

Lecture 1: Segmental Features of Singapore English Pronunciation: can the world understand us?

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"Singapore Accent is Fine" Deputy Prime Minister (now PM) Lee, 6

April 2001

- *"We need not speak with a British or American accent; a Singaporean accent is fine. But Singaporeans must speak a form of English that is readily understood by people all over the world."*
- Emphasis on Global Intelligibility

What constitutes intelligibility?

- 3 different types:
 - (i) recognition of words and utterances- intelligibility
 - (ii) recognition of the meanings of words and utterances - comprehensibility
 - (iii) grasping the speakers' intent behind words and utterances- interpretability
- Focus is on (I) and those features which hinder our interlocutors from recognising words and utterances

Importance of context

- *“If you are driving, take the PIE and turn off at the first HDB estate. Otherwise, if you are taking the MRT, get off at the stop opposite the MOM Building.”*
- difficult for foreigner to understand this utterance even if we enunciate our vowels and consonants carefully

Singapore English (SE) Consonants

- 1. 'th' vs 't'
- Example words: *three vs tree ; thin vs tin*
- Example sentences adapted from Brown (1998: *Use of English in Teaching*)
- *Why is your thigh so dirty?*
- *Why is your tie so dirty?*

SE Consonants

- 2. 'th' vs 'd'
- Example words: *there vs dare*
- Example sentences:
 - *I got these last semester*
 - *I got Ds last semester*

SE Consonants

- 3. 'r' vs 'l'
- Example words: *parrot* vs *palate*; *rice* vs *lice*
- Example sentences:
 - *Would you like some fried rice?*
 - *Would you like some fried lice?*

SE Consonants

- 4. Final 'p,b,t,d,k,g'
- 'p' vs 'b'
- *Where did he leave his cap?*
Where did he leave his cab?
- 't' vs 'd'
- *Are you his mate?*
Are you his maid?
- 'k' vs 'g'
- *Is she your prized pick?*
Is she your prized pig?

SE Consonants

- Simplifying consonant clusters: 2 consonants together
- scrip (t)
- promp (t)
- fac (t)

SE Vowels

- 1. Vowel in *bat* vs *bet*
- *My father is 'Dad'*
- *My father is dead.*
- *How much is your salary?*
- *How much is your celery?*

SE Vowels

- 2. Distinction between long and short vowels
- *(a) sheep vs ship*
- *Did the high heels make her feet sore?*
- *Did the high hills make her feet sore?*

SE Vowels

- 2 (b) *short vs shot*
- *My mother is short*
- *My mother is shot*

SE Vowels

- 2 (c) *cart vs cut*
- *If you calm down, we can discuss your problem*
- *If you come down, we can discuss your problem*

SE Vowels

- 2 (d) *pool* vs *pull*
- *Pull the door to the swimming pool.*

SE Vowels

- 3. Single (monophthongs) vs Dual Quality (diphthongs) Vowels
 - (a) *pen* vs *pain*
 - *Tell me where the pen is*
 - *Tell me where the pain is*

 - *Pass me the pepper*
 - *Pass me the paper*

SE Vowels

- 3 (b) *code* vs *cod*
- *The baby has a new coat*
- *The baby has a new cot*

SE Vowels

- 3 (c) *belly* vs *barely*
- *Do you read the Delhi newspaper?*
Do you read the daily newspaper?

Summary of Lecture 1:

- Defined intelligibility
- Covered the main differences in segmental features between Singapore English (SE) and other standard varieties of English like British English (BE)