Workshop 6

Synchronic transfers in Colloquial Singapore English: Case studies based on text message data

Date: 2017.08.011 (Friday) 13:00-16:00

Organizers: Jacob R. Leimgruber, Leslie Lee, Mie Hiramoto

1. Leslie Lee, Taohai Lin, Ten Tingkai : *Already, le, and liao:distributions and functions in Colloquial Singapore English text messages*.

2. Mie Hiramoto, Jun Jie Lim : *Sentence-final adverbs in a corpus of Colloquial Singapore English text message data*.

3. Jakob R. E. Leimgruber, Wei Xing Change, Magdalene Ong Wenli : *Colloquial Singapore English one and de in a corpus of WhatsApp text messages*.

4. Mie Hiramoto, Tong King Lee, Xue Ming Jessica CHOO : *The sentence-final particle sia in a corpus of Colloquial Singapore English text message data*.

5. Jeff Siegel : *(Discussant)*

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Abstract:

This sociolinguistic workshop aims to investigate how specific grammatical features are exhibited in Colloquial Singapore English (CSE) in the course of social media communication, namely, WhatsApp text messaging. McWhoter (2013) calls text message conversations 'finger speech' and discusses highly colloquial features in the texting language. Similarly, Thurlow (2003) explains text messaging data to be extremely rich resources for linguistic analysis. For this workshop, the data were collected by students at a university in Singapore between 2014 and 2016. The studies presented in this workshop are based on a 1.2 million-word sub-corpus of the data collected.

In the field of language contact and linguistic change, scholars generally discuss types of language/linguistic varieties that are considered non-traditional. From this viewpoint, CSE, also known as Singlish, is a very good example of non-standard English dialect that may also be considered an English-based creole. For CSE, the substrate languages are said to be Hokkien, Cantonese, Bazar Malay, etc. while the lexifier language is English. Scholars tend to explain CSE-specific linguistic phenomena to be a result of the influence of so-called substrate languages.

While it is true that many noticeable features of CSE must have come from the known substrate languages over the course of its historical development (e.g., during or after the British colonial period), there is a possibility that CSE is still undergoing changes in terms of some linguistic features. For example, CSE uses sentence-final one as in 'Today so hot one' as a pragmatic particle, said to add emphasis in a sentence (Bao 2009). From a sociohistorical viewpoint, it may be explained as a transfer from its equivalent expression in Cantonese ge or Hokkien ê. At the same time, from a synchronic point of view, this could also be a result of Mandarin de.

When discussing the substrate languages of CSE, scholars generally exclude Mandarin as its influence on CSE began much later than other Sinitic languages (e.g., Hokkien or Cantonese). However, a combination of policy measures, including the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' (since 1979) and a bilingual education system with

Mandarin as the designated 'Mother Tongue' for Chinese pupils, today's Chinese Singaporeans are becoming more fluent in Mandarin than in their heritage languages. Provided that students gather social media and text messaging data from speakers who are knowledgeable of Mandarin and English, the use of one could actually be motivated by Mandarin.

Theoretically, the papers in this workshop challenge the traditional idea of substrate influences (e.g., Siegel 1999) as well as of the founder principle (e.g., Mufwene 2001) that linguistic features of creoles are influenced by those languages that had early contact with the lexifier. We specifically highlight linguistic features that appear to be 'synchronic transfers' from more recent linguistic influences in CSE in this panel. Methodologically, we will be demonstrating linguistic analysis based on a new type of data that can be useful for other scholars who work in contact

linguistics as well as dialectology.

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Already, *le*, and *liao*:
distributions and functions in Colloquial Singapore English text messages

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There is a rich literature noting the use of *already* as an aspectual marker in Colloquial Singapore English (CSE), and attributing this novel usage to transfer from the aspectual markers of Sinitic languages spoken in Singapore (*le* in Mandarin and *liao* in Southern Min), e.g. Platt & Weber (1980); Ho & Platt (1993); Bao (1995, 2005); *inter alia*. Besides the aspectual use of *already*, it has also been shown that *already* occurs far more frequently sentence-finally in CSE than it does in 'inner circle' varieties of English, e.g. Hiramoto (2015). Using mixed-effects logistic regression models, we examine the distributions and functions of *already* (n=3619) vis-à-vis *le* (n=1238) and *liao* (n=1339) in a text message corpus of CSE. We find that, consistent with their distributions in the Sinitic languages (Soh & Gao 2007, 2008), situation type is a significant predictor of the aspectual contribution of *le* and *liao* in CSE: *le/liao* tend to signal perfective aspect in telic situation types, but inchoative aspect in atelic situation types [OR_{le}=87.9, 95%CI_{le}:56.67-136.35, *p*<0.001; OR_{liao}=29.26, 95%CI_{liao}:21.47-39.89, *p*<0.001]. As would be expected if the aspectual use of *already* was due to transfer from *le/liao*, the same distributions hold for *already* [OR=38.55, 95%CI:31.78-46.76, *p*<0.001]. Interestingly, the position of *already* relative to the predicate is also a significant predictor of its aspectual contribution: there is a greater tendency for *already* to signal inchoative aspect when it appears after the predicate [OR=1.52, 95%CI:1.15-1.99, *p*=0.00286]. We discuss our findings in light of a question that has not been raised in the previous literature on *already*: given that there are two variants of *le/liao* in the Sinitic languages, is the aspectual use of *already* in CSE an instance of transfer from verbal *le/liao* or sentential *le/liao*?

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Sentence-final adverbs in a corpus of Colloquial Singapore English text message data

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The tendency for some adverbs to take place at clause/sentence-final position in Asian Englishes has been studied (e.g., Bao & Hong 2006, Cheong 2016, Hiramoto 2015, Parviainen 2012). While Parviainen (2012) explains this phenomenon in English spoken in Singapore and Hong Kong as a diffusion from Indian English, Hiramoto (2015) suggests it to be a result of substrate transfer from languages in these regions, particularly pointing out the heavy influence from Chinese languages including Cantonese, Hokkien, and Mandarin.

This paper follows up on Hiramoto's (2015) study, which posits that the sentence-final tendency for adverbs, *already*, *also*, and *only* are motivated by substrate influence of local languages. Hiramoto's study was based on the spoken language corpus of the ICE-Singapore data (ICE-SG) that were compiled in 1992 (Nelson 2002). The current study investigates the newer WhatsApp corpus data (WhatsApp-corpus) of Singaporean college students collected between 2014 and 2015. In this presentation, we report the findings in changes to Colloquial Singapore English (CSE) data that were taken some twenty years apart. Comparing the results of ICE-SG and WhatsApp-corpus, the clause/sentence-final tendency of *already*, *also*, and *only* appears to be further stabilizing in CSE as seen in the following rates of the clause/sentence-final occurrences of the adverbs between the two corpus data—*already* (68.4% vs. 79.2%), *also* (44.8% vs. 44.1%), and *only* (13.1% vs. 25.0%).

Among other things, the twenty years gap in the corpus data entails a difference in Chinese Singaporeans' knowledge of Mandarin as students in the WhatsApp-corpus, along with their parents, have largely shifted their heritage language to Mandarin from southern Chinese varieties such as Hokkien and Cantonese. Speak Mandarin Campaign was launched by the government in 1979 with a slogan of 'Speak More Mandarin, Speak Less Dialects' (dialects refer to Hokkien, Cantonese, etc.), targeting speakers of southern Chinese varieties to speak Mandarin.

We argue that, while the initial substrate influence to motivate the sentence-finality of the adverbs may have started from Cantonese or Hokkien during an earlier CSE formation period (before the Speak Mandarin Campaign), the stabilisation of this feature seen today is actually due to Mandarin influence. Looking at this contact-induced linguistic feature in both diachronic and synchronic linguistic ecology in Singapore, it is clear that the heritage Chinese languages have shifted to Mandarin especially for younger Singaporeans. Thus, we conclude that the continuation of the English-Chinese (from southern Chinese varieties to Mandarin) bilingualism in Singapore has reinforced the use of sentence-final adverbs in today's CSE.

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Colloquial Singapore English *one* and *de* in a corpus of WhatsApp text messages

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The particle *one* in Colloquial Singapore English (CSE) has attracted a certain amount of scholarly interest; its many uses in CSE include ones not found in standard varieties and commonly assumed to be derived from a particle in the Chinese substrate, *de* in Mandarin (Gupta 1992a: 328, Bao 2009: 341, Wong 2014: 181, Teo 2014). The functions of CSE *one* are described by Teo (2014) as threefold (in addition to the obvious meaning of the numeral '1'): (i) pronominal, (ii) nominaliser, and (iii) contrastive focus marker, hereafter 'particle'. These are shown illustrated below:

(i)   Do you think she prefers classic or fashionable one?? [pronominal]
(ii)   I buy from Thailand one. [nominaliser] (from Teo 2014: 848, Bao 2009: 340)
(iii)   She can study one. [particle] (from Teo 2014: 849, Gupta 1992b: 332)

Much more recently, the existence of *de* in otherwise English-dominant CSE has drawn some limited attention (Deuber et al forthcoming, but see the mention in Platt 1987: 395). The origin of CSE *one* being postulated to be in Mandarin *de*, the relexification proposed by Bao (2009) would suggest that the two (*one/de*) ought to be interchangeable in a discourse context in which code-switching is likely anyhow. However, Teo (2014) points to differences in the two, with Mandarin *de* fulfilling a 'nominal modification' role that CSE *one* does not.

In the WhatsApp text messages corpus we use for this paper, instances of *one* (n = 4,034) and *de* (n = 312) are examined. Our findings suggest that pronominal *one* and nominaliser *de* are interchangeable in instances when an adjective precedes the *one* and *de* respectively, as shown in (1) and (2).

(1) a.   Do you think she prefers classic or fashionable one?? [A3F@ DTF_CF1]
    b   Do you think she prefers classic or fashionable de??
(2) a.   Difference compare to normal de for AC is only $15 [U5M@ DTF_CM4]
    b.   Difference compare to normal one for AC is only $15

In contrast, pronominal *one* and nominaliser *de* are not interchangeable in the case of formulaic expressions (3) and after determiners (4):

(3) a.   Nice one @SMT/F/C/21 [D27F@ DTF_CF4]
    b   *Nice de @SMT/F/C/21
(4) a.   I heard melb is the one w the super erratic weather :([VNT@ ORD_CF23]
    b.   *I heard melb is the de w the super erratic weather :(

Analysing these and other constraints on the interchangeability of *one* and *de*, we attempt to tease apart their meanings and shed a new light on their respective syntactic and pragmatic meanings.

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The sentence-final particle *sia*
in a corpus of Colloquial Singapore English text message data

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In this talk we investigate the newly emerging sentence-final particle, *sia*, in Colloquial Singapore English (CSE). One of the salient features of CSE is its rich use of sentence-final particles (SFPs). While these particles do not carry grammatical meaning, they serve to add pragmatic nuances to base utterances. By virtue of their colloquial nature, the particles build solidarity among speakers; moreover, they also work as identity markers for CSE speakers.

There has been extensive work on different SFPs such as *lah*, *leh*, *lor*, *hor*, *bah*. (e.g., Lee 2007; Leimbgruber 2016; Lim 2007; Wee 2002), but a relatively new addition to CSE is still underexplored in research: *sia*. The origin of SFP *sia* is said to be the colloquial Malay phrase *sial* (Khoo, 2012), which is a vulgar term equivalent to common English swear words. In Malay, it can be used as an emphatic marker but is considered extremely rude. This expression has been disseminated into CSE as a SFP relatively recently, and our data shows that it has gained massive popularity among youth today. Analysis of the text messages corpus data of Singaporean college students collected between 2014 and 2015, finds casual use of *sia* as a SFP to be nearly ubiquitous among Chinese and Indian Singaporeans, though noticeably less common among Malay Singaporeans, especially female.

This presentation discusses how the *sia* particle (1) is becoming generally more prevalent in CSE among young speakers, and (2) seems to have shifted its illocutionary force from being 'strong' to 'weak' over the last five to six years. These observations indicate that, despite its long association with Malay and other substrate languages, CSE is a dynamic repertoire that continually evolves through young Singaporeans' moment-by-moment engagement with their language, and the continued influence of these substrates suggest the fluidity of the borders of languages and dialects in this multilingual community.

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