

Singapore Voices: A sound installation of languages

Intangible heritage has often been described as the driving force of cultural diversity but the fragility of intangible heritage has also become one of the priorities of international concern. Currently, there is an increased awareness of the crucial role language plays in binding such intangible heritage together. Typically, intangible heritage dies with the passing of a language. Despite the critical role played by language in conserving and preserving our heritage, documenting it and displaying it in a form that is accessible and engaging still remains a challenge for researchers and museum curators.

In response to this challenge, an interdisciplinary team from Nanyang Technological University (NTU) comprising linguists, a sound artist and a museum curator put together an artistic installation of endangered varieties in Singapore called “Singapore Voices”(see Figure 1.). “Singapore Voices” is an artistic installation based on old-time stories told through eight vernacular forms of speech that we still hear in Singapore today. We used a design that incorporates sight, sound and touch. The installation aims to create for each visitor a unique experience constructed out of their own personal interaction with the exhibits. Visitors will be able to (literally) stay in touch with the older generation through listening to their stories, and to experience and appreciate at first hand Singapore’s rich cultural heritage.

As an interdisciplinary project it draws on a variety of expertise including sound art, photography, curatorship and linguistics. In this paper, we would like to present this installation as an example of how different academic disciplines can work fruitfully and meaningfully together. The presentation will also address some of the challenges facing the documentation and display of intangible heritage and suggest ways in which museums can work together with concerned researchers to resolve some of these issues.



Figure 1: Singapore Voices: The Hokkien and Hakka Installations (Photograph taken by Martin Reiser, IMI)

Project in collaboration with
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