

Conference report Canaan Lan

I was thrilled to receive Le Comité International Permanent des Linguistes (CIPL) travel grant to attend the 8th New Ways of Analysing Variation – Asia Pacific (NWAV-AP8) 2025, held in Singapore from 4th to 7th August. NWAV-AP8 is a biennial gathering that brings together researchers in sociolinguistics and sociophonetics from around the world. Therefore, I am particularly grateful for the CIPL's financial support, which made my participation and presentation at this prestigious event possible.

This year's NWAV-AP8 conference celebrated the linguistic diversity and richness of sociolinguistic research under the theme "Asia Pacific: Always Variable, Always Changing". I was particularly interested in work on speech acoustics, the phonetics of sound change, sociophonetic variation, and variationist sociolinguistics. One talk that made a strong impression on me was "A phonetic analysis of the changing New Zealand English vowel space in Auckland". New Zealand English (NZE) is well-known for its distinct vowel pronunciations, including the raising of DRESS and TRAP vowels. The study examined apparent-time sound changes in NZE by comparing younger (under 25) and older speakers (over 40) from Auckland and Nelson. By analysing both monophthongs and diphthongs using corpus data, the results revealed surprising reversals of previous changes such as the lowering of DRESS and TRAP among younger speakers, especially those from Auckland. One explanation was linked to Auckland's highly multicultural and multilingual population. Rather than migrants adopting local accents to sound more "local", local speakers might be adapting their speech to facilitate understanding with the immigrants. These findings challenged my expectations and provided valuable insights not only to the field of sound variation and change but also studies of language attitudes and identity in multicultural societies.

"Variation in English stop voicing contrast in Singaporean Chinese and Malay bilingual Preschoolers" was another interesting and engaging talk that expanded my horizons. Very few studies have examined bilingual children's stop voicing production in Singapore, and even less is known about the role of language dominance in a multilingual and multicultural context. This study compared nine preschoolers (three English-dominant Chinese, three English-dominant Malays and three Malay-dominant Malays), measuring several variables including voice onset time (VOT), f₀, intensity, and centre of gravity (COG). Contrary to my expectation, the results revealed few significant contrasts between Chinese and Malay groups, with Chinese (English-dominant) children only showing a trend of using greater f₀ contrasts, while Malay-dominant children exhibited a trend towards intensity contrasts. While the small sample size may have been a factor, the findings seem to suggest a more complex interplay of acoustic, social, and other influences (e.g. closure duration) beyond language dominance.

I also had the privilege of presenting my paper titled "Investigating /ɔ:/ and /ɒ/ variation in Singapore English". This study investigated the acoustic properties of, and the extent of overlap between, the /ɔ:/ and /ɒ/ using both male and female Chinese Singaporeans born 1988-2004 across speech styles. Contrary to previous findings, speech style did not influence vowel quality significantly. However, a significant distinction between the vowels emerged when the postvocalic context was taken into account, with a further significant interaction between vowels and gender. Dynamic analyses revealed additional differences in vowel

trajectories, highlighting the importance of using dynamic measures in phonetic investigations. These findings also underscore the need to include male data in studies of sound variation and change and to account for postvocalic contexts when examining low back vowel overlap in SgE. The Q&A session following my talk provided constructive feedback and opened opportunities for building connections with international colleagues!

As I reflect on this exceptional experience, I am deeply grateful to the CIPL for their generous support. This travel award enabled me to contribute to ongoing discussions on sound variation and change in multilingual contexts and postcolonial Englishes. The invaluable feedback and intellectual exchanges at NWAV-AP8 have expanded my knowledge of sociolinguistics and speech science, and will directly inform and enrich my research.