Group: Language Models at Home and in School

Date: 27 October 2007 (Saturday)

Time: 9.00am – 12pm

Venue: NUS, AS5/02-02 (Video Room 1)

### Opening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> SCLSIG Meeting

The third meeting of the Singapore Child Language Special Interest Group (SIG) was convened by Dr. Madalena Cruz-Ferreira in October 2007. While the past year's meeting related to the issues surrounding language norming efforts in Singapore, this year's meeting concentrated on research in language models at home and in school within the context of Singapore.

Following from last year's meeting, Dr. Cruz-Ferreira reminded participants about the publication of the *Bibliography of Child Language Research in Singapore* and the annual updating of the bibliography. She requested that researchers, both supervisors and students alike, keep her updated on their research efforts in child language. Dr. Cruz-Ferreira also announced that work is ongoing for the publication of a book on multilingual norms, addressing norms of language use in multilingual contexts.

The meeting then proceeded with presentations by invited speakers who were all from the National Institute of Education, Singapore.

### Presentations

1. "Becoming Bilingual: The Singapore Way", *Linda Thompson*, English Language and Literature Academic Group, NIE

In her presentation, Dr. Linda Thompson shared her research on how children achieve bilingualism in the plurilingual Singapore society. She started by asking what "bilingual" means, what bilinguals do, and what bilingualism is in Singapore. Individuals achieve bilingualism informally at home, in the community or formally through education. Current descriptions of bilingualism

(Baker, 2006; Cummins, 2006; Romaine, 1989) provide a rich understanding of the nature of bilingualism, but they are insufficient as they are derived from monolingual communities. Hence current models of bilingualism need to be reconsidered, taking into account multilingual contexts. Dr. Thompson also highlighted the principled processes of ethnographic research, which brings together the responsibility of researchers to involve participants in all stages of the research.

Dr. Thompson's research reports on an ethnolinguistic study of 40 Singaporean families living in plurilingual Singapore. From the Ministry Of Education survey at Primary 1 registration, language use in Singaporean homes is changing, with an increasing number of families using English as their home language. As the usage of English at home increases, dialect usage levels off. There is also an increasing number of single parent families, as well as three-generation households. Furthermore, interlingual marriages and partnerships add on to the rapid linguistic change in Singapore, creating complex and different ways of being bilingual. In addition, compaction stereotyping of language use does not reflect accurately the linguistic repertoires of these children. Indeed, findings from Dr Thompson's research identify a range of different linguistic repertoires for children who are identified by the unifying label of 'bilingual'. Dr. Thompson thus suggests 7 categories that interlingual families in Singapore can be classified into, which would better reflect the complexity of linguistic structure of Singapore households. With the government's policy of recruiting foreign talents, the linguistic structure of Singapore households can only become more complex as incoming foreigners bring with them their own languages.

Dr Thompson reminded researchers that ethnographic research is endangered. Linguistic research is not a portfolio without responsibility, and research should not be based on hearsay.

2. "Attitudes towards Literary Tamil and Standard Spoken Tamil in Singapore", *Seetha Lakshmi* (with Vanithamani Saravanan and Imelda Caleon), Asian Languages and Cultures Academic Group, NIE

The second presentation by Dr. Seetha Lakshmi was a joint research study with Dr. Vanithamani Saravanan and Ms. Imelda Caleon on the attitudes of Tamil teachers towards speakers of Standard Spoken Tamil (SST) and Literary Tamil (LT). The study has been published as Saravanan et al. (2007). Tamil teachers are viewed as gatekeepers of language standards and their opinion is valuable in addressing the issue of whether SST can be potentially included in Tamil

classrooms. Research was conducted to find out if consensus exists amongst them in relation to the acceptability of SST with regard to commonly used attitude variables in sociolinguistic and social-psychological studies.

Tamil is characterised by diglossia (Britto, 1986; Ferguson, 2000) and comprises two varieties that complement each other in function. The formal or H variety is mainly used in writing and only learnt in school; while the spoken or L variety is used in informal conversations and learned naturally. In Singapore, SST is a variety of Spoken Tamil that has been standardised by informal consensus. SST is a modern spoken koine for interdialect communication that has emerged from the everyday discourses of educated people, a variety that avoids regionalisms and caste-specific forms (Schiffman, 1998).

Dr. Seetha highlighted the use of Tamil among families in Singapore today. Whereas in the past Tamil was used by grandparents and maids, this is changing in the modern families as grandparents are persuaded to speak English, and maids hired by families are from Indonesia. English provides a 'competitive edge' in the international economic arena (Xu and Li Wei, 2002) and is also the link language for Singapore's ethnically diverse population (Gopinathan et al., 2004). According to a census survey (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2000), only 43% of Indian families in Singapore use Tamil as their home language. From a previous study (Lakshmi, 2001,) Dr. Seetha found that the variety of Tamil used by students at school differed from the variety which they use at home, and hear on radio chat shows and in the movies. There is a lack of fit between what Tamil-speaking children bring to school and what school offers as standard levels of achievement. The LT that is taught in schools and used in classrooms, although deemed as of the high variety, contributes to the uninspiring methods of teaching it in school. This leads to students viewing the Tamil that they learn inside the classroom merely as classroom language, which lacks relevance and communicative value in out-of-school contexts. For example, in using the term "ice cream" in LT, there is a need for students to consult a dictionary in order to understand its meaning. Dr. Seetha mentioned that for a language to survive, it requires support from the government, awareness of its suitability for usage in the media and its real life use at home. An added difficulty in teaching Tamil is due to the wide exposure to English education in school, resulting in children preferring to use English rather than Tamil. Hence there is a need for the teaching of Tamil as a school language to be built upon existing home experience, that is, the Tamil that is taught in school should be of the same variety as that used at home. There is a conflation in the distinction between SST and LT where SST used in the classroom and social context is

assumed by Tamil users to be LT.

Results of the study showed that members of the Tamil-speaking community are keen to accept SST as an additional resource and are inclined towards accommodation and acceptance of the use of SST, especially as a resource to assist linking the language that Tamil students acquire and use outside of school. However, they reject SST as being suitable for media presentation. Dr. Seetha concluded that exposing students to SST in classroom contexts is advantageous because it can add more variety to the uses of the language by students.

3. “Home vs. School Language: Practices among Malay-speaking children”, *Norhaida Aman*, Asian Languages and Cultures Academic Group, NIE; Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, NIE

Dr. Norhaida Aman next shared with the audience her research project with Malay-speaking children. She was interested in investigating the language practices amongst Malay-speaking children in Singapore. What prompted her to carry out her project was that information from census surveys on home and school language usage does not account for different language nuances; respondents have simply to pick their dominant language use. Furthermore, such surveys gather the response of parents, which may not accurately reflect the actual language usage at home. As part of her study, research had also been carried out on Chinese and Indian children whereas no research had been done for the Others category because of the complexity of their language use.

Dr. Norhaida’s project takes the form of face-to-face interview surveys which investigate the children’s language use in different domains such as family and friends, schools, media, and public places, while taking into account their socioeconomic status (SES). Language is a reflection of their ethnic identity. Research findings show that there is no correlation between language use at home and SES status for Indians, and Malays tend to belong to the low SES group regardless of language use at home. Malay was seen as a language of intimacy which is used with friends and family, especially among the middle and low SES groups. For the high SES group, respondents were equally likely to use both English and Malay with family members, as well as friends of the same race. When English is used with their parents, it is usually for functional purposes, for example, when asking for pocket money. There is wide variation when language is used for interaction with friends in school versus outside school. English is viewed as a language of social mobility, mainly used in school for group work and when writing notes with friends of the same race. This result holds true

across all three SES groups. The Chinese and Indians use 100% English when speaking with children from other ethnic groups. Interestingly, the low SES group showed the greatest shift from using Malay towards using English in school. Where religion is concerned, Malay was seen as the language of choice regardless of SES group. Reservations were expressed with regard to using English to teach religion; it was also noted that knowledge of some Arabic is important. In print form, there is a tendency for Malays to resort to using both English and Malay. For pop culture, the interesting finding is the active engagement with different languages by Malays. The attitude towards English compared with Malay is that English is seen as a high status language used for communicating with the world. Malay on the other hand, is seen as important for culture as a form of culture ballast equated as their mother tongue, to anchor themselves to their ethnic, personal as well as their religious identities.

4. “Singlish in the school: an impediment or a resource?”, *Rani Rubdy*, English Language and Literature Academic Group, NIE

The last presentation for the day was by Dr. Rani Rubdy, who shared findings on the use of Singlish in schools and how it can be used as a pedagogic resource. Her study has been published as Rubdy (2007). Most Singaporean children start school already fluent in Singlish while Singapore Standard English (SSE) is usually acquired only after they enter primary school. In the Singlish-‘Good’ English debate, the use of Singlish is viewed as an obstacle to the development of students’ literacy skills in Standard English and so the practice of classroom codeswitching between the two varieties is strongly discouraged. However, the presence of the vernacular in the classroom continues to be robust. Findings indicated that teachers used Singlish for specific purposes, rather than haphazardly. Situations that call for the use of Singlish in class include explanation of difficult content to students with low English proficiency, as well as to build rapport with students. Pupils codeswitch between English and Singlish at various times. The incidence of codeswitching also tends to be higher in content subject classes like maths and science than in the English class.

The studies carried out involved survey questionnaire for students and teachers. Results showed that students were ambivalent about Singlish. This reflects the conflict that Singaporeans often experience between the need to use language for expressing local culture and international intelligibility. 83% of students state that they do not find it ‘cool’ to speak Singlish, giving a positive valuation to Standard English. This is further evident with 95% of the students rejecting the idea that their friends would laugh at them for speaking the standard, and 90%

acknowledging that it is important for them to speak good English. A significant 84% strongly disapproved of teacher's use of Singlish in class, and interview data further reiterate their view that by speaking Singlish, students would not be helped to speak Standard English.

Usage of Singlish in students' written work was also prevalent, but the range of SCE features in written work was much narrower. These include subjectless clauses (PRO-drop), copula deletion, 'do' deletion, the use of 'already' as aspectual marker, the use of 'got' and 'cannot' and the invariant tag. The stark reduction of SCE features in writing suggests students' awareness of the need not to use Singlish in written work as opposed to oral communication.

Dr. Rubdy pointed out that contrary to government policy, ignoring or condemning the vernacular may not be a successful strategy and will not help curtail the use of Singlish. Siegel's (1999) review of the research on educational programmes that involved the use of stigmatised varieties reveals that there is no evidence that classroom codeswitching is harmful. It can be important or even necessary as a communicative resource for the management of learning (Ferguson, 2003; Lin, 1996, 1999; Liu et al., 2005). One approach is to use classroom codeswitching as a bridge or springboard in helping students understand the subject matter of their lessons to provide scaffolding for them to cope with new content or unfamiliar concepts. It could serve to annotate and clarify the meaning of certain sections of the texts, demarcate reading of the text from commentary on it, encourage student participation and to scaffold knowledge construction for pupils with limited English language resources. Indeed, effective use of Singlish in the classroom may enhance the quality of lessons.

### **Discussion Session involving panel speakers and participants**

After the presentations, participants continued to share and discuss matters over tea. Dr. Rubdy brought up the issue of German in the context of Switzerland, where there exist Swiss German and Standard German. This can be likened to the existence of Singlish and Standard English in Singapore, where Singlish is a language of intimacy and friendship. However, unlike Singlish in Singapore, the Swiss government does not condemn Swiss German in favour of Standard German. Furthermore, the issue of Standard English in Singapore is problematic as even within England itself, there does not appear to exist a single standard. Dr. Cruz-Ferreira added that Singlish could simply be another way of using English. Dr. Rubdy pointed out that the usage of Chinese dialects was successfully curbed

within 30 years under the Speak Mandarin campaign. However, the same success could not be seen with Singlish due to the soft-handed approach towards it and people's resistance against ousting Singlish. In addition, most of the Mandarin that children pick up is text-based and is usually learned in school, eliminating the problem of non-standard or vernacular Mandarin. It was unanimously agreed amongst the speakers and participants that Singlish should be allowed to exist alongside Standard English, as long as children are able to make a distinction between the two and codeswitch based on the situation.

Participants agreed that the linguistics situation in Singapore is complex and Dr. Cruz-Ferreira expressed her amazement that researchers have tried to unravel the complexity, with the starting point seemingly nowhere in sight. Surprisingly, the four presentations at the meeting focused on a common theme on common subjects, namely the extreme complexity of language uses and how we can use available resources for teaching. It was unanimously agreed that collection of data is a delicate and difficult task, at the same time that data-based research is important for reflecting actual linguistic situations. The third SCLSIG meeting was closed with Dr. Cruz-Ferreira promising to include the issue of speech therapy in multilingual contexts in the next meet.

Reported by Ng Wan Qing Jessie and Toh Weimin  
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## Abstracts of Conference Presentations

### Developing learner metacognition in English language classrooms in Singapore

*Country Speaker Report delivered at The 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on English in South East Asia (ESEA 2007), 12-14 Dec 2007, Bangkok, Thailand*

*Lawrence Jun Zhang, NIE, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*

This paper reports on part of a larger research project (Gu, Hu, Zhang, 2003, 2005; Rao, Gu, Zhang & Hu, 2007; Zhang, Gu & Hu, 2008) where interventional pedagogical approaches were adopted for developing learner metacognition within the framework of cognitive psychology (Anderson, 2005) in English language classrooms in Singapore. It begins by introducing the term metacognition, arguing for the importance for developing learner metacognition in language learning and teaching. Given that studies of this kind on Singaporean children are less frequently reported (cf. Zhang, 2008, whose participants were PRC ESL students in Singapore), this paper focuses on an intervention study using Singaporean pupils as participants. 246 grade 5 primary school pupils were invited to participate in this study over a whole semester in order that the intervention would help them enhance their metacognition for effective learning of English. The paper specifically focused on the reading and writing intervention projects by following a six-step procedure based on the understanding of metacognition: 1) Metacognitive awareness-raising, 2) Preparation, 3) Teacher presentation and modelling, 4) Consolidation, 5) Evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies used, and 6) Transfer of strategies to new learning tasks. Findings suggest that the experimental (treatment) group who received writing strategy instruction outperformed their control (comparison) group peers on a post-test and a delayed test, but the effect was statistically significant for metacognitive training in reading only on certain metacognitive strategies. Issues and implications of the study for Asian classrooms are also discussed.

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**A Colloquium on  
Power/Imagination/Accommodation: Flexibility in  
Southeast Asian Contexts**

*International Conference on Responding to Change Flexibility in the Delivery of  
Language Programmes, 7-8 January 2008, Hong Kong University of Science  
and Technology*

In this colloquium, four papers will map out specific configurations of flexibility in various levels of change in Southeast Asian contexts: degrees of compliance and concession in the delivery of language teaching as a negotiated commodity (Singapore); the interplay of socio-cultural and political factors in the implementation of teacher as well as postgraduate training programmes (Philippines); and the practices of localisation of a national curriculum (Malaysia). The presenters will reflect on their own understanding of flexibility in the delivery of English language programmes in specific contexts. In the end, they hope to show how flexibility is rooted in institutional, socio-cultural and socio-political practices, and thus must be understood as such.

**Paper 1: Redesigning a language course within the context of ongoing  
institutional changes: A case of organizational learning**

*Ma. Luisa C. Sadorra, National University of Singapore*

In diversified language teaching communities, where both materials design and

classroom instruction are complicated as a result of varying degrees of compliance and concession on administrative and instructional levels, language teaching has become largely *negotiated* in terms of discipline-specific issues, differing tutor preparations, and culturally defined pedagogic practices. Moreover, evolving institutional pursuits and goals redefine faculty priorities/agendas which influence foci of language programmes. Within such institutional contexts, language educators deal with a continuing tension operating between language teaching components and disciplinary or institutional agendas. To address challenges of this kind, a postgraduate language course has been redesigned from an organizational culture framework, whereby organizational learning helps situate course planning within institutional constraints, steers directions throughout the various stages of course planning and implementation, seeks to decentralize pedagogic decision-making, and supports accommodation of perceived and actual institutional constraints.

**Paper 2: Strategic criticality: How teachers negotiate competing perspectives on ELT**

*T. Ruanni F. Tupas*, National University of Singapore

This paper describes the struggles of teachers in contextualizing the competing paradigms of teaching English in particular classrooms in the Philippines. Through the use of a ‘critical’ textbook in a postgraduate programme in second language teaching, the teachers have been exposed to a wide range of possibilities in the teaching of English: the teaching of Standard English, the recognition of the legitimacy of World Englishes, practices of resistance against linguistic imperialism (e.g., codeswitching), and so on. While the teachers seem critically aware of these competing paradigms, their choices are also constrained by socioeconomic, political and ideological conditions which are largely not of their own making. These conditions help prevent the teachers from practicing what in theory are sociolinguistically and politically legitimate ways to deal with English. However, because of such critical awareness of the competing paradigms, such conditioned choices do not go back simply to the teaching of ‘Standard English’. Data from the teachers’ works reveal the painful process by which they deal with ‘Standard English’, and the way to go for them is to idealize their work: teach Standard English through a ‘Filipinized’ content because it is through this that English will ultimately be localized. Another strategy is to practice informed codeswitching in the classroom -- but in the service of Standard English.

**Paper 3: Managing the change from ‘learning to teach’ to ‘learning to**

**learn' (also): A case of English INSET in the Philippines**

*Ma. Luz C. Vilches, Ateneo de Manila University*

This presentation aims to reflect on the issue of flexibility vis-à-vis the interplay of institutional, socio-cultural, and political factors that affect the management of innovation in English language education. In the presentation, I will describe two teacher training paradigms in Philippine ELT, the dynamics of implementation in shifting paradigms, insights gained, and further challenges. My topic is on teacher training and focused on aid projects. The management of change to be dealt with is from the focus on communicative language teaching (as espoused by the World bank/ADB aid project for the Department of Education from 1989 to 1994) to a focus on promoting learning in the language classroom (as espoused by the UK DfID aid project for DepEd from 1995 to 1999 which I managed). The latter project topped up what was lacking in the former -- and how this was done within the socio-cultural, political context of the Philippine educational scene is the focus of my discussion on flexibility.

**Paper 4: Flexibility in the National English Language Curriculum**

*Moses Samuel, University of Malaya*

While most national curricula typically aim at curricular standardization, the question remains, how can national curricula be responsive to individual differences among the learner population it serves, or the peculiar social, cultural or contextual demands of different communities? This paper presents a case study of how a curricular unit on reading labels in a rural Malaysian classroom is invested with local relevance as the rural community in which the school is located moves through different stages of consumerist literacy, as the one-shopkeeper provision shop makes way for a supermarket. In this community in transition, reading labels becomes more than a decoding activity; it involves also different habits of mind associated with changing literacy practices. The paper examines the teacher's role as 'ethnographer' of community literacy practices in fostering flexibility that is critical in ensuring that the curriculum unit is meaningful in the lifeworlds of learners.

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**The impact of structured argumentation and enactive role play on students' argumentative writing skills**

*Ascilite Conference 2007: ICT: Providing Choices for Learners and Learning  
2-5 December 2007, Singapore*

*Jamaludin, M. L. Caroline Ho, & Y.S. Chee*  
NIE, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

This paper reports the impact of using a structured argumentation board and enactive role play in *Second Life* on students' argumentative writing skills in the context of the A-level subject General Paper. Students were taught the structural aspects of argumentation based on Toulmin's (1958) argumentation framework. The structured argumentation board, Voices of Reason, supported their argumentation discourse while the *Second Life* platform supported students' contextualized role-playing activities on the topic of globalization. Students participated in these two separate modes of technology-facilitated learning in a cyclic, interwoven fashion, alternating back and forth between two cycles of argument and enaction. Data in the form of argumentative essays were collected at the beginning and the end of a four week intervention period. We compare the pre and post intervention argumentation essays written by the students based on Toulmin's argumentation framework, contrast the findings with that of the control group's argumentative essays, and present the statistical results in this paper.

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**Argument-based negotiation and conflict resolution through  
enactive role play in Second Life**

*The 15th International Conference on Computers in Education: Supporting  
learning flow through integrative technologies, 5-9 Nov 2007, Hiroshima, Japan*

*A. Jamaludin, M. L. Caroline Ho, & Y.S. Chee*  
NIE, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

This paper proposes the use of an immersive virtual environment, Second Life, for enactive role play to help students recognize and solve conflicts through argument-based negotiation. An important core of the epistemology of negotiation is that stakeholders in a dispute have legitimate conflicting interests, and the goal of negotiation is to reconcile those interests in an equitable manner given the constraints of the situation. In this study, students role-play as lead negotiators for parties in a dispute concerning a fictitious island which seeks to join the community of regional and international democracies after decades of totalitarian government. The discourse corpora of five student groups across two enactment sessions were analyzed using an adapted collaborative argumentation framework. We present the results of a two-step analysis approach that involves

an initial single dialectical move analysis and a sequential analysis for pertinent moves and patterns within the virtual interaction. We discuss how these dialectical and sequential moves impact upon students' acceptance or non-acceptance of a conflict resolution. We conclude with a discussion on related pedagogical implications.

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## Book Review

### *Changing Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar*

Edited by T. Ruanni F. Tupas, Yuan Yi and Christianty Nur  
Singapore: SAAL, 2007. 106pp

Pedagogical grammar has always been an important subject in language teaching. However, teaching grammar has never been an easy and clear-cut task for language teachers to embark on. *Changing Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar* provides a very useful update on research into grammar teaching and learning. It is divided into four main areas of inquiry: issues in pedagogical appropriateness, developments in theories of language and grammar teaching, advances in the use of technology in grammar teaching and learning and studies on Standard Singapore English.

According to the editors, this book is useful in helping language practitioners to develop 'a sense of responsibility over what we teach and how we teach it [grammar]' (p. 5). I notice that this appears to be a recurring theme introduced in almost all the chapters. For example, in the first chapter which discusses the issue of the grammar syllabus and teacher involvement over the responsibility in grammar teaching, Hung explores the question of whether teaching is considered a profession like any other professional career such as doctors and lawyers. I could easily agree to his contention that teaching is indeed a profession which similarly requires us as teachers to make decisions on our teaching although the syllabus is always around in guiding us on what and how to teach. The crucial thing about teaching is how we respond to students' learning. As far as grammar teaching is concerned, our role becomes important the moment we analyze and understand students' interlanguage grammar and develop plans to help solve the differences discovered.

Throughout the book, many approaches are also discussed in trying to 'simplify' the problems faced by teachers in deciding on what, how and when to teach

grammar in the language classroom. For instance, the choice of inductive and deductive teaching of grammar is seriously explored by Ng and Chia in their paper. The merits of both approaches are discussed and they conclude that both are equally effective though the superiority of any one approach still remains debatable. As teachers, we need to find our own balance that suits the students that we teach after taking into consideration the constraints in time and students' response in deciding how far we like to pursue a particular approach or a combination of both approaches in our teaching.

As a compilation of papers presented in a symposium, the book has attempted to share the vast ideas of linguistic experts in a manner which is easy to follow by means of the categorizing made on the various issues raised about grammar teaching. Nevertheless, a careful and critical reading of the book would inevitably raise some questions worthy of further exploration. For example, McArthur's notion of Singapore being a 'simple place' (p. 26) could leave the reader wondering what this really means. Are issues of language learning not very complex compared to cities which are more modern and cosmopolitan?

Nevertheless, questions raised on the issue presented might be more of how much more one could benefit from the ideas shared in view of the many new approaches suggested in teaching grammar. This is particularly interesting when we consider the various electronic platforms recommended, like the use of discussion board and concordance software which are readily available over the Internet. The use of concordance interface as suggested by Gallo and Deng, and Doyle, is obviously an innovative approach in providing learners with authentic examples and data to study grammar more interestingly. Though time could be a factor, the preparation made to generate data (either from our own students' writing or from available data found in the concordance websites), the variety of examples, and context presented would make grammar teaching and learning much more meaningful than ever before. At least for me, I do not need to scratch my head at every grammar lesson to illustrate examples of sentences and contexts where the grammar points could be emphasized.

In conclusion, this book is a useful and practical resource that all language teachers should have. This is one book that seriously helps to update language teachers and researchers on the intricacies of teaching English, in this case, grammar, in cognizance of the changes that language itself undergoes. Furthermore, the book also offers readers with opportunities to explore further many critical issues discussed.

Reviewed by *Arzami Salim*

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## NEWS

### **Beatriz Lorente Awarded the Wang Gungwu Prize at NUS**

SAAL is happy to share the good news that Dr. Beatriz Lorente, current Honorary Treasurer of SAAL and a lecturer at NTU, has been awarded the Wang Gungwu Medal & Prize for the academic year 2006-2007 for the Best PhD thesis in the Social Sciences/Humanities. Congratulations, Bea! The following is the summary of her thesis, entitled *Mapping English linguistic capital: The case of Filipino domestic workers in Singapore*.

#### **Summary**

This study examines how, as linguistic capital, English is both a resource for a domain of symbolic struggles in transnational social fields or arenas. This is contextualized by remapping English in macro- and micro-levels of analysis to account for how it is embedded in structural inequalities and how it is mobilized in the immediate struggles of individuals. In this regard, this study draws from the case of Filipino domestic workers in Singapore. The case presents a unique opportunity to explore how the inequalities of the world system and the acts of English identification of individuals are configured in the context of the flows of migrant women between the Philippine and Singapore, two post-colonial states in contrasting stages of development, that had and that continue to have a historical and cultural formation negotiated in or mediated by English.

To unpack the different dimensions of the case, the study focuses on how macro- and micro-level social actors in the transnational arena of domestic work appropriate English and what the effects of these appropriations may be, at their levels. These social actors are the Philippine state, transnational maid agencies in Singapore and the Filipino domestic workers in Singapore themselves. In particular, the study describes how, in the transnational field, English is appropriated by: (1) the Philippine state in its discourse about the competitiveness of its migrant workers; (2) maid agencies in Singapore, in their script of servitude for Filipino domestic workers; and (3) the Filipino domestic workers in Singapore in how they negotiate the everyday realities of their marginalized position in Singapore society.

The study argues that English is embedded in multiple interconnected sites of symbolic struggle. The appropriations of English at different levels and their effectiveness at generating uptake of English at different levels and their effectiveness at generating uptake are contingent on the space-specific distribution of valuable material and symbolic resources. This has particular implications for marginalized groups such as the Filipino domestic workers who mobilize English in their immediate struggles to reconstitute the everyday impositions of structural power on their lives. An understanding of the interactions between structural inequalities engendered by English and agentive appropriations of English should inform strategic interventions.

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**Coming Soon: 24<sup>th</sup> SAAL Lecture, to be delivered by  
Professor Alastair Pennycook**

The 24th SAAL Lecture will be delivered by Professor Alastair Pennycook (University of Technology Sydney) on 23 April 2008. More details will be announced in late March or early April.

## **SAAL Executive Committee Members 2006-2008**

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