



## **English: Personal Experiences**

*Colin Goh*

### **Colin Goh:**

I grew up in a largely English speaking household. My father was a doctor, my mother was an English teacher, a primary school English teacher. So I was exposed to English pretty early on but I also had a Chinese nanny so I grew up speaking Hokkien a lot.

Almost everything in Singapore is taught in English, in the English, in the English medium schools. When I was growing up you were either English medium school or the Chinese medium school and there were very few Chinese medium schools. So everything was taught in English except Chinese or you know the mother tongues as they call them. So if you were Malay you studied Malay. If you were Indian you studied Tamil, etc etc. So I had to study Mandarin even though Mandarin was not my dialect. At home – I would go home. I'd speak a smattering of English, a little bit of Malay because my parents are what I call Peranakans and they are Straits born Chinese which means there has been a commingling at some point with Malays. Speak a bit of Malay and mostly Hokkien.

My parents cannot speak Mandarin at all. And with my friends we would break into Singlish – whatever came naturally. There was a lot of code switching simply because in school you try to speak a little more formally to the teacher so you use more grammatical forms then you know as soon as the bell rang you would be off with our friends and speaking whatever – whatever we would like.

English was important for me insofar as I think I speak and write it fairly decently and my first career was as a lawyer so that definitely helped to be able to understand, you know, complicated sentence structures. But I've since left the law and am now a film maker and I find myself making films mostly in Chinese or various vernacular languages you know and so I don't think it's played... I have a much more naturalistic approach I guess or attitude towards language. I am more interested in how people feel how people express themselves in their own unique ways rather than you know bench marking them against how far they're deviating from a certain norm. Maybe I'd feel differently if I'd remained a lawyer.