

# Navigating Language Choice in the Workplace: Professional Employees' Attitudes Towards Singlish in a Multinational Company in Malaysia

<sup>\*1</sup>Nur Syafiqah Athirah Mohd Sihar, <sup>2</sup>Shazleen Mohd Rozaidi

<sup>1</sup>Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Negeri Sembilan Branch, Kuala Pilah Campus, 72000 Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>CSG International

**\*Corresponding author**

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the attitudes of five professional employees towards the use of Singlish in the Malaysian branch of a multinational company, with particular attention to how its perceived appropriateness varied across workplace relationships and levels of formality. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with five multilingual employees who had experience with Singlish in workplace communication. The interview data were analysed using an inductive thematic approach with language ideology subsequently applied as an interpretive lens. The findings revealed that participants' attitudes towards Singlish were context-dependent rather than uniformly positive or negative. Singlish was associated with comfort and approachability, particularly among familiar interlocutors, while Standard English was more closely associated with professionalism. In formal workplace settings, some participants considered Singlish acceptable for maintaining rapport, whereas others expressed reservations about its use, particularly in client-facing interactions. Participants also identified common Singlish features, including sentence-final particles such as lah, leh, lor, meh, and ah. Overall, the perceived appropriateness of Singlish was influenced by factors such as the interlocutor, degree of familiarity, workplace hierarchy, and level of formality. The study contributes to the understanding of Singlish beyond its primary Singaporean context by highlighting how the five participants associated language choice with interpersonal rapport and expectations of professionalism in a Malaysian multinational workplace.

**Keywords:** Singlish; workplace communication; language attitudes; multilingual workplace; language choice

## INTRODUCTION

Sharing a common language does not necessarily mean communicating in the same way. In multinational workplaces, employees from diverse linguistic backgrounds may use English as a shared working language while continuing to draw on different linguistic repertoires and communicative practices (Brannen et al., 2014). As a result, workplace communication may vary according to the speakers involved and the context in which interaction occurs. In the Malaysian workplace context, Idris and Ismail (2023), for instance, found that Malay speakers of English in the workplace varied their use of request modifications according to contextual factors such as relative power and the degree of imposition involved in the request. Their findings demonstrate that workplace communication practices may vary according to the social and situational demands of an interaction. Similarly, Bhar et al. (2022) discovered that language use in a Malaysia-based multinational company varied

according to the communicative situation and target audience, with employees using English and Bahasa Malaysia, flexibly across workplace interactions.

Such variation is not limited to the choice between different languages but may also be reflected in the varieties of English that speakers use. In multilingual societies, English has developed into localised varieties that reflect the linguistic and sociocultural environments in which it is used (Bolton, 2012). One such variety is Singapore Colloquial English (SCE), commonly known as Singlish, which has developed within Singapore's multilingual environment. Singlish incorporates linguistic influences from languages spoken in Singapore and is characterised by distinctive features, including sentence-final particles such as *lah*, *leh*, and *lor* (Ningsih & Rahman, 2023). However, Singlish is more than a linguistically distinctive variety of English; it also carries social and cultural meanings within Singaporean society. In particular, Singlish has been associated with local identity in Singapore (Goh, 2016). Given the social meanings associated with different varieties of English, how speakers perceive and evaluate these varieties becomes particularly important.

Previous studies have shown that attitudes towards Singlish are not necessarily uniform. Singlish has been associated with positive social meanings such as identity and solidarity, while concerns have also been raised regarding prestige and appropriateness (Alsagoff, 2007, 2010; Cavallaro et al., 2014). More recent research similarly suggests that evaluations of Singlish may vary according to the social and communicative context in which it is used (Leow et al., 2025). These findings suggest that attitudes towards Singlish may be multidimensional and shaped by the social and communicative context in which the variety is used.

The context-dependent nature of these attitudes becomes highly relevant in professional workplaces, where language choices may be evaluated in relation to expectations of appropriateness and professionalism. In Malaysia, linguistic variation within professional settings has long been documented. Nair-Venugopal (2003), for instance, observed the use of localised varieties of Malaysian English alongside style-shifting, code-mixing, and code-switching in Malaysian business organisations, indicating that workplace communication may draw on locally situated linguistic practices. More recent research has further highlighted the role of professional expectations in the evaluation of English variation. Abu Bakar and Hashim (2024), for example, found differing perceptions of Malaysian English accents within the workplace, with some employees reporting pressure to modify their natural accents in professional settings, despite management participants not necessarily associating accent with professional competence. These studies show that localised forms of English have long been part of Malaysian workplace communication, while attitudes towards such forms may vary according to what is considered appropriate and professional in the workplace.

Although Singlish is primarily associated with Singapore, it shares certain linguistic similarities with Malaysian English varieties, especially the colloquial variety commonly referred to as Manglish. Even though the two varieties share similarities across several lexical categories, differences have also been identified in the influence of local languages (Norizam, 2014). The present study acknowledges this overlap but does not seek to compare Singlish and Manglish or to determine whether individual linguistic features belong exclusively to either variety. Instead, it focuses on employees' attitudes towards Singlish and the features they recognise or report as Singlish within workplace communication.

Despite the context-dependent attitudes towards Singlish identified in previous studies, less attention has been given to how professional employees in Malaysia view its use in the workplace. This raises questions about how Singlish is perceived by professional employees and whether its acceptability differs across formal and informal workplace contexts. The study also identifies common Singlish features recognised or reported by employees in workplace communication. By doing so, the study extends current understanding of attitudes towards Singlish beyond its primary Singaporean context and provides further insight into its use within a Malaysian professional workplace. Based on this focus, the study is guided by the following research objectives and research questions.

## Research Objectives

To explore professional employees' attitudes towards the use of Singlish in a multinational workplace.

To examine professional employees' attitudes towards the use of Singlish across formal and informal workplace contexts.

To identify common Singlish features recognised or reported by professional employees in workplace communication.

## Research Questions

What are professional employees' attitudes towards the use of Singlish in a multinational workplace?

How do professional employees' attitudes towards the use of Singlish differ across formal and informal workplace contexts?

What common Singlish features are recognised or reported by professional employees in workplace communication?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Singlish as a Localised Variety of English

Singlish, also known as Singapore Colloquial English, is a localised variety of English that has developed within Singapore's multilingual environment. The use of Singlish is not entirely separate from Standard English, as speakers may shift between the two varieties according to the social context of an interaction. According to Gupta (1989), speakers who are able to use Standard English may also use Singlish in more informal situations, suggesting that the choice between the two varieties can be influenced by the social setting.

In terms of its linguistic features, Singlish reflects influences from the languages spoken within Singapore's multilingual community, particularly Chinese languages, Malay, and Tamil. These influences can be observed in its pronunciation and grammatical patterns (Ningsih & Rahman, 2023). Although Singlish differs from Standard English in several syntactic features, much of its vocabulary remains English-based and has been adapted to the local linguistic environment (Ningsih & Rahman, 2023). Singlish also shares several features with Malaysian English varieties, especially the colloquial variety commonly referred to as Manglish. Tan et al. (2018) highlighted similarities between Manglish and Singlish in several linguistic features, while also noting differences in the influence of local languages on the two varieties. More specifically, Norizam (2014), in a comparative analysis of Manglish and Singlish lexis, identified similarities across several lexical categories, including the use of particles such as *la* and *lah*. However, distinctions were also identified, with Manglish lexical items in the data showing stronger influence from Malay, whereas Singlish lexical items showed greater influence from Chinese varieties such as Hokkien and Cantonese. This overlap demonstrates that some linguistic features may be shared between the two varieties rather than serving as exclusive markers of either Singlish or Manglish.

Beyond its linguistic features, understanding Singlish also requires attention to the pragmatic meanings associated with its use. Zaidi and Arrumsia (2026), for example, found that the distinctive linguistic features and pragmatic norms of Singlish could create communicative challenges for migrant domestic workers who were unfamiliar with localised language practices. Their findings suggest that effective interpretation of Singlish involves more than recognising particular words or grammatical structures; speakers must also understand how these features function within specific social and communicative contexts. This contextual dimension becomes important in interactions involving speakers from different linguistic and cultural

backgrounds, where familiarity with Singlish and its communicative conventions may vary. Accordingly, examining Singlish in professional settings requires consideration not only of its linguistic characteristics, but also of how speakers perceive its social meanings and appropriateness across different contexts.

### **Language Attitudes, Identity and Appropriacy**

Attitudes towards Singlish are often mixed, as the variety may be positively associated with identity and solidarity while also being viewed as less appropriate in certain contexts (Lee & Ahn, 2021). This suggests that evaluations of Singlish are not necessarily uniformly positive or negative but may depend on the social meanings associated with its use. For instance, Chiu and Lin (2024) examined attitudes towards Singaporean English in terms of correctness, acceptability, pleasantness, and familiarity. Their findings showed that participants' evaluations could vary across these dimensions, with some participants associating Singaporean English with friendliness and familiarity. Such findings demonstrate that attitudes towards a local variety of English may involve different dimensions of evaluation rather than a single judgement of whether the variety is acceptable.

Moreover, the relationship between Singlish and social identity further contributes to these differing attitudes. Singlish has been associated with local identity and a sense of belonging within Singaporean society (Goh, 2016). This social function is also reflected in the contexts in which speakers choose to use the variety. Lan et al. (2025), in a study involving 86 Singaporeans, found that Singlish was commonly associated with culture, home, and solidarity, whereas Singapore Standard English (SSE) was more strongly associated with formality and professionalism. However, their findings also showed that Singlish was not entirely restricted to informal relationships, as some participants reported using it when communicating with company managers and senior colleagues. These findings suggest that the use of Singlish is not limited to informal interactions, as speakers may also use it in professional relationships depending on the social context and their relationship with the interlocutor.

More recent evidence similarly demonstrates that perceptions of Singlish may depend on the communicative context. Leow et al. (2025) reported differing evaluations of Singlish among multilingual speakers, including positive associations with approachability and communicative effectiveness alongside concerns about its appropriateness in more formal situations. Overall, these studies suggest that speakers may evaluate Singlish differently depending on factors such as social relationship, communicative setting, and expectations of formality. The appropriacy of Singlish can therefore be understood as context-dependent, particularly in professional environments where speakers may need to balance interpersonal connection with expectations of professional language use.

### **Language Choice in Multinational Companies**

Multinational companies bring together employees from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making the use of a shared language important for workplace communication. English commonly serves this function, although employees may continue to draw on their different linguistic repertoires when communicating in the workplace (Brannen et al., 2014). In multinational business contexts, English can function as a shared means of communication among professionals from different linguistic backgrounds (Karhunen et al., 2023). This shared use of English enables employees who do not share the same first language to communicate and perform workplace tasks across linguistic boundaries.

However, using English as a shared workplace language does not mean that employees communicate in a uniform manner. Language choice may vary according to the communicative situation and the people involved. In a Malaysia-based multinational company, Bhar et al. (2022), for example, found that employees used English and Bahasa Malaysia flexibly according to the communicative situation and target audience. Similarly, Idris and Ismail (2023) found that Malay speakers of English in Malaysian workplaces varied their request modifications

according to contextual factors, including relative power and the degree of imposition involved. Although these studies examine different aspects of workplace communication, together they demonstrate that employees may adapt their language practices according to the social and situational demands of workplace interactions.

Such flexibility may also involve the use of localised varieties of English. Earlier research by Nair-Venugopal (2003) identified the use of localised Malaysian English alongside style-shifting, code-mixing, and code-switching in Malaysian business organisations, showing that local linguistic practices had already formed part of professional workplace communication. More recent research suggests that the use of localised English continues to raise questions about professional appropriateness. Abu Bakar and Hashim (2024), for example, found differing perceptions of Malaysian English accents in the workplace, with some employees reporting pressure to modify their natural accents in professional situations, although management participants did not associate accent with professional competence. Taken together, these studies show that localised forms of English have long been present in Malaysian workplace communication, while their perceived appropriateness in professional settings remains open to differing evaluations.

These findings highlight the importance of context in determining how localised varieties of English are used and perceived in professional settings. Also, this issue is evident in the use of Singlish, which may serve interpersonal functions while also being evaluated against expectations of formality and professionalism. However, less attention has been given to how professional employees in Malaysia perceive the use of Singlish within a multinational workplace. Examining these perceptions may therefore provide further insight into how employees evaluate the appropriateness of Singlish across different workplace relationships and levels of formality.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY**

This study draws upon the language ideology advanced by Irvine and Gal (2000) as its theoretical lens. Language ideologies refer to socially situated beliefs, assumptions, and values concerning language and its use, through which particular linguistic forms or varieties become associated with broader social meanings. From this perspective, language varieties may become associated with broader social and cultural meaning concerning the people, activities, and contexts with which they are linked (Irvine & Gal, 2000). These social meanings can influence how a language variety is perceived and evaluated across different contexts.

This perspective is particularly relevant to Singlish because the variety has been associated with competing social meanings. On the one hand, Singlish has been positioned against Standard English and associated with informality and lower linguistic prestige; on the other hand, it has been valued as a marker of local identity, solidarity, and cultural belonging (Alsagoff, 2007, 2010; Cavallaro et al., 2014). More recently, Lan et al. (2025) found that Singaporeans expressed ownership and affinity towards Singlish while simultaneously perceiving it as less standard than other English varieties, suggesting the continuing influence of standard language ideology. These contrasting evaluations are pertinent to workplace communication, where the same language variety may carry different social meanings depending on the context and interlocutors involved, potentially leading to differing interpretations or misunderstanding about its appropriateness. Given the study's focus on employees' attitudes towards Singlish, language ideology is suitable because it enables these attitudes to be understood not simply as positive or negative evaluations, but as reflections of broader beliefs and values concerning appropriate language use in different workplace contexts.

Accordingly, language ideology serves as an interpretive lens in the present study rather than as a set of predetermined categories for analysing the data. The interview data were analysed inductively, allowing patterns and themes concerning employees' attitudes towards Singlish to emerge from participants' accounts. Language ideology was subsequently used to interpret the beliefs, values, and social meanings underlying these emergent themes. In this way, the framework supports the study's examination of employees' attitudes towards workplace Singlish while preserving the inductive nature of the thematic analysis.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

This qualitative study explored five employees' attitudes towards and experiences of Singlish in the Malaysian branch of a multinational company with operations in Malaysia and Singapore. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with five employees based in the company's Malaysian branch. The interviews focused on participants' experiences and attitudes regarding the use of Singlish in workplace communication.

Five employees from different ethnic and professional backgrounds were purposively selected from the same multinational company. Participants were selected based on their professional experience and familiarity with Singlish in workplace communication. All participants had encountered Singlish through various workplace interactions. The number of participants was also influenced by access and scheduling constraints within the professional workplace setting, as employees had limited availability due to their work commitments.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' workplace according to their availability. Notably, the Director and Manager had each completed a five-year secondment at the company's Singapore branch before returning to Malaysia, providing them with substantial exposure to Singlish in both Malaysian and Singaporean workplace contexts.

| Participant        | Ethnicity | First Language | Position         | Years of service |
|--------------------|-----------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Participant 1 (P1) | Chinese   | Mandarin       | Director         | 30               |
| Participant 2 (P2) | Chinese   | Mandarin       | Manager          | 15               |
| Participant 3 (P3) | Chinese   | Mandarin       | Senior Executive | 6                |
| Participant 4 (P4) | Malay     | Bahasa Melayu  | Executive        | 6                |
| Participant 5 (P5) | Indian    | Tamil          | Executive        | 2                |

**Table 1 Participants' details**

### Data Collection

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed by the researchers based on the research objectives and research questions. The interview questions were designed to elicit participants' experiences and attitudes towards Singlish in workplace communication, including its use across different workplace contexts. The semi-structured format provided consistency across interviews while allowing follow-up questions to clarify or further explore participants' responses. Each interview lasted approximately 10–15 minutes and was conducted face-to-face in a casual setting at the workplace. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis.

### Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using an inductive thematic approach. First, all audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Following the transcription process, the transcripts were then read repeatedly to familiarise the researchers with the data. Subsequently, both researchers collaboratively conducted the coding process by reviewing the transcripts together and identifying recurring words, expressions, statements, and patterns relevant to the research questions. Initial codes were generated from these recurring responses including “not professional,” “comfortable,” “depends on the context,” and “acceptable as long as the message

is delivered.” The codes were then compared across participants. Related codes were subsequently organised into categories and grouped into emergent themes. Both researchers discussed the codes and themes together and reached agreement on their interpretation and categorisation. Finally, the themes were reviewed, compared, and refined across participants to identify recurring patterns and variations in their responses.

## FINDINGS

### Employees' attitudes towards the use of Singlish in the workplace

The first research question examined employees' attitudes towards the use of Singlish in the workplace. The analysis revealed a recurring theme in which Singlish was associated with comfortable and approachable communication, especially among familiar interlocutors. Participants generally associated Singlish with informal interactions involving colleagues and other familiar individuals, although some preferred Standard English to maintain professionalism. This was particularly evident in P3's experience of conducting workplace training:

P3: “.....Not the most professional way of speaking but at the same time I view that it can be necessary, for example in our line of work when we do training, sometimes it is important to appear more casual and appear more approachable to our learners for them to feel more comfortable and more relatable to us. While I do see it not the most professional way of speaking, I see it something necessary in our culture.”

The response illustrates a dual perception of Singlish: while it was regarded as less professional than Standard English, it was also perceived as useful for creating a more approachable and comfortable communication environment. Participants' attitudes towards its use were also influenced by their relationship with the interlocutor. They reported being more inclined to use Singlish with peers, close colleagues, small groups, and supervisors who were receptive to informal communication. Thus, Singlish appeared to function as a linguistic resource for signalling familiarity and reducing interpersonal distance.

### The Use of Singlish Across Formal and Informal Workplace Contexts

The second research question examined employees' attitudes towards the use of Singlish in formal workplace settings. Four of the five participants reported encountering Singlish in formal workplace interactions. Two contrasting themes emerged: Singlish was perceived as less professional but acceptable for maintaining rapport, while some employees disapproved of its use in formal settings. These contrasting views indicate that attitudes towards Singlish were influenced by the interlocutor, interpersonal relationship, and communicative situation.

### Maintaining Rapport Despite Perceived Unprofessionalism

Several participants perceived Singlish as less professional than Standard English but nevertheless considered it acceptable when used to maintain rapport and create a more comfortable communication environment. This was evident in participants' accounts of interactions with clients, colleagues, and supervisors with whom familiarity had already been established. P1 explained that Standard English was preferred during initial formal interactions, whereas Singlish could emerge as the relationship became more familiar:

P1: “When it comes to formal meetings at the start it is always good to speak proper English. Like meeting clients or stakeholders for the first time it is best to use formal English. Then however when things become more casual both parties get comfortable, that is when your Singlish will start to come out.”

Similarly, P3 emphasised communicative effectiveness and the importance of evaluating the situation:

P3: “It doesn't matter. If you ask me, in terms of speaking or communication as a whole, if you can get

the message across, it doesn't matter you use broken English or Singlish. My view is it's okay to use but read the room."

These responses indicate that participants did not view the appropriateness of Singlish in absolute terms. Instead, its acceptability appeared to depend on the communicative context and the relationship between speakers. Some participants also reported accommodating their clients' language choices by using Singlish when it was initiated by the clients, particularly to maintain rapport and facilitate comfortable communication. A similar pattern was observed in interactions with supervisors. P3 explained:

P3: "I would say to everyone. Even though bosses I would use it. Probably at the start, I would avoid it. But over time I'm trying to build closer relationships. I will use it. Unless I'm not comfortable with the bosses or the bosses are not comfortable with it, I would avoid it."

This suggests that familiarity may influence participants' willingness to shift from Standard English to Singlish even when communicating across workplace hierarchies. Rather than being determined solely by an interlocutor's professional position, language choice appeared to depend on the established relationship and perceived level of comfort.

### **Disapproval of Singlish in Formal Settings**

Despite the contextual acceptance described above, some participants expressed reservations about the use of Singlish in formal professional settings. In their view, Standard English was more closely associated with professionalism, particularly when communicating with clients. P5 expressed a firm preference against using non-standard varieties in professional settings:

P5: "Seriously I feel like it's a principal kind of thing-you don't use any dialect in a professional setting."

Similarly, P4 distinguished between communication with colleagues and communication with clients:

P4: "Truthfully, of course it is not professional. But it is okay if we are talking to our own colleague. Unless with clients, I think it is better to use professional English."

These responses demonstrate that Singlish was not universally accepted in formal workplace communication. While some participants were more accepting of Singlish depending on the interlocutor and level of familiarity, others maintained a stronger distinction between informal communication with colleagues and professional communication with clients.

The contrasting views highlight a tension between professionalism and interpersonal rapport. Standard English was generally associated with professional formality, whereas Singlish was associated with familiarity, comfort, and interpersonal connection. Participants therefore appeared to negotiate their language preferences according to the demands of each communicative situation rather than consistently using or avoiding Singlish.

### **Common Singlish Features in Workplace Communication**

The third research question examined the common Singlish features recognised by employees in workplace communication. All five participants demonstrated familiarity with Singlish and provided examples from their experiences. Commonly identified features included sentence-final particles such as "lah", "leh", "lor", "meh", and "ah", alongside locally familiar expressions and constructions. Examples provided by the participants are presented in Table 2

| Participant        | Examples of Singlish Features                                                                 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participant 1 (P1) | “Walaoweh”; “Why so kancheong?”                                                               |
| Participant 2 (P2) | “Lah”; “You finished already ah?”; “Where got one?”; “Cannot meh?”; “You wanna eat lunch ah?” |
| Participant 3 (P3) | “Lah”; “Why leh?”                                                                             |
| Participant 4 (P4) | “Can lah”; “Where got lunch?”; “Can you do it meh?”                                           |
| Participant 5 (P5) | “Ya lor”; “Where got one?”; “You don’t know meh?”                                             |

**Table 2 Examples of Singlish features identified by participants**

Beyond identifying specific linguistic features, participants also commented on the communicative functions associated with Singlish. Sentence-final particles were particularly prominent across their examples, including “lah”, “leh”, “lor”, “meh”, and “ah”. One participant also perceived Singlish as a more direct and efficient means of communication in certain workplace situations. This perception was reflected in P4’s response:

P4: “I feel like Standard English contains a long sentence in order to get the point straight. So using Singlish will make the communication faster and get messages delivered faster. Singlish is quite straightforward.”

Importantly, this response does not establish that Singlish is linguistically simpler than Standard English; rather, it reflects the participant’s perception that Singlish enables more concise and efficient communication. Such perceived efficiency may contribute to its use in everyday workplace interactions despite concerns about its appropriateness in more formal professional settings.

The participants’ familiarity with these features also reflects their exposure to Singlish within workplace communication. More importantly, their responses suggest that Singlish was recognised not only through linguistic features but also through communicative functions they associated with its use. In particular, participants linked Singlish with familiarity and rapport while one participant also associated it with communicative efficiency in workplace interactions.

Overall, the findings show that participants’ attitudes towards Singlish were context-dependent rather than uniformly positive or negative. Its perceived appropriateness varied according to factors such as the interlocutor, degree of familiarity, workplace hierarchy, and level of formality. Across these contexts, participants appeared to negotiate between two key considerations: professionalism and interpersonal rapport.

Standard English was generally preferred when professional formality was prioritised, particularly during initial interactions with clients or stakeholders, whereas Singlish became more acceptable as familiarity developed or when its use supported comfortable communication. These findings suggest that Singlish was neither consistently accepted nor rejected in the workplace but was instead viewed as a flexible communicative resource whose appropriateness depended on the social and professional context.

## DISCUSSION

### Singlish, Familiarity and Interpersonal Rapport

The findings indicate that participants' attitudes towards Singlish were associated with its perceived interpersonal functions in workplace communication. Participants associated Singlish with comfort and approachability, particularly when communicating with familiar colleagues and other interlocutors with whom an established relationship existed. These perceptions are comparable to the findings of Leow et al. (2025), who reported positive associations between Singlish and qualities such as approachability and communicative effectiveness. Within the context of the present study, participants' responses suggest that their evaluations of Singlish were influenced by both the relationship between speakers and the communicative situation.

From a language ideology perspective, the participants' responses suggest that Singlish was associated with social meanings beyond its linguistic form. Their associations of Singlish with comfort, familiarity, and interpersonal connection can be understood in relation to broader social meanings attached to the variety. Previous studies have similarly associated Singlish with solidarity, cultural belonging, and local identity (Alsagoff, 2007, 2010; Cavallaro et al., 2014). Among the participants in the present study, these meanings were reflected in greater acceptance of Singlish when familiarity and interpersonal connection were emphasised.

### Formality, Professionalism and Workplace Relationships

The participants also expressed differing attitudes towards Singlish in formal workplace contexts. Some participants considered its use acceptable when it helped maintain rapport, including in interactions with clients and supervisors after familiarity had been established. Others expressed stronger reservations and reported preferring Standard English in situations where they considered professionalism important, particularly in client-facing interactions. These differing perceptions are consistent with the findings of Leow et al. (2025), who reported that positive associations with Singlish, such as approachability and communicative effectiveness, coexisted with concerns about its appropriateness in more formal contexts.

Familiarity also appeared to influence how some participants perceived Singlish across workplace hierarchies. Their accounts suggest that an interlocutor's professional position was not the only consideration in their evaluation of Singlish, as some participants reported greater acceptance of its use with supervisors once a more comfortable relationship had developed. This can be compared with Lan et al. (2025), who found that Singlish was not entirely restricted to informal relationships, with some participants in their study reporting its use with managers and senior colleagues. Within the present study, the participants' accounts therefore suggest that the perceived appropriateness of Singlish was influenced by a combination of workplace hierarchy, formality, and interpersonal familiarity.

These contrasting evaluations can be interpreted through language ideology. Among the participants, Standard English was generally associated with professionalism and formal workplace communication, whereas Singlish was more closely associated with familiarity, comfort, and interpersonal rapport. These associations reflect Irvine and Gal's (2000) conceptualisation of language ideology, in which language varieties can become associated with broader social meanings concerning the people, activities, and contexts with which they are linked. From this perspective, the participants' attitudes towards Singlish reflected the different meanings they associated with its use across workplace contexts.

### Recognised Singlish Features and Communicative Functions

The participants recognised a range of features that they associated with Singlish, particularly sentence-final particles such as lah, leh, lor, meh, and ah. The sentence-final particles identified by the participants are also

commonly described as features of Singlish in previous research (Ningsih & Rahman, 2023). Importantly, however, the present study did not seek to establish whether these individual features belonged exclusively to Singlish. Rather, the findings represent features that the participants themselves recognised or reported as Singlish in their workplace experiences.

The participants' responses also indicate that their perceptions of Singlish extended beyond the recognition of particular linguistic features. Some associated its use with familiarity and rapport, while one participant perceived Singlish as a more direct and efficient way of communicating in certain workplace situations. This perception should not be interpreted as evidence that Singlish is inherently simpler or more efficient than Standard English. Instead, it reflects the communicative value that the participant associated with the variety based on their own workplace experience. This distinction is important because the present study examined participants' attitudes and perceptions rather than objectively measuring the communicative efficiency of Singlish.

From a language ideology perspective, the participants' responses show that the features they recognised as Singlish were not evaluated solely as linguistic forms but were also associated with particular communicative functions. These evaluations reflect the participants' perceptions within the specific workplace context examined in this study.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the attitudes of five professional employees towards the use of Singlish in the Malaysian branch of a multinational company. The findings indicate that participants' attitudes towards Singlish were context-dependent, with its perceived appropriateness influenced by the interlocutor, degree of familiarity, and level of formality. While Standard English was generally associated with professionalism, Singlish was valued for creating comfort and maintaining rapport, while one participant also perceived it as a more direct and efficient means of communication. Its use in formal settings, however, was less consistently accepted, particularly in client-facing interactions, highlighting a tension between interpersonal rapport and expectations of professional communication.

The study contributes to the understanding of Singlish beyond its primary Singaporean context by providing insights into how it was perceived by the five participants within a professional workplace in Malaysia. Viewed through the lens of language ideology, the findings show how participants associated Singlish and Standard English with different social meanings, especially in relation to familiarity, interpersonal rapport, and professionalism. Overall, the study highlights the context-dependent nature of participants' attitudes towards Singlish in workplace communication.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is subject to several limitations. The study involved a small sample of five participants from a single multinational company and the interviews were conducted within a relatively short duration of 10 to 15 minutes. It is acknowledged that a larger and more diverse sample, together with longer interviews, could have provided a wider range of perspectives and richer accounts of employees' attitudes towards Singlish.

Future studies could therefore involve participants from multiple multinational companies and different hierarchical levels, as well as conduct longer interviews to obtain more in-depth data. Furthermore, future research could also incorporate observational data to examine how Singlish is used in actual workplace interactions, complementing employees' self-reported attitudes and experiences.

Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the understanding of Singlish beyond its primary Singaporean context by examining the perspectives of five professional employees in a Malaysian multinational

workplace. The findings highlight the context-dependent nature of these attitudes, where Singlish may be valued for familiarity, interpersonal connection and communicative ease, while more standard forms of English may be preferred in formal professional settings. The study therefore provided a basis for further research on attitudes towards localised varieties of English in multilingual professional workplaces.

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