



# TGIF: The NTU Linguist Chatroom

**Join us! Friday, 20 January 2017, 3.30pm  
@ HSS Conference Room (HSS-05-57)**

## **Accounts of self-differentiation by academically elite students in Singapore**

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This study draws from an ethnography of a group of academically elite students (a mix of Singaporeans and immigrants) who attended a top-ranked secondary school in Singapore. I investigate how informants engaged in self-differentiation (ie how they talked about their position in relation to others) when describing their experience in local schools. My informants' accounts demonstrate a consistent and relational way in which they positioned themselves (and others) along a continuum of 'Singaporean-ness', often engaging in anti-immigrant talk, particularly against students from China (even if they are from China themselves). In these descriptions of cultural distinction, the use and acceptability of certain styles of English and Singlish is raised by informants as a key feature. In Singapore's context, these patterns of self-differentiation with links to use and style of Singlish and English might be explained if they are seen in the light of wider discourses: (i) immigrants (where immigration is opposed by segments of the public); (ii) the status of English and Mandarin in academically elite contexts in Singapore; and (iii) how styles of English are linked to notions of social class. These findings potentially trouble the state's assumptions about race and racial criterion in immigration policy, which involves recruiting talented foreign students from primarily China.

### **Speaker**



**Luke Lu** is a PhD candidate at The Centre for Language, Discourse and Communication, King's College London. In a previous incarnation, he taught General Paper at a local top-ranked secondary school for four years. His research interests are in Linguistic Ethnography and Interactional Sociolinguistics, often to do with issues such as migration, education, language rights and ethnicity. His PhD research concerns a multi-scalar view of understanding academically elite students in Singapore. In this regard, he has recently published a paper about the conditioned ways in which these academically elite students talked of their aspirations and trajectories.

