

# Identifying the social correlates of Singlish: The relationship between Singlish-ness and locally relevant meanings

Yin Lin Tan<sup>1,2</sup>, Ting Lin<sup>1</sup>, Meghan Sumner<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Stanford University*  
<sup>2</sup> *National University of Singapore*





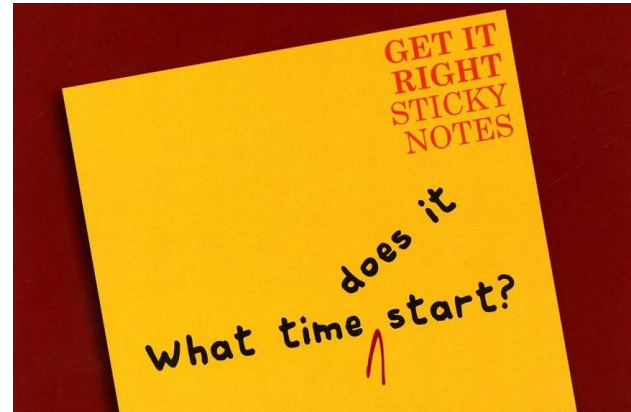
Excuse me?!

# English in Singapore

Singlish—Standard Singapore English

Explaining variation in English in Singapore

- (H)igh vs (L)ow (Gupta 1994)
- Lectal continuum (Platt 1975)
- Cultural Orientation Model (Alsagoff 2010)
- Indexical account (Leimgruber 2012)



# An indexical account

Focus on linguistic features and social meanings indexed by them

- Social meanings are locally relevant and locally grounded
- Singlish?

Addresses concerns from previous models

- Education, formality, cultural orientation

**What social meanings are indexed by speech that is perceived to be Singlish?**

# Methods

# Overview

## Task 1: Perception Experiment

**Clip 1**  
Press "S"

**Clip 2**  
Press "L"

Which clip sounds more Singlish?

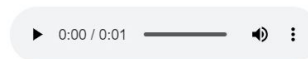
**Clip 1**  
Press "S"

**Clip 2**  
Press "L"

Which clip sounds more Singlish?

## Task 2: Attribute Rating Task

Press play to listen to the audio again.



Rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

The speaker is EASYGOING.



The speaker is ROUGH.



# Task 1: Perception Experiment

## Speeded forced-choice task

- “Which clip sounds more Singlish?”
- 2 seconds to respond
- 20 trials x 6 blocks; 132 participants

## 40 natural-speech stimuli

- 1.4-2.6 seconds long
- 10 Chinese Singaporean speakers
- Syntactically and lexically similar to Standard English



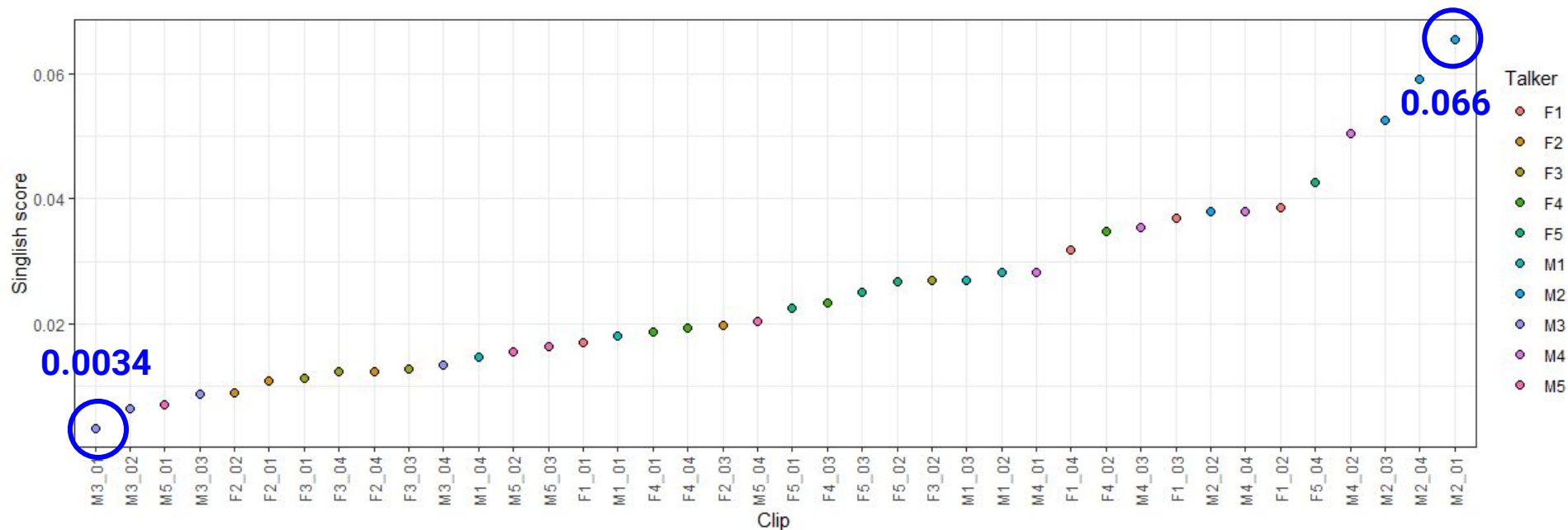
# Task 1: Perception Experiment

“Singlish score” using Markov chains

## Singlish score

= predicted probability of being chosen as the More Singlish clip

- Accounts for different matchups
- Proxy for Singlish-ness





# Task 2: Attribute Rating Task

## Attribute rating task

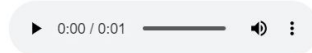
- “The speaker is [X].”
- 7-point Likert scale
- 40 trials, 1 audio clip/trial; 50 participants

## 6 attributes from Task 1:

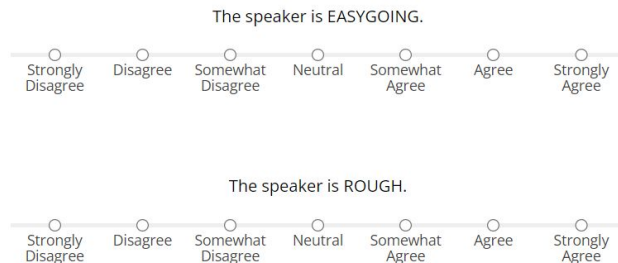
ROUGH, PROPER, CASUAL, EASYGOING,  
HONEST, FAST-SPEAKING

Obtain **attribute ratings** for each clip

Press play to listen to the audio again.



Rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:



# Results

# Analysis

## Six Bayesian ordinal mixed effects regression models

- Outcome variable = Attribute rating
- Fixed effect = Singlish score

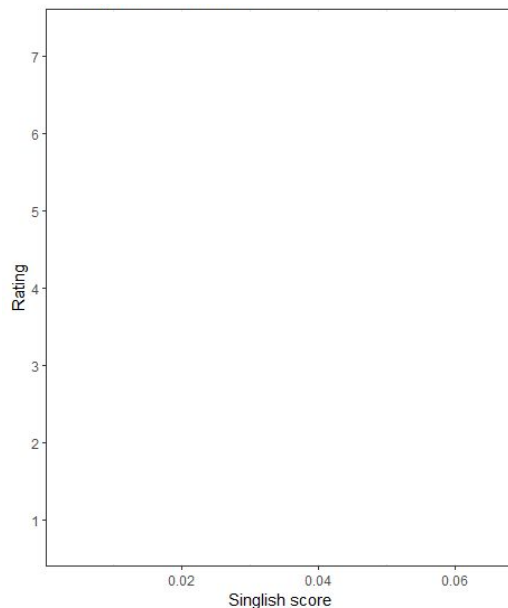
## 95% credible interval (CI)

- “Given the data, the effect has a 95% probability of falling within this range”
- If 0 is not within the 95% CI
  - → 95% probability that coefficient is positive
  - → 95% probability that the effect is positive

95% CI does not include 0:  
**ROUGH, PROPER, CASUAL, FAST-SPEAKING**

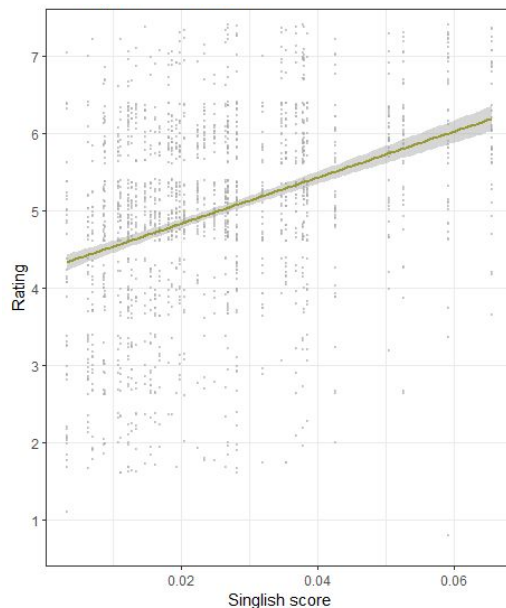
# Results

## ROUGH



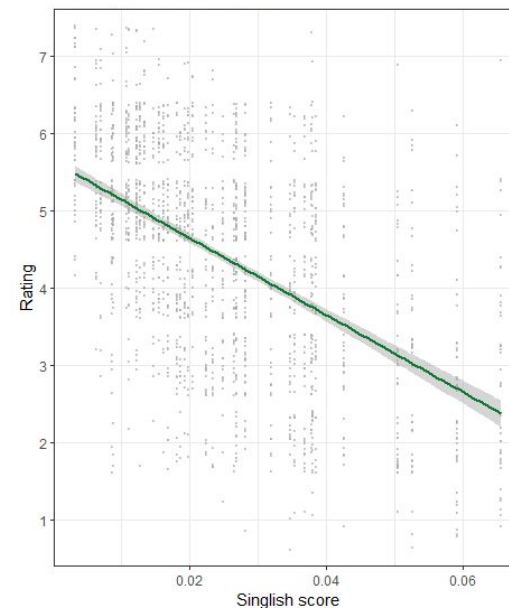
95% CI = [17.15, 64.87]  
Estimate = 40.15

## CASUAL



95% CI = [40.42, 80.77]  
Estimate = 60.72

## PROPER



95% CI = [-125.02, -70.15]  
Estimate = -97.43

# Discussion

# So far:

## Measure of Singlish-ness

- Task 1: Perception Experiment
- Singlish score for each clip

## Attribute ratings for each clip

- Task 2: Attribute Rating Task
- ROUGH, PROPER, CASUAL, EASYGOING, HONEST, FAST-SPEAKING



# Ideologies about the non-standard

Singlish positioned as non-standard in dominant discourse

- Standard English as the language of the workplace and school
- Mother tongue as the language of culture and heritage

ROUGH, CASUAL, and PROPER

- Aligns with association between Singlish and informality (Ng, Tan, and Cavallaro 2023)
- *Only in casual settings; we should strive to use formal and proper English in business settings*
- *Acceptable in casual context but not in formal context*

# An indexical field for Singlish

A constellation of meanings associated with Singlish

- Singlish as a style: bundle of meaningful linguistic features
- Meaning is indexed by individual features, but also by the entire style

Minimally: ROUGH, CASUAL, and PROPER

- Other meanings associated with non-standardness
- *More coarse/crude, Sounds less polished, ghetto, uneducated, low-class*
  - Compared to Standard English?



# Implications

Reference point for future indexical accounts of English in Singapore

- Social meanings that may be indexed by individual linguistic features

Starting with the meaning, rather than the form

- What feature(s) index ROUGH both on its own and within the context of a Singlish style?
- What feature(s) index ROUGH on its own, but doesn't within the context of a Singlish style?

# Thank you!

Questions? Email us!

Yin Lin: [yltan@stanford.edu](mailto:yltan@stanford.edu)

Ting: [linting@stanford.edu](mailto:linting@stanford.edu)

Meghan: [sumner@stanford.edu](mailto:sumner@stanford.edu)

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