

At the Edge of Contact
Insights into Universality from Singlish

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ABSTRACT

A characteristic feature of Singlish, a contact variety spoken in Singapore, is the apparent optionality of inflectional morphology, which has been analysed in the literature as involving phonological free variation. I present novel evidence to demonstrate that the absence of inflectional morphology correlates to syntactic and semantic reflexes that are not predicted if the alternation holds at the level of phonology.

I demonstrate that each of these reflexes, such as the bleeding of inverse scope and certain locality effects, has been independently noted to hold of topicalisation and focalisation constructions in English, and propose a structural analysis of clauses lacking overt inflectional morphology in Singlish, where the ostensible subjects of such clauses are realised in a (low) left peripheral position which exhibits mixed A and \bar{A} properties.

I then demonstrate that these clauses are also (i) temporally ambiguous, and (ii) sensitive to an eventive/stative asymmetry, with eventive predicates being disallowed in bare inflection-less clauses. I argue that these facts are congruent with an

account in which tense is not syntactically projected, and discuss the implications of such an account for the Extended Projection Principle (EPP), namely that the locus of the EPP must be contextually determined (Bošković 2023), and cannot be universally satisfied in TP.

I also show that the relative ordering of elements within the Singlish nominal is rigid, patterning like English, and unlike Chinese, which exhibits a much higher degree of word order freedom within the nominal domain, and that Singlish has inherited the article system of English.

I argue that this provides independent evidence for the NP/DP hypothesis, which attributes properties such as the freedom of word order within the nominal phrase to the presence/absence of DP, and that the contrast between Singlish and Chinese is counterevidence against the universal projection of DP.

I also present novel data pertaining to two Singlish prenominal relativisation strategies, and argue that they result from the Chinese-inherited structure of Singlish interacting with English-inherited lexicon.

In sum, I show that the data presented characterises Singlish as a language variety that is quite transparent in its syntax-morphology mapping.

At the Edge of Contact: Insights into Universality from Singlish

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B.A., National University of Singapore, 2018

M.A., University of Connecticut, 2023

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Connecticut

2023

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2023

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Can is can, cannot is cannot, but sometimes cannot oso must can."

- Singlish Proverb

It is hard to believe that it has already been more than five years since I first set foot in the corridors of Oak Hall in March of 2018, in the immediate aftermath of a blizzard which completely upended my original travel plans and led to me wandering the streets of Manhattan overnight. I recall arriving dazed and overwhelmed, and throughout my time here, this never really changed.

That I was able to get through this graduate program is therefore nothing short of a minor miracle, and one that can be directly attributed to the guidance that the members of my dissertation committee, Željko, Magda, and Vicki have unfailingly provided throughout my time here – my sincerest gratitude goes to each of them.

It is difficult to express in words how much I owe to Željko, who has believed in me even when I didn't necessarily believe in myself. I am beyond thankful for all the assistance and mentorship both in terms of syntactic theory, as well as other personal and professional matters, which I have received from Željko over the years, and I can only aspire to one day be as great of a mentor to others as Željko has been to me. His advice has made the impossible possible for me.

Getting to know and work with Magda has been a highlight of my time at UConn, and I have always looked forward to our conversations, both in the classroom and in the hallway. Thanks to Magda, my proficiency in semantics has increased manifold since I first arrived (though there's definitely still a long way to go). More telling, however, is the fact that my interest in semantics remains as keen as ever.

I will always have fond memories of working with Vicki, of sitting in for Field Methods classes as we puzzled over the identification of high and low tones together, but also of the numerous social events which Vicki has hosted at her place (not least being the celebration of my defence). Thanks, Vicki – I am a better syntactician and person for having met you.

Thanks, of course, also goes to the members of my general committees, Memo and Mamoru for GP1 and Jon G. and Stefan for GP2. I have benefited greatly from the insights which you have shared on my research projects.

Of course, the same can be said of all of the other excellent UConn faculty and instructors (both past and present) with whom I have had the privilege of interacting in my time here: Diane, Andrea, William, Adrian, Marie, Harry, Jon Sprouse, Norbert, Svitlana, Asia, Nick, and Omar. I would also like to thank our department's program coordinator Tamara for all of the invaluable assistance which she has provided over the course of my time at UConn.

This journey has proven difficult, but it would have been impossible without the following people: Emma (and her husband, Alex), Jayeon, Renato, and Pasha, who were particularly supportive during the pre-vaccine era of the pandemic. A special shout out also goes to my housemates at Prospect: Giulio, Nic, and Nymeria.

To the following people, hanging out with you all, whether on the bus, at the bar, at the climbing gym, or at our respective places has been indispensable in keeping me grounded over the course of the past five and half years: Yoshiki, Yusuke, Robin, Pravaal, Claudia, Ivana, Zixi, Shangyan, Muiyi, Teru, Shuyan, Shengyun (and her mother), Wesley, and Grace.

And not forgetting those who were right there with me from the beginning:

Yuya, Kangzheng, Sarah, Xuetong – we went through some wild times together, and I will always cherish those memories. Though we have had our ups and downs, I am proud to have been a part of the same cohort as you guys.

Thanks also go to the other students whom I have met at UConn, including those who were walking the hallways of Oak Hall before me: Marcin, Yuta Sakamoto, Yuta Tatsumi, Hiroaki, Sabine, Paula, Hiromune (and Miu and Koreaki), Pietro, Gabriel, Christos, Roberto, Karina, Ryosuke, Vanessa, Chantale, Lily, Brendan, Laura – I found a home in this department, and a home is only as welcoming as the people in it. I can only hope that I have been as welcoming to the other students who arrived after me, but who have similarly been an unforgettable part of the UConn department: Eva, Maggie, Ari, Penelope, Beccy, Tarcisio, Brittany, Marley, James, Qiushi, Mingjiang, Walter, Maryam, Sharmin, Thanos, Pepper, Aaron, and Hanyu.

Of course, the support which I received came not only from the people at UConn, but also from others halfway around the world. Thanks to my parents, siblings, and my grandmother, as well as the rest of my family back home in Singapore – your care and concern means more than I can express.

Thanks also to my friends from Singapore, whom I have at times bugged for judgments: Keely, JJ, Helen, Keef, Wanya, Cheryl, Hannah, Jim, Elisa, Jason, Mich, Jiahan, Selene, Yony, Suf, Shiyong, and Yitian.

Finally, I would also like to acknowledge my professors from the National University of Singapore for their role in setting me down this path: Yosuke, mitcho, and Mie – thank you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Preliminaries

The starting point for the enterprise of generative grammar is that there is a Universal Grammar (UG) that underlies each and every natural language which is found around the world. This postulate, that UG exists, is what then allows for the empirical findings in a particular language to be extended to our understanding of other languages, since, by virtue of UG, all languages share the same foundations.

At the same time, however, UG must also allow for variation across languages, since it is an empirical fact that we do indeed find variation across all sorts of domains when we look at the language varieties that exist around the world. That not all languages are the same is indisputable, and the postulation of UG does not erase this fact.

One of the key tasks that falls to the generative syntactician, then, is to sort what is universal from what is not. That is, the generative syntactician is concerned

with the determination of whether specific structures and properties are variant or invariant, seeing as this endeavour would allow for us to glean further insight into the inner workings of the postulated UG system, and thereby deepen our collective understanding of how language operates.

This line of inquiry was perhaps most prominent within the framework of Principles and Parameters (P&P), which characterised the field in the government and binding (GB) era of generativism, and though we have since entered the Minimalist era, many of the same research questions which defined the P&P framework remain central to our shared collective endeavour of trying to model UG.

Linguistic universals (or, to use P&P parlance, principles) are so named by virtue of their universal reflection across all languages; given this, to claim that any particular structure or property is a linguistic universal is tantamount to making the prediction that said structure or property will be found in all languages of the world. One particular area which has been associated with various claims of universality is the structure of the clause, though the purported universality which is to be found within this domain has taken many different guises.

The first of these claims which I will be attempting to address in this dissertation concerns the cross-linguistic prominence of the argument which we colloquially refer to as the subject, though the very notion of a subject is one that has no theoretical status within modern generativism (see, e.g. McCloskey 1997 for the difficulty of even defining subjecthood within the generative framework). Still, the (possibly) universal privileged status of the “subject” argument has long been observed, and was formalised by Chomsky (1982) in the form of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP). Indeed, accounting for the EPP effect remains a core issue for the enterprise

of generative syntax to date, and this dissertation seeks to add to the body of work seeking to demystify the EPP.

Another related claim of universality centers on the TP projection in particular, with the suggestion being that TP is universally projected, at least in the basic declarative clause. This notion has its roots in the use of the label I(NFL)P for the maximal projection of the basic declarative clause during the GB era, prior to the splitting of INFL advocated by Pollock (1989), though its present formulation can be traced to the advent of Minimalism, when Chomsky (1995) proposed that some elements of the then-newly split INFL, in the form of Agr_SP and TP, should be collapsed once more.

This was motivated by the fact that Agr_S did not meet the proposed precondition that for an element to be represented as a distinct element within the syntax, it had to bear interpretable features (Chomsky 1995; p. 321). Since the function of Agr_S was purely formal, i.e. its proposed existence was entirely to satisfy theory-internal considerations, Chomsky instead suggested that the functions of Agr_S should be reconceptualised as features which are situated on a functional head that bears interpretable features, namely T. The net effect of this is that we have a TP head which regulates both temporal reference and subject-agreement; at the appropriate level of abstraction, this marks a (partial) return to the unsplit-INFL picture of the basic clause. On top of its functions as the locus for temporal information, as well as the locus for subject-agreement, TP was also hypothesised to be the locus for the application of the EPP effect; the proposed universal projection of TP therefore also had the additional theoretical upside of being directly responsible for the (possibly) universal application of the EPP.

As with any universal claim, the verification of the claims of universality with respect to basic clausal structure can be achieved by checking whether there are any language varieties with properties that are incompatible with the proposed universal clausal structure. To this end, various authors have argued that there are in fact a number of languages which fit the mould as counterexamples to the universality of TP; some examples include Yucatec Maya (Bohnenmeyer 2002; 2009), Kalaallisut (Bittner 2005; 2008), various Slavic languages (see, e.g., Todorovic 2016), Turkish (Zanon 2014), Korean (Kang 2014) (see also Bošković 2012 and Todorovic 2016 for more examples of such languages). Similar claims of syntactic tenselessness have also been levied at (Mandarin) Chinese, leading to the ongoing debate concerning the syntactic status of T in Sinitic languages more generally (see Huang 1982, Li 1985, Tang 1990, Lin 2005, Smith and Erbaugh 2005, Sybesma 2007, Lin 2010; a.o.). Despite the reported counter-evidence, however, the universality of T is still widely assumed in contemporary theory.

A similar pattern can be seen surrounding claims concerning universality which have been made in the nominal domain, particularly with respect to the universal projection of D. This parallelism is perhaps unsurprising when we consider that Abney's (1987) suggestion that D is probably universally projected (p. 54) was made on the back of a suggested cross-domain parallelism between D and INFL. While the universal projection of D in nominals has also seen pushback with respect to languages which do not have overt articles (see, e.g. Fukui 1988, Corver 1992, Zlatić 1997, Chierchia 1998, Cheng and Sybesma 1999, Lyons 1999, Willim 2000, Baker 2003, Bošković 2005; 2008; 2012, Despić 2011, Zanon 2015, a.o.), the assumption that all languages, even languages lacking overt articles, universally have

a DP projection (whether overtly or covertly) within the nominal domain remains commonplace.

In this dissertation, I probe the universality of the EPP, as well as the syntactic categories of T and D respectively, by considering the insights which we may obtain from a detailed study of a particular language variety, in the form of the contact variety of Singlish. The status of Agr_S will also be examined.

1.2 The object language: Singlish

Singlish, also referred to as Colloquial Singaporean English (CSE) or Singapore Colloquial English (SCE), is a contact variety spoken in Singapore, and has been variably characterised as either the basilectal and/or mesolectal segment(s) of the speech continuum of a pidgin (DeCamp 1971, Platt 1975, Tay 1979, Platt and Weber 1980), a creoloid (Platt 1975), an extended pidgin (Arends et al. 1994), or the low colloquial variety that stands in diglossic opposition to Standard English (Gupta 1989). The exact typological status of Singlish remains indeterminate, but despite this lack of consensus on the matter, there are a few indisputable facts which pertain to the formal properties of Singlish.

The first of these facts concerns the composition of the languages which together comprise the contact ecology of Singlish, and the relative strength of their influence on the development of Singlish: of the myriad language varieties which have been represented in the contact situation which birthed Singlish, Singlish has been influenced most saliently by the language varieties of English, Malay, and the Sinitic varieties of Mandarin, Southern Min, and Cantonese, and to a lesser extent,

Tamil. Furthermore, each of these individual language varieties continue to be represented in present-day Singapore to varying degrees.

The second fact is that of the input language varieties to Singlish, different varieties have had different types of influence. For example, the lexicon of Singlish has clearly been drawn primarily from English, while the grammatical structures which underlie the instantiation of these lexical elements has been drawn largely from the Chinese varieties of Southern Min, Cantonese, and Mandarin.

Given this, the use of the terms superstrate vs. substrate to characterise the relationship between English, the other input varieties, and Singlish is commonly adopted from the literature surrounding pidgin and creole linguistics. I will follow in this tradition in referring to English as the superstrate variety and the other input varieties as substrates to Singlish in this dissertation.

The third and final fact is that since the British introduced English to Singapore when they first arrived in 1819, the contact ecology of Singlish has largely remained intact over the course of the intervening two centuries or so, meaning that Singlish remains at the heart of the same contact situation that first led to its development, and the various pressures which were exerted by the different languages on the shape of Singlish continue to be applied even today, even if the exact degree of influence has shifted around (see, e.g. Bao 2015).

This third fact in particular highlights the ongoing contact nature of Singlish; unlike many other contact language varieties, where the label of being a contact language refers to its origin, with the variety having since achieved *lingua franca* status within its endemic range, Singlish is, in a sense, a contact language twice over, as a language variety that was not only borne of contact, but also continues to exist

at the confluence of a contact situation involving various genealogically-unrelated language varieties. The effect of this is that while the overall blend of properties which Singlish has inherited from its input varieties has largely stabilised, there remain pockets of variation, where particular properties remain in flux.

This positions Singlish as a variety that has the ability to provide unique windows of insight into what exactly is actually universal in a number of domains when it comes to the architecture of language.

1.3 Overview of this thesis

While the overarching goal of this dissertation is to probe at the issue of linguistic universality as laid out above, the more practical desiderata which I will be addressing in the dissertation can be characterised as (i) to document novel empirical facts from Singlish, and (ii) to analyse these empirical findings both in relation to the claims which have been made in the literature regarding the formal properties of Singlish, as well as to claims concerning cross-linguistic universality, where applicable.

1.3.1 The low left periphery (Chapter 2)

In chapter 2, I discuss a number of novel empirical findings concerning the purported optionality of agreement morphology in Singlish, as illustrated by the grammaticality of both (1) and (2) in Singlish.

- (1) John likes linguistics.
- (2) John **like** linguistics.

In particular, I demonstrate that the absence of agreement results in a wide range of syntactic and semantic reflexes, contrary to the phonological treatment of the phenomenon proposed in the literature (cf., e.g. Wee and Ansaldo 2004).

More specifically, I show that the absence of agreement morphology results in (i) the bleeding of object topicalisation, (ii) the blocking of adjunct-extraction from lower in the structure, (iii) an incompatibility with embedding under regret-class predicates, (iv) a ban on quantificational “subjects”, (v) interpretational constraints on wh-“subjects”, (vi) a subject-object asymmetry with respect to cross-clausal wh-extraction, and (vii) scope-freezing, which is illustrated in the contrast between (3) and (4), where the absence of agreement in (4) bleeds the inverse scope reading that is available in (3).

(3) Someone loves everyone. $\checkmark \exists > \forall; \checkmark \forall > \exists$

(4) Someone **love** everyone. $\checkmark \exists > \forall; * \forall > \exists$

Each of these properties constitutes a genuine empirical challenge to a PF-based account of the absence of agreement, since phonological processes apply *after* Spell-Out, and should thus be incapable of affecting the applicability of syntactic processes down the line, nor should they be able to affect semantic interpretation.

To account for these findings, I pursue an analysis in which the absence of agreement morphology diagnoses a difference in underlying syntactic structure, such that the surface “subjects” in clauses where agreement is absent are in fact, syntactically speaking, topics (i.e. they are not located in the “regular” subject position, but a topic position), at least in the basic paradigms.

However, I also report the existence of a second type of agreement-less clause, which exhibit most but not all of the properties of agreement-less clauses of the

first type. I demonstrate that this second class of agreement-less clause can be distinguished from the first group by the (obligatory) presence of focus marking within the left periphery, and propose a unified treatment of agreement-less clauses in general.

In particular, I argue for the adoption of Bošković's (2023) mixed A/\bar{A} projection ($A/\bar{A}P$) as the position in which the non-agreeing "subjects" of Singlish are realised, since Bošković (2023) proposes that $A/\bar{A}P$ is the landing site for all locally \bar{A} -moved subjects. Crucially, this position is restricted to subjects, a property which is attributed to the satisfaction of the EPP in said position.

This analysis, I argue, makes the right predictions with respect to a novel observation that there is a subject-object asymmetry with respect to the (im)possibility of long-distance *wh*-extraction in Singlish. In particular, I demonstrate that in contrast to object *wh*-extraction, subject *wh*-extraction is blocked from agreement-less clauses, cf. the contrast between (5) and (6), which I argue is due to a criterial freezing effect that applies to embedded *wh*-subjects, but not embedded *wh*-objects.

(5) ?* Who_{*i*} does John think *t_i* **love** Mary?

(6) Who_{*i*} does John think Mary **love** *t_i*?

The characterisation of these "subjects" as being simultaneously both subjects and topics/foci thus adds a twist to the purported universality of subjects, cf. the EPP.

1.3.2 The inflectional domain (Chapter 3)

In chapter 3, I demonstrate that, like agreement morphology, tense morphology is optional in English, meaning that constructions without agreement morphology, such as in (2) above, are in fact temporally ambiguous. That is, (7), which lacks both overt tense and agreement morphology, can be interpreted as being a present tense clause that corresponds to the overtly inflected (8) or a past tense clause corresponding to (9).

(7) Mary **love** syntax.

=(8) or (9)

(8) Mary loves syntax.

(9) Mary loved syntax.

In fact, I demonstrate that the optionality of tense marking is *exactly* like the optionality of agreement marking, and propose that both agreement-less and tense-less constructions should be uniformly treated as a single natural class, namely that of clauses lacking inflectional morphology, or inflection-less clauses. Accordingly, I propose an extension of the analysis which I present in chapter 2 to inflection-less clauses in general.

I then discuss the temporal interpretation of inflection-less clauses, and demonstrate that the lack of temporal specificity is resolved pragmatically, by showing that the accessed interpretation can be modulated by context. I consider evidence relating to a novel eventive/stative asymmetry where basic inflection-less clauses involving eventive predicates are ungrammatical, cf. the ungrammaticality of (10).

(10) * John eat an apple.

Drawing on a proposal by Enç (1991) that eventive predicates, unlike stative ones, contain a temporal variable which must be licensed by a c-commanding clause-mate element bearing temporal content, I suggest that the contrast is due to a difference in the syntactic configuration of the inflectional domain of Singlish inflection-less clauses, such that there is no appropriate licenser available in inflection-less clauses.

The facts which I present in chapters 2 and 3 lead me to conclude that Singlish clauses which lack inflectional morphology should be analysed as being syntactically tenseless, contrary to the characterisation of TP as being a linguistic universal. The discussion in these chapters also bears on the role of agreement, i.e. Agr_S.

As sketched out above in section 1.1, the theoretical motivation for positing the universal projection of T is ultimately also tied to the notion of the EPP, since the universally projected T would have provided an invariant syntactic locus where EPP could then be uniformly situated, regardless of the language variety in question. The (near) universal application of the EPP could then be derived as being epiphenomenal to the universal projection of T.

The proposed absence of T in Singlish naturally leads to questions concerning the status of the EPP in Singlish. In arguing that Singlish inflection-less subjects are in SpecA/ \bar{A} P rather than TP, I thus also concomitantly argue that the EPP is satisfied not in T, but in the higher A/ \bar{A} projection, in line with the proposal made by Bošković (2023) that the EPP cannot be tied to a specific projection, but can instead be satisfied across a number of different positions cross-linguistically. These projections together constitute an EPP domain, and the highest projection from this domain that is present within the structure is where the EPP is ultimately satisfied.

In the Singlish case, the (obligatory) satisfaction of the EPP in $A/\bar{A}P$ removes the EPP as a consideration for the (non-)projection of TP.

I then discuss an apparent exception to the general absence of temporal marking in the form of clauses with future reference, which must be marked with the future-oriented modal *will* or (with eventive predicates) the progressive morpheme *-ing*, as shown in (11) and (12).

(11) John *(will) like Singlish after this semester.

‘John will like Singlish after this semester.’

(12) John eat*(ing) an apple tomorrow.

I suggest that these can be accounted for without the syntactic projection of T if the expression of future meaning is modal, and modality must be linguistically encoded in an overt fashion in Singlish. I propose that this need to morphologically realise the modal future can be attributed to a generalised blocking principle, which I base on Chierchia’s (1998) blocking principle, which was originally proposed to constrain the cross-linguistic distribution of semantic type-shifters in the nominal domain.

I argue that this generalised blocking principle also accounts for the distribution of the various aspectual markers that are available in Singlish; differences between Singlish, English, and Chinese in terms of what must be morphologically realised can thus be attributed to the fact that in Singlish, lexical properties which are directly drawn from English interact with an underlying syntax which is instead drawn from Chinese, which is then further constrained by the application of the generalised blocking principle.

as demonstratives and possessors (and, of course, the articles themselves) must be realised within this DP layer if it is present, and thus necessarily precede other adjectival elements, which are located lower within the nominal phrase.

Conversely, in languages without overt articles, the absence of a distinct DP layer means that demonstratives and possessors¹ are *syntactically* treated on a par with adjectives, hence the relative freedom of word order across these elements.

That Singlish nominals do not exhibit the freedom in word order that we find in Chinese nominals (cf., e.g. Bošković 2012, Bošković and Hsieh 2013) despite the fact that we see transfer of syntactic structure from Chinese to Singlish in every other domain can therefore be construed as further evidence that, per the NP/DP hypothesis, the syntactic projection of D is in fact not universal.

I demonstrate that this contrast between Singlish and English on the one hand and Chinese on the other is crucially not due to a lack of Chinese influence on the structure of the nominal domain by documenting novel empirical data relating to relativisation strategies in Singlish. In particular, I demonstrate that Singlish utilises two prenominal relativisation strategies which are clearly derived from Chinese; in fact, Chapter 4 contains the first description of one of these two prenominal relatives which are distinguished in that they contain two instances of D within a single relative construction, as illustrated in (16).

(16) That sell chicken rice the man

‘The man that sells chicken rice’

¹ Numerals behave differently across NP languages, possibly due to crosslinguistic variation with respect to whether numerals must be introduced/situated in a classifier phrase, e.g. in Chinese, where numerals other than *yi* ‘one’ must co-occur with a classifier (Bošković and Hsieh 2015; fn. 21).

I demonstrate that the mixing of the determiner system of English with the syntactic structure of Chinese leads to some interesting interactions in terms of semantic composition, and present an analysis which is crucially able to capture the facts while still preserving Chierchia's (1998) Blocking Principle.

1.3.4 Concluding remarks (Chapter 5)

Finally, in chapter 5, I present a brief discussion of the sociolinguistic factors surrounding the development of Singlish, particularly since the year 2000, and further discuss how these factors may have affected patterns in child acquisition, to account for the heightened interspeaker variation that we presently find in Singlish, before concluding.

Chapter 2

The Low Clausal Left Periphery

One area where Singlish manifests its contact nature is in the syntactic configuration of the clausal left periphery. Tense/agreement-morphology is optional in the language variety, and the alternation, illustrated in (17), has historically been analysed as being in free variation, i.e. that the (non-)realisation of the agreement/tense morpheme is purely determined within the phonological component.

- (17) a. John likes Mary.
b. % John like Mary.²

I argue that this is not the case for at least a significant subpopulation of speakers³, for whom the absence of the agreement-morpheme is correlated to a number of syntactico-semantic reflexes, contrary to the predictions made by a PF-based

² The absence of agreement can result in a feeling of incompleteness, i.e. agreement-less clauses require additional contextualisation in order to attain full acceptability; this incompleteness is marked with the % symbol, adopted from Tsai (2008), who observes a parallel effect in (Taiwanese) Mandarin; I return to this issue later in chapter 3.

³ A survey of seven native speakers revealed that a majority (five speakers) observed the contrasts between the fully-agreeing and agreement-drop constructions presented in section 2.1, while a minority (two speakers) did not exhibit sensitivity to the relevant alternations.

treatment of the alternation. Under standard models of Spell-Out within the generative framework, phonological processes apply post-Spell Out, and are therefore incapable of interacting with both further syntactic processes and semantic interpretation.

In particular, I observe that such constructions, which I temporarily dub *agreement-less* constructions⁴, (i) disallow the application of the syntactic operation of object topicalisation, (ii) prevent adjunct extraction from more deeply embedded clauses, (iii) cannot serve as the complement of factive predicates such as *regret*, (iv) are scopally frozen, (v) are not able to host universally-quantified subjects, and (vi) require that *wh*-subjects be interpreted as D(iscourse)-linked, i.e. the domain of quantification must be *explicitly* established within the context.

2.1 Topic

It has been claimed that agreement-lessness in Singlish is a purely PF phenomenon, with the non-realisation of the agreement morpheme being treated as the result of the spell-out of a zero allomorph (Wee and Ansaldo 2004, Sato 2016). This view of agreement-lessness makes the strong prediction that agreement-lessness should not have any syntactic or semantic correlates.

It is therefore surprising that there are in fact a number of syntactic and semantic reflexes which accompany agreement-lessness, which have hitherto been undocumented. I present them in this section as evidence against a PF treatment of agreement-lessness in Singlish.

⁴ I propose an updated label that more accurately reflects the nature of these constructions in chapter 3.

2.1.1 Object Topicalisation

The first piece of evidence which I bring to bear upon this issue is the fact that agreement-less constructions, unlike their fully-agreeing counterparts, are resistant to object topicalisation.

- (18) a. $Mary_i$, Mr. Wu knows t_i .
b. ?* $Mary_i$, Mr. Wu **know**. [= (54)]

Examples (18a) and (18b) form a minimal pair, diverging only in the presence/absence of the standard third-person present tense agreement morpheme *-s*. That there is a contrast in acceptability arising from this minimal difference therefore demonstrates that the absence of the agreement morpheme bleeds the syntactic operation of object topicalisation.

Note that the ungrammaticality reported here cannot be attributed to any particular prosodic requirement, e.g. a requirement that there be a prosodic break immediately following the topicalised object, such as is usually required in standard English, since the insertion of an equivalent intonational break, as indicated by the comma following the topicalised object in (18b), is insufficient to rescue the sentence from ungrammaticality.

Nor can the ungrammaticality be a result of some phonological constraint that rules out the realisation of a phonologically null element at the right edge of a prosodic phrase: the insertion of additional phonological material at the right edge does not eliminate the observed contrast between object topicalisation in fully-agreeing versus agreement-less constructions (19a vs. 19b).

- (19) a. $Mary_i$, Mr. Wu knows t_i well.

b. ?* Mary_i, Mr. Wu **know** t_i well. [= (19a)]

The incompatibility of object topicalisation with agreement-lessness further extends to biclausal contexts as well. Where object topicalisation is usually licensed in the embedded clause (20a), it is again illicit when the agreement morpheme is unrealised on the embedded predicate (20b).

- (20) a. John says that Mary, Peter likes.
b. ?* John say(s) that Mary(,) Peter **like**.

This alternation crucially cannot be attributed to the mismatch between the presence/absence of agreement on the matrix and embedded clauses respectively, as demonstrated by the acceptability of both (21) and (22).⁵

- (21) John **say** that Peter **like** Mary.
(22) (?) John says that Peter **like** Mary.

This state of affairs is incompatible with a PF-based account of agreement-lessness, since the treatment of agreement-lessness as a PF phenomenon would amount to the assertion that agreement-lessness applies post-syntactically, and as such, cannot have any syntactic reflexes under standard models of syntax and its interactions with the interfaces. That is to say, under such a view of agreement-lessness, the syntax should not be privy to how the agreement morpheme is ultimately pronounced (or in this case, not pronounced). Since agreement-less con-

⁵ The mismatched agreement construction is admittedly somewhat marked; however, if agreement-lessness has syntactic correlates as I am claiming, changing the agreement-less status of multiple clauses to avoid this confound will create pairs of examples that are not minimally different. To preserve isomorphism in the non-target clauses, so as to isolate the effects of any individual instance of agreement-lessness, I have elected to leave the agreement status across clauses in the multiclausal examples mismatched.

structions and their fully-agreeing counterparts have the same underlying syntax, they are not expected to diverge in their syntactic behaviour.

Contrary to this prediction, what we have seen is that the loss of the agreement morpheme bleeds the syntactic operation of object topicalisation in the above examples. The incompatibility of agreement-lessness with object topicalisation therefore poses a serious empirical challenge to the treatment of this phenomenon as a PF one, and consequently, serves as evidence motivating a syntactic account of the alternation under study.

2.1.2 *Adjunct-extraction across agreement-less predicates

The next piece of evidence which I present to demonstrate that agreement-lessness cannot be treated as a post-syntactic alternation concerns multiply-embedded clauses, in the form of a contrast involving adjunct extraction possibilities.

Consider first the standard English example (23). The embedded indirect object *to John* can be dislocated to the left edge of the embedded clause, yielding the perfectly grammatical (24).

(23) I think that Mary says *to her friends* that Peter fixes cars with a hammer.

(24) I think that *to her friends*, Mary says that Peter fixes cars with a hammer.

Notably, it has been observed that this operation of embedded topicalisation blocks the extraction of adjuncts from any clause that is lower in the structure (Lasnik and Saito 1992). To illustrate, example (25) is ungrammatical under the indicated reading, where the extracted adjunct *how* associates with the most deeply embedded clause.

- (25) * How_i does he think that *to her friends*_j, Mary says *t_j* that [Peter fixed cars *t_i*]?

That is not to say that the linear string corresponding to (25) is itself ungrammatical, however. If construed differently, the linear string is perfectly acceptable; in particular, the sentence is grammatical *if* the adjunct is instead interpreted as modifying either of the two higher predicates. In other words, the linear string corresponding to (25) *can* be interpreted, and is in fact two-way ambiguous between a question about the manner of *saying* (26) and the manner of *thinking* (27), but crucially, the interpretation where it is the manner of *fixing* that is being questioned cannot be accessed; ergo, the topic ‘to her friends’ blocks *wh*-extraction from a more deeply embedded clause, but crucially does *not* block *local wh*-extraction.

- (26) How_i does he think [that *to her friends*_j, Mary says *t_j* that [Peter fixes cars] *t_i*]?

- (27) How_i does he think [that *to her friends*_j, Mary says *t_j* that [Peter fixes cars]] *t_i*?

This alternation can be isolated and directly attributed to the embedded topicalisation structure, when we consider the otherwise-equivalent construction (28). (28) forms a minimal pair with (25), distinguished only by the fact that it does *not* have the same embedded topicalisation structure; unlike (25), (28) *does* indeed allow for the extracted adjunct to be interpreted as an associate of the lowest predicate, i.e. (28) is three-way ambiguous.

- (28) How_i does he think that Mary says to her friends that [Peter fixes cars *t_i*]?

The contrast in accessible interpretations that arises between (25) and (28) therefore demonstrates that the syntactic operation of topicalisation can bleed the extraction of a lower adjunct.

With this as background, we now consider the case of agreement-less constructions, what we find is that agreement-lessness blocks the extraction of a more deeply embedded adjunct in exactly the same fashion as the topicalisation structures discussed above: the contrast between (28) and (25) is replicated in the minimal pair comprising (28) and its agreement-less counterpart.⁶

(29) * How_i does he think that *Mary say to her friends* that [Peter fixes cars *t_i*]?

Crucially, the available interpretations for the extracted adjunct in (29) are exactly the same as those noted to be available for the embedded topicalisation example (25), i.e. while (29) cannot be interpreted as a question regarding the manner of fixing, it is still two-way ambiguous, and can be interpreted either as a question regarding the manner of thinking (30) or the manner of saying (31).

(30) How_i does he think [that *Mary say to her friends* that [Peter fixes cars]] *t_i*?

(31) How_i does he think [that *Mary say to her friends* that [Peter fixes cars] *t_i*]?

Again, if agreement-lessness were truly the result of the instantiation of a zero allomorph in the PF, we would not expect the alternation between (29) and (28), which are distinguished only by the absence/presence of overt agreement respectively, to have an impact on the (un)availability of any particular interpretation(s), since the LF representations of the two constructions should, under such a view, be identical.

⁶ See fn. 5 for a discussion of the mismatch in the presence/absence of agreement cross-clausally.

The existence of a semantic contrast between the two constructions therefore constitutes further evidence in favour of treating agreement-lessness within the syntax, rather than post-syntactically as a PF alternation.

That there is again a parallel to be drawn between embedded agreement-lessness and embedded topicalisation is also suggestive that the two phenomena should be unified, with the parallelisms deriving from a syntactic structure common to both types of constructions.

2.1.3 *Regret agreement-less predicates

The parallelisms continue when we consider the interaction of agreement-lessness (as well as topicalisation) with ‘regret’-class verbs. In particular, I demonstrate that just as ‘regret’-class verbs have long been observed to be unable to take clausal complements that have a topicalised nominal phrase in their left periphery (Hooper and Thompson 1973), they are similarly unable to take as their complements agreement-less constructions.

It must first be noted that this incompatibility of ‘regret’-class verbs with topicalisation in their complement clauses cannot be extended to *all* predicates that take clausal complements, given that there are other predicates which *do* allow for embedded topicalisation in their clausal complements, such as *say*, which we previously saw in (20a), repeated below.

(20a) John says that Mary, Peter likes.

- (32) a. John regrets that he knows Mary.
b. * John regrets that [Mary], he knows.

However this incompatibility between regret-class predicates and topicalisation within their complements is to be implemented, the point I want to make here is simply that there is indeed an incompatibility, and, crucial to the purposes of this chapter, that this incompatibility surfaces in agreement-less constructions as well: while agreement-lessness can in principle apply to embedded clauses (33), it patterns with topicalisation in that it is not allowed when targeting the predicate of the clausal complement of a verb such as *regret* (34).

(33) John says that he **know** Mary.

(34) * John regrets that [he] **know** Mary.

This is unexpected under the PF approach to agreement-lessness, since the agreement morpheme is, under such a view, syntactically represented even in the cases where the zero-allomorph was ultimately selected for realisation. The semantic conflict that holds between topicalisation and ‘regret’-class verbs should therefore be orthogonal to the exact form of the agreement morpheme, since there is no *a priori* reason why agreement-lessness should trigger an equivalent conflict with the requirements imposed by ‘regret’-class verbs. We should therefore expect there to be no contrast between the grammatical fully-agreeing (32a) and the ungrammatical agreement-less (34), contrary to fact.

Taking the earlier observations into consideration, this paradigm is, conversely, unsurprising if the “subjects” of agreement-less constructions are, in actuality, topics, since the embedded “subject” *he* in (34) would be, from the viewpoint of the syntax, a topic; the incompatibility between ‘regret’-class verbs and agreement-lessness would consequently resolve into the aforementioned interpretational incompatibility between ‘regret’-class verbs and topicalisation structures.

2.1.4 Bleeding of Inverse Scope

Yet another piece of evidence in favour of a syntactic treatment of agreement-lessness relates to the effects of agreement-lessness on quantificational scope readings; agreement-lessness voids inverse scope readings which are otherwise possible in their fully-agreeing counterparts.

Example (35) is ambiguous between a surface-scope reading, where the existential introduced by the embedded subject *somebody* scopes over the universal introduced by the embedded object *everyone*, and an inverse scope reading, where the universal scopes over the existential. That is to say, the embedded sentence is adjudged true either if there is a specific unique individual such that everybody is loved by that individual **or** if, for each individual being considered, at least one individual loves them.

(35) John says that someone **loves** everyone. $\checkmark \exists > \forall; \checkmark \forall > \exists$

Interestingly, agreement-less constructions do not display this same ambiguity. Instead, the inverse scope reading is completely ruled out in (36).

(36) John says that someone **love** everyone. $\checkmark \exists > \forall; \boxed{* \forall > \exists}$

Again, the two examples (35) and (36) form a minimal pair, with the only point of difference being the realisation/non-realisation of the embedded agreement morpheme.

This therefore constitutes a case of semantic non-equivalence between the fully-agreeing construction and its agreement-less counterpart; setting the exact analysis of the semantic alternation aside for a moment, the very fact that there is such an alternation at all indicates that a PF-based account of the phenomenon cannot be

tenable, since a silent allomorph of the same underlying morpheme should not be able to affect the semantic component.

How does the blocking effect of agreement-lessness on inverse scope obtain then?

One possibility is to appeal to differences in the structural height of the existential quantifier in fully-agreeing versus agreement-less constructions.

Consider the standard English sentences in (37) and (38). As before, inverse scope is available in (37) such that the universal quantifier in the object outscopes the existential quantifier in the subject. However, if we question the subject of (37), as in (38), the universal quantifier cannot scope over the *wh*-element (see, e.g. May 1977). That is to say, (38) is only compatible with an answer where there is a single unique individual who loves each and every individual within the domain. (38) is crucially not amenable to an answer which comprises the concatenation of every individual's distinct lover.

(37) Someone loves everyone. $\checkmark \exists > \forall; \checkmark \forall > \exists$

(38) Who loves everyone? $\checkmark wh > \forall; * \forall > wh$

This indicates that while inverse scope can obtain over subjects in the canonical subject position (i.e. SpecTP), it cannot obtain over elements which have undergone extraction to a higher structural position. The inability of inverse scope to obtain in the agreement-less construction in (36) may therefore be yet another instantiation of the same effect: the existential quantifier in the “subject” is similarly too high for inverse scope to obtain, i.e. the “subjects” in (35) and (36) respectively cannot have been realised in the same syntactic position.

An alternative analysis appeals to the more general constraints imposed upon sentential topics, rather than their structural height. First, consider that indefinites cannot usually serve as topics, as demonstrated by the contrast in grammaticality between (39) and (40), where the topicalised nominals are marked by the definite article *the* and the indefinite article *a* respectively (see also Hankamer 1971, Kuno 1972).

(39) The girl, Mr. Wu knows.

(40) ? A girl, Mr. Wu knows. (?specific, *nonspecific)

Crucially, an exception is made when the indefinite is interpreted as being specific⁷ (cf. Erteschik-Shir 1997; 2007, Cohen and Erteschik-Shir 2002, Giurgea 2015; a.o.). Accordingly, (40) improves when the topicalised element is interpreted as a specific indefinite (cf. Davison 1984), i.e. the speaker intends for the reference of the indefinite to be a particular girl whom they have in mind. The same holds of the agreement-less construction in (36): the construction is acceptable only if *someone* is interpreted specifically.

This specificity requirement is generally taken as an example of the so-called “exceptional wide scope” phenomena, and can be formalised in a number of ways. Indeed, the exact formalism has been hotly debated in the literature, with some of the options including the (forced) interpretation of the indefinite as referential (Fodor and Sag 1982), the imposition of some sort of existential closure, such as through choice functions or Skolem functions (see, e.g. Reinhart 1997, Winter 1997, Kratzer 1998; a.o.), and the stipulation that the specificity comes by way of

⁷ Partitives can also induce a similar effect; see also Ward and Prince (1991) for further discussion regarding both indefinite and nonspecific topics.

presupposition (Yeom 1998). One analysis that is particularly aligned to the current paper is Endriss’s (2009) analysis of exceptional wide scope phenomena as being directly correlated to topicalisation.

The exact implementation of the specificity requirement is, however, in no way central to the present discussion. The critical observation is only that the specificity requirement itself exists as a so-called exceptional wide scope phenomenon. Ergo, the absence of the inverse scope reading in (36) is a result of the topical (quantificational) indefinite *someone* being exceptionally required to take wide scope over the universally quantified object *everyone*.

In fact, the exact implementation of the absence of inverse scope, while interesting, is itself orthogonal to the more general point that I am trying to make in the current section, which is simply that agreement-less “subjects”, much like topics, do not allow for the possibility of inverse scope, contrary to the predictions made by the PF account of agreement-lessness, though the observation is in fact in line with this quote from Endriss (2009): “Quantifiers receive wide scope due to their interpretation as topics” (p. 10).

Furthermore, the specificity requirement that may be the source of the forced wide scope interpretation of quantificational topics, in fact applies more generally to indefinites in the agreement-less “subject”-position, as I will briefly demonstrate in the next subsection.

2.1.5 Quantificational Constraints

Existential quantifiers aside, universal quantifiers have also been argued to be unable to serve as topics (Reinhart 1981), cf. the ungrammaticality of the English (41).

We would therefore, in light of the findings thus far, predict universally quantified external arguments to be ruled out exactly in the context of agreement-lessness. This prediction is indeed borne out (42a vs. 42b; 43a vs. 43b).

(41) ?* Everyone, Mary loves. [Eng.]

(42) a. Everyone loves John.

b. ?* Everyone love John.

(43) a. Everybody loves John.

b. ?* Everybody love John.

The distribution of quantifiers in Singlish therefore provides another domain in which the “subjects” of agreement-less constructions parallels topics more generally.

2.1.6 Wh-subject-topics

Lasnik and Uriagereka (1988) observe that *wh*-phrases in English cannot undergo topicalisation, on the basis of examples such as the following:

(44) Who said that John like Mary? [Eng.]

(45) Who said that Mary, John likes? [Eng.]

(46) Who said that John likes who? [Eng.]

(47) * Who said that who, John likes? [Eng.]

As such, we might expect that the *wh*-subject questions to be impossible in agreement-less constructions, since the *wh*-subject would be expected to be forced

to function as a topic, given the trend that we have seen throughout the present section.

The impossibility of topicalising *wh*-phrases appears to be variable cross-linguistically, however. Grohmann (2006), on the basis of earlier work (Grohmann 2000; a.o.), argues for the existence of *wh*-topics on the basis of German multiple *wh*-questions, arguing further that these *wh*-topics are subject to a constraint he labels Discourse Restricted Quantification (48).

- (48) Discourse Restricted Quantification (DRQ; from Grohmann 2000; 269)
- Questions involving two *wh*-expressions are well-formed if the value of both *wh*-expressions is determined by the context; determination of values is satisfied by providing a set of at least two possible referents in the discourse.

What this means is that “all *wh*-phrases in a German multiple *wh*-question must be D(iscourse)-linked (possibly, but not necessarily in the sense of Pesetsky (1987))” (Grohmann 2006; p. 269). This characterisation extends to Singlish: unlike in English, *wh*-topics are indeed allowed in Singlish, so long as they are in compliance with some version of the DRQ.

That is to say, in exactly such cases, a basic subject-question can cooccur with agreement-lessness (note the impossibility of interpreting 50 as a regular, non-D-linked question; cf. 49).

(49) Who loves Mary?

(50) Who love Mary? (*regular question; ✓ partitive/specific)

Given their divergent behaviour with respect to the availability of (i) object topicalisation, (ii) adjunct-extraction, (iii) embedding under regret-class verbs, (iv) inverse scope readings, and (v) quantificational “subjects”, as well as (vi) the interpretational constraints on *wh*-“subjects”, the distinction between Singlish agreement-less constructions and their fully-agreeing counterparts cannot be attributed to a PF-alternation, but must instead be treated syntactically, particularly in such a way that agreement-less “subjects” are syntactically topics.⁸ In the next section, I sketch out in greater detail the syntactic configuration implicated by the empirical facts that have been presented so far.

2.2 Analysis

I have thus far demonstrated that Singlish agreement-less constructions implicate the existence of a topicalisation structure at the left edge, on the basis that agreement-less constructions consistently pattern like topicalisation with respect to syntactic processes and possible semantic interpretations. In particular, the ostensible subject behaves like a topic in these constructions. I therefore begin by considering the nature of subjects more generally, and how this relates to the properties, and consequently, the status of the agreement-less “subject”.

Following Pollock’s (1989) seminal proposal, there has been a continual body of work which argues for a subdivision of what was traditionally labelled Infl/IP, i.e. which argues for Split IP (Belletti 1990, Bobaljik and Jonas 1996, Bošković 2015;

⁸ The account of the blocking effect of other topics on object topicalisation from Lasnik and Saito (1992) can be extended to the blocking effect of agreement-less subjects on object topicalisation on this approach.

2020; in press, Cardinaletti 2004, Cinque 1999, Collins 2005, Merchant 2013, Swart 1998, Ramchand and Svenonius 2014, Tenny 1992; among many others), on the basis of evidence from a variety of phenomena, such as intermediate V-movement, quantifier float, coordination, and multiple subject positions. A number of works within this line of research also follow Pollock (1989) in arguing for the existence of a dedicated subject agreement position within the inflectional domain (most recently Bošković 2020; in press, see also Kayne 1989, Watanabe 1993, Bošković 1997).

In line with this body of research, I assume that there is indeed a projection dedicated to subject agreement, and thus, subject agreement morphology, i.e. Agr_SP. The presence of Agr_SP is, however, less evident in agreement-less constructions in particular, seeing as they lack subject-agreement.

That said, the evidence discussed above indicates that the “subjects” of Singlish agreement-less constructions do not pattern with regular subjects syntactically. The incongruity between these “subjects” and regular subjects are therefore suggestive of a difference in structural position, with the scope facts in particular indicating that these “subjects” are instantiated in a syntactic position higher than the dedicated subject position.

Two possible lines of analysis which provide a means of reconciling this apparent conflict become immediately salient. The first option is that Agr_SP is *not* present in agreement-less constructions, such that agreement-less constructions actually do not (or indeed, cannot) have subject agreement at all.

An alternative line is that in agreement-less contexts specifically, SpecAgr_SP is in some way defective, such that the subject of the agreement-less construction

is extraordinarily allowed to circumvent moving through it, thereby deriving the absence of agreement morphology. Either way, the “subject” is not located in the usual (agreeing) subject position in agreement-less constructions (for relevant discussion, see also Bošković 2023).

That said, the exact status of the dedicated subject agreement position/projection in the Singlish agreement-less construction is ultimately orthogonal to the properties of the explicitly realised “subject” argument in the Singlish agreement-less construction which I am discussing here. In other words, regardless of whether the (Spec)Agr_SP is absent or defective, agreement morphology is absent, as desired, and the overtly manifested subject is not located within that projection. For reasons which will become clearer after chapter 3, I tentatively suggest that the absence of evidence for the presence of the subject agreement position/projection should be taken as evidence of absence, i.e. what you see is what you get with respect to the functional structure here.

Setting this issue aside for the moment, then, and taking the parallelisms between agreement-less “subjects” and canonical topics established earlier in the chapter into consideration, I suggest that the “subject” in Singlish agreement-less constructions is not actually a subject in the syntactic sense, but is rather instantiated in the specifier of a higher TopP projection.

This addresses the apparently aberrant behaviour of agreement-less “subjects” since their unexpected properties are unexpected only if we take the syntactic subject as the frame of reference; when switching to the paradigm that characterises syntactic topics, they are in fact fairly well-behaved. Since the “subject” in these constructions is not a syntactic subject, it is not surprising that subject-agreement

with the “subject-topic” does not surface.

It is clear from the contrast between agreement-less constructions and their fully-agreeing counterparts that English could not have been the source of this syntactic configuration, independent of its exact technical implementation. How then did this syntactic configuration come to be available to Singlish?

This state of affairs is, I suggest, unsurprising, when we consider the nature of Singlish as a contact language. While the fully-agreeing constructions (and their corresponding syntactic spine) can clearly be attributed to the English superstrate, the clausal spine for agreement-less constructions is instead inherited from another of the languages extant in Singlish’s formative contact ecology.

In particular, I point to the Chinese⁹ languages as a viable candidate for the origin of this agreement-less syntax, since these languages are well-attested within the contact ecology of Singlish, whilst also sharing both of the properties which we seek to address, namely (i) unambiguously lacking agreement morphology, and (ii) having been characterised as being topic-prominent in nature (see, e.g., Bao 2015).

A note: while the Southern Min varieties of Hokkien and Teochew were undoubtedly the most prominent of the Chinese languages over the course of Singlish’s developmental history, I will primarily be comparing Singlish to Mandarin instead. The rationale for this departure is threefold: first and foremost, Mandarin patterns with both Hokkien and Teochew in most, if not all, of the aspects relevant to the discussion at hand. Second, owing to longstanding governmental language policies, Mandarin has, especially in more recent times, been increasingly represented in the linguistic ecology of Singapore at the direct expense of the other Chinese languages.

⁹ I use the term Chinese not to refer to Mandarin Chinese (which I will refer to as Mandarin), but as an umbrella term to refer to the relevant Sinitic languages.

Accordingly, the contact ecology of Singlish is now more skewed towards Mandarin and away from the other Chinese languages than ever before. Finally, Mandarin is the most-studied of the Chinese languages, and insights drawn from this body of research, which may not have been replicated in Hokkien and/or Teochew, are pertinent to developing a comprehensive understanding of the Singlish facts under consideration.

2.2.1 On the topic of Topics in Singlish

The suggestion that Singlish has Topic projections akin to those found in the Chinese languages is not in itself entirely novel, with Chinese-style topic constructions having long been observed to exist in Singlish. In particular, Bao (2015) and Sato (2016) have both made proposals within the generative framework to this effect.

However, it is important to note that the analysis I will be sketching in this chapter is distinct in that it establishes a clear bidirectional entailment between agreement-less and the obligatory projection of Top. This, notably, entails in turn that fully-agreeing Singlish clauses are distinct from agreement-less constructions in that they do *not* obligatorily include a Top projection, *pace* Sato (2016).

Bao (2015) also does not make an equivalence between agreement-less subjects and topics, simply demonstrating that Singlish has what he terms “Chinese-style topics”, which are characterised as being distinct from English-style topics in that they do not correspond to any pronominal variable in the main clause, as reflected by the accompanying glosses in (51).

- (51) a. [NP nèi-cháng huǒ] [IP xìngkuī xiāofáng-duì lái de kuài]
that-CL fire fortunate fire-brigade come PRT quick

‘That fire, fortunately the fire-brigade came quickly.’ (Bao 2015; 12a)

- b. [NP nèi xiē shùmù] [IP shùshēn dà]
that some tree tree-trunk big
‘Those trees, the trunks are big.’ (ibid.; 12b)

- (52) a. [my family] [everybody is educated in English]
‘In my family, everybody is educated in English.’ (Platt et al. 1983; 47)
- b. [a pick-up taxi] [you have to share the trip with others]
‘With a pick-up taxi, you have to share the trip with others.’ (ibid.; 48)
- c. [stay longer] [they have to overcharge]
‘If you stay longer, they have to overcharge.’ (ibid.; 78)
- d. [take paper] [I also want to tell mummy]
‘When I am taking a paper, I want to tell my mother.’ (ibid.; 136)

On the basis of the parallels between the Singlish (52) and the Mandarin (51), Bao (2015) concludes that “(t)he topic structure of Singapore English is clearly derived from Chinese” (p. 100).¹⁰

¹⁰ Such a claim may at first appear to run counter to the previously reported incompatibility of agreement-lessness with object topicalisation in section 2.1.1, since the Chinese varieties and, by extension, Singlish, should, and indeed, do allow for the realisation of multiple topics, as in (i) and (ii).

- (i) [zuótiān]₁ [Lǐ xiānshēng]₂ [wǒ e₁ kànjiàn le e₂]
yesterday Li Mr. I see ASP
‘Yesterday, Mr Li, I saw.’ (Mandarin; Bao 2015; 13a, from Xu and Langendoen 1985)
- (ii) [Another time]_h, [same MRT]_i, [this man]_j, he_j sat opposite me e_i e_j.
(SgE; ibid. 36c, from the ICE-SIN corpus)

Crucially, however, the interpretation of each of the multiple topics is distinct, with only one of them being able to serve as the *aboutness* topic of the sentence (see, e.g. Heim 1982); the others are obligatorily interpreted contrastively (for a discussion of the typology of topics, see Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010). The application of the label “multiple-topic constructions” to these constructions is therefore somewhat misleading: while it is true that there are multiple topics in the loose sense, there is only a single topic which the clause is actually about.

Accordingly, the left-dislocation of the object *Mary* in (19b) improves if it is interpreted con-

Sato (2016) makes a similar observation, albeit beginning from the observation that there is a subject-object asymmetry that takes the form of a definiteness “preference” that applies to subjects but not to objects. This “preference” is effectively a strong bias towards the definite interpretation of the reference of preverbal subjects, as demonstrated by the examples in (53), which is not found when considering the reference of objects. This, he suggests, can be accounted for if subjects in Singlish move to the specifier of a higher topic projection, thereby creating an operator-variable chain. It is this operator-variable chain that results in the definiteness “preference”, and the subject-object asymmetry follows from the fact that objects do not undergo any comparable movements within the derivation.

- (53) Definite subject “preference” (Sato 2016; 20)
- a. People come already. Come greet them! (definite/*indefinite)
‘The people (that we were discussing/know were coming) came. *Some people came.’
 - b. I buy book already. (definite/indefinite)
‘I have already bought {a book/the book/books/the books}.’
 - c. Book (I) buy already. (definite/*indefinite)
‘I have already bought {*a book/the book/*books/the books}.’

As was previously noted, Sato (2016) also treats the realisation of agreement as being orthogonal to the underlying syntactic structure, i.e. he considers agreement-less constructions to be syntactically identical to their fully-agreeing counterparts.

trastively, either through the use of contextual cues, or through the use of dedicated lexical markers, such as *then*, as in (iii); see section 2.3 for further discussion of these facts.

- (iii) Mary_i *then* Mr. Wu **know** *t_i*. [‘It is Mary (and not someone else) that Mr. Wu knows.’]

In his view, (54) and (55), which form a minimal pair, are syntactically equivalent; in other words, Sato (2016) adopts the view that agreement-lessness is a post-syntactic alternation, i.e. PF in nature.

(54) Mr. Wu knows Mary.

(55) ? Mr. Wu know Mary. [= (54)]

Note also that Sato (2016) crucially requires the subject to have *moved* to the higher topic position, since the operator-variable chain is critical for establishing the relevant subject-object asymmetry the analysis was designed to capture. Sato's (2016) analysis therefore necessarily involves the operation of short subject topicalisation, which has been demonstrated by Lasnik and Saito (1992) to be unavailable in English, as illustrated by the contrast between (56) and (57). When an embedded object undergoes topicalisation, it can take an antecedent from a higher clause. It stands to reason then, that if the subject could undergo local topicalisation, it would also be able to take an antecedent from a higher clause. This is, however, not possible, leading Lasnik and Saito (1992) to conclude that subject topicalisation is disallowed in English.

(56) * John_i thinks that *himself*_i, *t*_i likes Mary. (Lasnik and Saito 1992; 23b)

(57) John_i thinks that *himself*_i, Mary likes *t*_i. (ibid.: 21b)

This conclusion is further supported by the contrast between (58) and (59); the higher degree of degradation that is observed with *wh*-extraction from the embedded topicalised subject as compared to *wh*-extraction from an otherwise-equivalent embedded topicalised object indicates that the two topicalisation operations are not in fact equivalent.

(58) ?? Which athletes do you think that pictures of, Mary bought? (ibid.: 24b)

(59) ?* Which athletes do you think that pictures of, are on sale? (ibid.: 25b)

This kind of movement has been argued to be banned in many languages, such as Kinande (see, e.g. Schneider-Zioga 2000; 2007, Bošković 2016; a.o.), Kaqchikel (Erlewine 2014; 2016), as well as Florentino and Trentino (Brandi and Cordin 1989, Rizzi 1990), and is in fact suggested to be universally banned (see, e.g. Bošković 2016, Erlewine 2020).

Given this, the implementation of Sato's (2016) analysis would position Singlish against the grain with respect to the availability of short subject topicalisation. An alternative derivation of agreement-less "subjects" in Singlish that does not violate Lasnik and Saito's (1992) ban on short subject topicalisation is available, however: consider the possibility that "subject-topics" in Singlish are not derived through movement, but are instead base-generated in the left-peripheral position in which they surface. Since they do not undergo movement to their derived position, the generation of the "subject-topic" would not be in violation of the kind of (anti)locality conditions which have been suggested to be the source of the potentially universal ban on short subject topicalisation, as argued for by Bošković (2016) and Erlewine (2020).

Under this analysis, the canonical subject position where the theta role of the external argument is assigned is filled not by a trace of the moved argument (since there has been no movement), but a null pronoun instead, i.e. *pro*; this allows for the base-generation of the subject-topic higher in the structure, where it then semantically binds the subject *pro*.

A parallel construction which replicates this relationship between a base-generated

subject-topic and a pronominal canonical subject lower in the structure can actually be found in English, in the form of hanging topic constructions (see, e.g. Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010); much like the structure which I am proposing for agreement-less constructions in Singlish, these hanging topic constructions have a resumptive pronoun in the canonical argument position, and are taken not to be derived by movement. Furthermore, these constructions exhibit a parallel condition on definiteness/specificity both when the hanging topics correspond to the clausal object (60a vs. 60b) and the clausal subject (61a vs. 61b), in line with what we observe with Singlish agreement-less constructions.

- (60) a. The girl, Mr. Wu knows her.
 b. A girl, Mr. Wu knows her. (✓ specific, *nonspecific)
- (61) a. The girl, she knows Mr. Wu.
 b. A girl, she knows Mr. Wu. (✓ specific, *nonspecific)

Since this analysis posits the existence of a morphologically-null *pro* which serves as the canonical subject, it crucially requires that Singlish be a *pro*-drop language. This has been independently demonstrated by Sato and Kim (2012), who, in investigating the generalisation that languages which have radical *pro* drop also do not have overt morphological agreement put forth in Saito (2007), show that Singlish has radical *pro* drop in exactly those contexts where agreement morphology is missing, ergo agreement-less constructions (cf. 62B1 vs. 62B2, 62B3 vs. 62B4, 63B1 vs. 63B2).¹¹

¹¹ Note that these constructions include the use of sentence final particles, which are indicated using small caps.

- (62) A: John plays soccer well HOR?
 B1: Yah, he plays well SIA.
 B2: * Yah, Ø plays well SIA.
 B3: Yah, he does SIA.
 B4: * Yah, Ø does SIA. (adapted from Sato and Kim 2012; 19)

- (63) A: John want to go zoo or not?
 B1: Don't want LAH.
 B2: * Ø doesn't want LAH. (adapted from *ibid.*: 20)

That Singlish has null pronominals has also been noted in Bao (2015), who observes that the existence of empty categories in Singlish has been posited as far back as Tay (1979), and has largely been attributed to Chinese influence on the variety.

In particular, Bao (2015) demonstrates that there is indeed parallelism between the distribution of empty categories in Singlish and that in Mandarin; null subjects are available in Singlish, with a distribution parallel to what is found in Mandarin.

- (64) [*pro* xīyān] yǒu hài
 [*pro* smoke] have harm
 'Smoking/To smoke is harmful.' (Bao 2015; 18a)

- (65) a. [*pro* walk in Pulau Ubin] also can
 'It is also ok to walk in Pulau Ubin.' (ibid.; 19a)

- b. [*pro* leave one stroke only], [*e* wrong already]
 'Leave out one stroke, and (the character) is wrong.'

(Platt et al. 1983; 25)

2.2.2 Interim Summary

I have presented a number of novel observations which demonstrate that despite prior claims to the contrary, agreement-lessness has both syntactic and semantic reflexes for at least a subpopulation of speakers.¹²

In particular, I have demonstrated that agreement-lessness bleeds syntactic operations such as object topicalisation and the extraction of adjuncts from more deeply embedded clauses, and can also have semantic consequences, namely blocking the obtainment of inverse scope.

The incompatibility of agreement-lessness with ‘regret’-class predicates can also be situated in a conflict in the semantic requirements imposed by the predicate itself and by the syntax of topicalisation: in particular, those semantic requirements pertaining to the factive presuppositional content of the complement clause. “Subjects” of agreement-less constructions also pattern with topics in that they are interpreted as being specific, with reflexes seen in the exceptional wide-scope interpretation of existentially quantified “subjects”, the (general) impossibility of universally quantified “subjects”, as well as the obligatorily D-linked interpretation of *wh*-“subjects”.

All of these facts indicate that a PF-based account of agreement-lessness, as

¹² As noted earlier, a minority of my informants (two out of seven) did not report any contrasts in any of the constructions under study here. If the issue was not not understanding the task, this may point toward a possible bifurcation of the speaker population, such that one group treats the agreement-lessness as a true PF phenomenon, in line with prior literature. This split within the speech community is perhaps unsurprising, given the unofficial status and lack of institutional support for Singlish as a variety. In the absence of any established standard, individual speakers are likely to develop their own Singlish grammars wholly on the basis of the input they encounter in their critical period, input that can vary wildly in terms of amount and quality. This does raise several interesting questions regarding the spread of variability that can be observed in Singlish speakers, though these issues are likely best explored in future research using experimental methods.

has been suggested in the literature, is evidently untenable, and instead motivate a structural account wherein the structural position of the “subject” of agreement-less constructions is distinct from that of the subject in fully agreeing constructions.

That is to say, these observations motivate an analysis of the agreement-less construction which involves the merger of a topic projection wherein the overt “subject” is realised, such that agreement-less “subjects” are, syntactically speaking, topics rather than subjects. This thereby captures the parallels to topicalisation noted in the chapter thus far.

Before that, however, I present some additional empirical facts in order to further refine the generalisation that the external arguments of agreement-less constructions receive a topical interpretation that does not arise in the presence of agreement morphology: that is, there are some edge cases which serve as apparent counterexamples to this particular formulation of the generalisation, and I explore these exceptions (and the necessary refinements to the proposed analysis) in the following section.

2.3 Focus and A/ \bar{A} P

While the external arguments of agreement-less constructions are indeed interpreted topically by default, there are some cases in which the “subject” need not be topical.¹³ Namely, when the subject is focalised, it does not receive the sort of topicality which we have seen in the previous examples. To illustrate, consider (66), where the external argument *John* has been marked with the lexical item *then*, a focus marker

¹³ For ease of exposition, where the precise discourse status of the subject is not crucial, I will continue to refer to the “subjects” of agreement-less constructions as subject-topics.

which bears corrective focus: in this case, *John* is instead interpreted contrastively. Note also that *then* cannot mark new information focus (NIF), as evidenced by the ungrammaticality of (67bA).

(66) [John then] know Mary.

Approx.: 'It is John that knows Mary (and not someone else).'

(67) a. A: Bill know Mary.

B: John then know Mary.

b. Q: Who (here) know Mary?

A: *John then know Mary.

In fact, NIF seems to be more generally incompatible with agreement-lessness. Consider the following discourse:

(68) Q: What's new in the department?

A: John likes syntax now.

A': *John like syntax now.

In (68), the entirety of the answer clause has to be interpreted as new information, and only the fully-agreeing answer (68A), where agreement is marked on the copula, is allowed, while its agreement-less counterpart (68A') is ungrammatical.

This contrast is replicated in questions where NIF falls on the subject of the answer clause, as demonstrated in (69), where the substitution of the agreement-less predicate *know* in place of the fully-agreeing *knows* results in ungrammaticality.¹⁴

¹⁴ The incompatibility between agreement-lessness and NIF may also relate to the incompleteness we find in baseline agreement-less clauses; see fn. 2.

(69) Q: Who knows Mary?

A: John knows Mary.

A': ?*John **know** Mary.

Some strategies which Singlish speakers employ to avoid having NIF fall on the “subject” of the agreement-less clause is to introduce the argument corresponding to the desired “subject” in a non-“subject” position *before* using the agreement-less clause, as illustrated in the discourse in (70), where *John* is first introduced as the object of *know* before being used as the “subject” of the agreement-less predicate *like*.

(70) Q: What’s new in the department?

A: You know John? John like syntax now SIA.

[Approx.: ‘You know John? He (surprisingly) likes syntax now.’]

The degradation associated with NIF can also be ameliorated by marking the external argument as bearing exhaustive focus, e.g. by using the exhaustive focus marker *only*, as in (71A).

(71) Q: Who knows Mary?

A: Only John **know** Mary.

In addition to corrective and exhaustive focus, sentential “subjects” of agreement-less constructions can also bear additive focus, indicated by the focus marker *oso*, derived from the English *also*, as illustrated in (72).¹⁵

¹⁵ It should be noted that in addition to serving as a postnominal focus marker, *oso* can also function as a predicative focus marker that appears either immediately before (i) or after (ii) the predicative phrase (presumably *vP* or *VP*). One issue that arises as a result of this variability in placement is that the post-subject and the pre-predicate positions are indistinguishable relative to one another (cf. i

- (72) Bill oso know Mary.
‘Bill also knows Mary.’

One possibility is to treat these constructions as involving *contrastive* subject-topics, rather than vanilla subject-topics which we saw previously. There is much controversy, however, concerning whether the notion of a contrastive topic is necessarily topical in nature, or if they can best be understood as a subtype of contrastive *focus* (see, e.g. Titov 2013); since this debate is orthogonal to the present endeavour, I will instead simply note that what is crucial for agreement-less clauses in Singlish is that the relevant argument that bears some kind of property which has traditionally been associated with the left periphery, whether that be topicality or focus.

The possibility of having focalised elements in the left periphery of the agreement-less clause also raises the question of whether we can have both a subject-topic *and* another focalised element be co-instantiated in the left periphery. To lay out the baseline paradigm, consider that when an object receives focus-marking, it cannot remain in-situ, and must instead be realised in the left periphery (73 vs. 74).

- (73) [Mary then]_i Bill know *t_i*.
‘It is Mary that Bill knows (and not someone else).’

- (74) * Bill know [Mary then].

vs. iii). Since *then* does not exhibit this kind of ambiguity, I will largely constrain the discussion to come concerning the behaviour of focus constructions in Singlish to *then*-constructions.

- (i) Mary want to go home, but she [oso want to keep partying].
- (ii) Mary want to go home, but she [want to keep partying oso].
- (iii) Mary want to keep partying, and [Jane oso] want to keep partying.

Int.:=(73)

Crucially, the focalised object must precede the subject of the clause (cf. the ungrammaticality of 75). When the focalised argument is preceded by another argument, it can no longer be interpreted as an object, and must instead be interpreted as a focalised subject, while the clause-initial argument is interpreted as a topicalised object, as, for example, is the case in (76).

(75) * Bill [Mary then]_i know *t_i*.

Int.:=(73)

(76) Bill_i [Mary then] know *t_i*.

Approx.: ‘As for Bill, it is Mary (and not someone else) that knows him.’

The inverse is also true, such that when the focalised argument is immediately followed by another argument, the focalised argument must be interpreted as the object; attempting to interpret the unmarked clause-second argument as the object is impossible, as demonstrated by the unacceptability of (77) under the intended reading (cf. the acceptability of the same string with a different interpretation in 73).

(77) * [Mary then] Bill_i know *t_i*.

Int.: ‘It is Mary that knows Bill.’

Note that the ordering restrictions observed here are not due to some kind of processing constraint, where the argument immediately preceding the predicate would be taken to be the external argument of said predicate just in case it is able to bear the relevant theta-role, since this pattern is preserved even when we substitute the animate object *Mary* in (73 – 77) for an inanimate argument, such as *syntax*.

(78) [Syntax then] Bill know.

Approx.: ‘It is syntax that Bill knows.’

(79) ?* Bill [syntax then]_i know *t_i*.

Int.:=(78)

The predicate-adjacent argument *syntax* cannot be understood as the external argument, since the subject-experiencer predicate *know* requires an animate external argument; that (78) remains ungrammatical indicates that the relative ordering of the two arguments is structurally conditioned.

This pattern is not restricted to just the constructions containing corrective focus, as demonstrated by the following parallel paradigm where we have instead the additive focus marker *oso*.¹⁶

(80) Bill [Mary *oso*] like.

Approx.: ‘As for Bill, Mary also likes him.’

(81) [Mary *oso*]_i Bill like *t_i*.

Approx.: ‘Bill likes Mary too (i.e. Bill also likes someone else).’

(82) * Bill like [Mary *oso*].

Int.:=(81)

2.3.1 Focus and Topic

Since the focalised object necessarily precedes the external argument just in case there is a focalised object, as illustrated by the three-way contrast between (73), (75), and (77), this raises the question as to whether the external arguments in these

¹⁶ Setting aside the alternative parses where *oso* modifies the predicative phrase rather than a nominal.

constructions are also interpreted as subject-topics, or if they are manifestations of the external argument in a lower position (i.e. either SpecIP or SpecvP).

To set the stage, first consider that both the corrective focus and additive focus constructions which I have presented can be used only in contexts where the subject-topic has already been established as the topic for the present segment of the discourse; in the absence of preceding discourse in which the topic has been established, the use of a focus-marked clause, as in (83), is disallowed (cf. the acceptability of the same string in 84, where there is preceding discourse).

(83) * [Mary then] Bill like. (out of the blue)

(84) A: Bill like Jane. ‘Bill likes Jane.’

B: [Mary then] Bill like. ‘It is Mary that Bill likes.’

The simple presence of preceding discourse is insufficient to license a construction that takes the form of (84B), however, as evidenced by the unacceptability of (85B), which is minimally different in that the subject-topic is changed from *John* to *Bill*; the issue is that *John* is not identical to the topic which has been established by the subject-topic of the immediately preceding discourse utterance, i.e. *Bill*.

(85) A: Bill like Jane. ‘Bill likes Jane.’

B: *[Mary then] John like. ‘It is Mary that John likes.’

While this appears to suggest that the “subject-topic” of (85B), *John*, cannot be interpreted topically at first blush, the sentence crucially improves significantly if we further enrich the context with information such that the subject-topic that is instantiated after the focalised object is no longer new information, as in (86), where

the mention of *John* in the preceding discourse fully ameliorates the previously observed unacceptability (85B vs. 86B).

(86) A: I know that Bill like Jane, but what about John?

B: [Mary then] John like. ‘John likes (girls like) Mary (and not Jane).’

This indicates that despite being realised in the clause-second position after the focus-marked object, the subject-topic still behaves as a topical element, in that it is incompatible with NIF.

2.3.2 A/ \bar{A} P

The broadened range of properties which we observe for subject-topics in Singlish can be captured if we amend the proposed analysis such that the subject-topic in Singlish is not instantiated in a dedicated Topic projection, as I tentatively proposed earlier in the chapter, but rather a position which is less specified with respect to the type of \bar{A} -property which it regulates.

A prime candidate for just such a position is Bošković’s (2023) A/ \bar{A} P, which he proposes is a projection straddling the inflectional and the left peripheral domains which hosts locally \bar{A} -moved subjects, whether that movement involves topicalisation or focalisation. Crucially, this position is targetable only by subjects, the reason being that the EPP is also satisfied in this position.

The existence of such a projection, Bošković argues, allows us to capture empirical facts from across a wide variety of unrelated languages (e.g. Kinande, Kaqchikel, Icelandic, West Ulster English, Brazilian Portuguese, Hong Kong Sign Language, a.o.); indeed, he identifies the Singlish subject-topic as being a prime

candidate for being in SpecA/ \bar{A} P based on data which I reported in Lee (2022).

I summarise some of the evidence which Bošković presents in favour of the existence of A/ \bar{A} P in the following section.

2.3.3 A summary of Bošković (2023)

Bošković (2023) begins with the observation that there is considerable debate concerning the structural position of *wh*-subjects, as in (87).

(87) Who left?

The primary positions in this debate are (i) that *who* is in SpecTP (see, e.g. Carstens et al. 2016, Chomsky 1986), and (ii) that *who* is in SpecCP (see Bošković 2016; 2021, Messick 2020; and the references therein). One piece of evidence presented by Mizuguchi (2014) against the former position has already been presented in section 2.1.4, concerning the bleeding of inverse scope in *wh*-subject questions; the relevant data is presented again in (88). If *wh*-subjects are situated in SpecTP like regular subjects, then we should expect inverse scope to be equally possible in both (88a) and (88b), yet the inverse scope reading is impossible when the subject is a *wh*-phrase.

- (88) a. Who loves everyone? $\checkmark wh > \forall$; $*\forall > wh$
b. Someone loves everyone. $\checkmark wh > \forall$; $\checkmark \forall > wh$

Bošković (2023) further discusses evidence from West Ulster English (WUE), observed by McCloskey (2000), that local subject questions involve *wh*-movement

that proceeds directly to a projection higher than SpecIP.¹⁷

First, consider that WUE allows for the quantifier *all* to be floated under *wh*-movement, as illustrated in (89), where the *wh*-movement of the object *wh*-phrase to the left periphery can result in *all* being realised in a sentence-medial position.

(89) What_{*t*}_{*i*} did he say all *t*_{*i*} that he wanted? (McCloskey 2000)

- (90) a. * They were arrested all last night
b. Who was arrested all in Duke Street?

Conversely, the ungrammaticality of (90a) indicates that quantifier float is disallowed under movement to the canonical subject position in this context. If the extraction of *who* in (90b) were to involve movement through canonical subject position, it would be floating *all* under the same kind of movement as in (90a), and (90b) would thus be incorrectly expected to be bad. The grammaticality of (90b) therefore indicates that *who* does not move through SpecIP.

Bošković also presents evidence against the latter position (i.e. that *who* is in SpecCP), starting with an observation by Kaisse (1983), who notes that the contraction of auxiliaries in English is subject to a restriction whereby the *wh*-phrase that hosts the contracted auxiliary must be a single word, as demonstrated by the contrast between (91) and (92).

However, this restriction does not apply to subject *wh*-phrases, hence the grammaticality of the examples in (93) (cf. the ungrammaticality of the examples in 92).

- (91) a. What's Mary buying?

¹⁷ Bošković (2023) uses SpecIP to refer to the canonical subject position when the distinction between SpecAgrsP and SpecTP is not immediately relevant.

- b. When's dinner?
 - c. How's your old man?
- (92) a. * Whose food's the dog eating?
- b. * Which man's she the fondest of?
- (93) a. Whose food's burning?
- b. Which man's leaving first? (Kaisse 1983)

Bošković takes this to be an indication that the *wh*-phrases/auxiliaries in (92) and (93) are not in the same position, i.e. object *wh*-phrases and subject *wh*-phrases are realised in different positions.

More evidence that subject *wh*-phrases and object *wh*-phrases do not target the same position can be found when considering the interaction between *wh*-extraction and topicalisation: Bošković shows that *wh*-extraction to the edge of an embedded interrogative can take place over an embedded topic only with object *wh*-phrases, hence the contrast in grammaticality between (94a), where the *wh*-phrase is an object, and (94b), where the *wh*-phrase is a subject.

- (94) a. ? Mary wonders [which book]_{*i*}, for Kim, Peter should buy *t_i*.
- b. * Mary wonders [which student]_{*i*}, for Kim, *t_i* should buy that book.
- (Bošković 2023; 20)

On the basis of these empirical facts and a number of additional arguments, Bošković concludes that the *wh*-extraction of subjects must target a position lower than that targeted by *wh*-extraction of objects, and thus suggests the following three-way distinction between canonical subjects, *wh*-subjects, and *wh*-objects, exempli-

fied in (95a – c) respectively, such that *wh*-objects are structurally higher than *wh*-subjects, which are in turn higher than canonical subjects, yielding the hierarchy in (96), where *wh*-subjects are in SpecA/ \bar{A} P.

- (95) a. I wonder **what** Mary bought
b. I wonder **who** left
c. I think **Mary** left

(96) what > who > Mary

Crucially, if *wh*-subjects like *who* in *who left* are in SpecA/ \bar{A} P, and they do not pass through the canonical subject position en route to SpecA/ \bar{A} P, then this necessarily means that the EPP must be satisfied in SpecA/ \bar{A} P. A/ \bar{A} P is thus the landing site of *wh*-movement, but it also the position where the EPP is satisfied, i.e. it is a mixed A/ \bar{A} position on the border of the traditional A and \bar{A} fields.

Bošković (2023) further argues that focalised subjects similarly move to SpecA/ \bar{A} P, noting that “*wh* and focalised elements often pattern together regarding movement” (p. 10).

Some evidence for this comes from NPI-licensing in English: in (97), the NPI *any* is c-commanded by the *only*-phrase in both (97a) and (97b), yet it is only licensed in (97a). Bošković takes this to indicate that in this particular case having the licensor c-command the NPI is insufficient, and there is a further requirement that the licensor cannot be in an A-position.

- (97) a. Only his girlfriend does John give any flowers.
b. * John gives only his girlfriend any flowers.

That the same NPI *any* can be licensed with *only*-marked subjects, as in (98), indicates that the *only*-marked subject is not in a pure A-position; this can be captured if focalised subjects also move to SpecA/ \bar{A} P, which, being a mixed position, is not a pure A-position, and can thus license the NPI in question.

(98) Only Mary showed any respect for the visitors. (Branigan 1992; 84)

A further upside of this analysis is that since the focalised subject is in SpecA/ \bar{A} P, and not SpecCP, it is not predicted to block subject-auxiliary inversion in polar questions, since C, the target of the movement of the auxiliary, is higher still than SpecA/ \bar{A} P, where the focalised subject is situated, as is indeed the case:

(99) Did only Mary show any respect for the visitors?

2.3.4 Singlish subject-topics as A/ \bar{A} subjects

Returning to Singlish, then: the properties which I have ascribed to Singlish subject-topics can neatly be accounted for if Singlish subject-topics are subjects which are situated in SpecA/ \bar{A} P, since what distinguishes the non-agreeing subjects of Singlish from fully-agreeing ones is that they must bear some sort of \bar{A} -feature (not necessarily topic), and this falls out immediately if they are base-generated/located in SpecA/ \bar{A} P.

An additional upside of this analysis is that it captures a number of puzzling distributional facts which arise when we turn our attention to another phenomenon which occurs in Singlish, namely with respect to the optionality of *wh*-fronting; in order to demonstrate how these facts fall out from the proposed analysis, I first begin with a brief overview of the phenomenon in the following section.

2.3.5 Wh-Questions

Another characteristic of Singlish which distinguishes it from English is that Singlish *wh*-phrases can optionally remain in-situ, i.e. unlike in English, Singlish *wh*-phrases are not mandatorily moved to the left edge in canonical interrogatives. This means that while the Standard English question in (100a) can only be formulated with the fronted *wh*-phrase (cf. the ungrammaticality of the other options in 100b – 100c), Singlish ostensibly allows for two alternative realisations of the same underlying question: in addition to the *wh*-fronting derivation which directly parallels its English counterpart, as illustrated in (101a), the *wh*-phrase can also instead be left in-situ, in its base-generated position, as in (101b).¹⁸

(100) Standard English

- a. Who do you like?
- b. * Do you like who?
- c. * You like who? (under a non-echo question reading)

(101) Singlish

- a. **Who** you like?
'Who do you like?'
- b. You like **who**?
=(101a)

Crucially, however, the *wh*-in-situ option is available only when the clause is agreement-less, though this restriction is obscured in the above examples since (the

¹⁸ The Singlish analogue to (100b) is independently ruled out because Singlish does not have *do*-support (cf. the absence of *do* in 100a); I discuss related facts further in chapter 3.

lack of) agreement can be observed only with third-person singular subjects. Accordingly, the following paradigm in (102), in which we have a third-person singular subject, *Mary*, in place of the second-person pronoun *you*, demonstrates the relevant distributional restriction: (102c) is ungrammatical because the option of *wh-in-situ* is available only in agreement-less clauses. Incidentally, the restricted distribution of *wh-in-situ* provides further empirical support for the syntactic differentiation of agreement-less and fully-agreeing constructions.¹⁹

(102) Singlish

- a. **Who** Mary like?
‘Who does Mary like?’
- b. Mary like **who**?
=(102a)
- c. * Mary likes who?
Int:=(102a), i.e. non-echo question

Since *wh*-fronting and *wh-in-situ* questions in Singlish have historically been treated as being semantically equivalent, this has led to much of the research into the alternation focusing largely on attempting to implement the freedom of the alternation in the morphosyntax (see, e.g. Yeo 2010b, Sato and Ngui 2017). Abstracting away from the specifics of their individual analyses, both accounts attempt to attribute both the possibility of *wh-in-situ*, as well as its optional nature, to particular properties of the C head(s) in Singlish.

¹⁹ Additionally, if we take the absence of do-support in (102a) to be the absence of agreement (see chapter 3 for further discussion), the relative ordering of the fronted *wh*-object and the non-agreeing subject, such that the *wh*-object precedes the non-agreeing subject, also falls out from Bošković’s (2023) hierarchy which places *wh*-objects higher than non-agreeing, *A/ĀP* subjects.

Setting this aside for the moment, the long-distance extraction possibilities with respect to embedded *wh*-phrases provide additional empirical support for the analysis where subject-topics in Singlish are situated in SpecA/ \bar{A} P in the following sense. First, consider that long-distance *wh*-extraction is possible out of agreement-less clauses, as in (103).

(103) Who_{*i*} does John think Mary **love** *t_{*i*}*?

However, this applies only when the *wh*-phrase that undergoes extraction is an object *wh*-phrase; *wh*-extraction of *wh*-subjects from agreement-less clauses results in ungrammaticality, as in (104).

(104) ?* Who_{*i*} does John think *t_{*i*}* **love** Mary?

Note that this contrast between subject and object *wh*-extraction can be tied directly to the absence of agreement on the embedded predicate, since long-distance *wh*-extraction of both the subject and the object are possible from fully-agreeing embedded clauses, as demonstrated by the grammaticality of both (105) and (106).

(105) Who_{*i*} does John think Mary **loves** *t_{*i*}*?

(106) Who_{*i*} does John think *t_{*i*}* **loves** Mary?

This state of affairs is somewhat perplexing, in that it is an inversion of the basic paradigm we saw with local *wh*-extraction, where the lack of agreement was the key to allowing *wh*-phrases to remain in-situ, since now it is the absence of agreement that prevents a *wh*-phrase from undergoing *wh*-extraction.

However, if we focus only on the present, long-distance paradigm, we see that the absence of agreement is discriminating subject-topics as being somehow distinct

from the other arguments, i.e. agreeing subjects, as well as objects in both agreeing and non-agreeing constructions, just as agreement-less declaratives do.

The subject-topic/object asymmetry which we find in the long-distance *wh*-extraction cases can in fact be understood as a consequence of Bošković's (2008) cross-linguistic generalisation, presented in (107). Here, operators are taken to be elements which semantically bind a variable from an \bar{A} -position (see also Epstein 1992, Rizzi 2006).²⁰

(107) Operators in operator-variable chains cannot undergo further operator movement. (Bošković 2008; 1)

Bošković (2008) further argues that freezing effects of this type can in fact be deduced from Chomsky's (2000, 2001) Activation Condition, which says that an element can undergo movement only if it has an uninterpretable feature, i.e. an uninterpretable feature on the moving element is required to make it visible/active for the operation Move; because the operator-variable chain is formed when an uninterpretable feature is checked/valued, being in an operator-variable chain deactivates, in the sense of the Activation Condition, the relevant element for further operator movement.

Given that I have demonstrated that the subjects of non-agreeing constructions (i.e. $A/\bar{A}P$ subjects) behave like other left-peripheral elements such as canonical topics and *wh*-elements, it is reasonable to assume that they are base-generated/located in an operator position in their own clause. From this operator position, i.e. Spec $A/\bar{A}P$, $A/\bar{A}P$ subjects participate in an operator-variable relationship, i.e. binding, with

²⁰ What (107) is intended for is to prevent elements in Top, Focus, and *wh*-positions from undergoing further movement; this is reminiscent of Rizzi's (2006) criterial freezing.

the theta-role-bearing *pro* that is instantiated within the thematic domain. Per the Activation Condition, this means that $A/\bar{A}P$ subjects are, like other operators, deactivated for the purposes of (further) *wh*-extraction, thus accounting for the ungrammaticality of (104).

Conversely, this does not hold of agreeing subjects, which are not situated in $\text{Spec}A/\bar{A}P$, and thus do not occupy the relevant operator position where an operator-variable relation can be established, nor does this hold of objects regardless of whether they are in agreeing or agreement-less constructions.²¹

2.4 Conclusion

In summary, I have demonstrated that the absence of agreement-morphology in Singlish cannot be analysed as a PF-phenomenon, since it has both syntactic and semantic effects. In the basic cases, agreement-less clauses resist object topicalisation, block adjunct-extraction from more deeply embedded clauses, and cannot be embedded under predicates like ‘regret’.

They also bleed inverse scope readings, and impose constraints on their “subjects”, such as preventing the instantiation of universally quantified “subjects”, and forcing the D-linked interpretation of *wh*-“subjects”.

Since each of these properties has been independently noted for topicalisation

²¹ One question that arises is why we do not see an intervention effect when *wh*-object extraction takes place over a non-*wh* subject-topic if both elements bear \bar{A} -features. There are three factors which can account for the lack of intervention here: (i) the subject-topic is deactivated in its surface position, since its uninterpretable features are checked off in its base-generated/surface position, (ii) the subject-topic is situated in a *mixed* A - and \bar{A} -position, and not a purely \bar{A} -position, and (iii) in cases like (103), the subject-topic does not bear *wh*-features; under a feature-relativised view of Relativised Minimality, the absence of *wh*-features on the subject-topic discounts it as a potential intervenor for *wh*-extraction.

constructions more broadly, I suggested that Singlish clauses which lack agreement similarly contain additional functional structure in the left peripheral domain, where the overt “subjects” which we find in Singlish agreement-less clauses are realised, i.e. there is a deeper structural difference that distinguishes between agreement-less constructions and their fully-agreeing counterparts.

However, I have also noted that not all agreement-less clauses in Singlish behave the same, and presented data concerning a subtype of agreement-less clause which did not fully exhibit all of the properties which we find in the basic cases, e.g. with respect to the bleeding of object topicalisation. Crucially, though, these exceptions each involved focalisation, either of the subject or the object. I have therefore proposed that both types of agreement-less clauses in Singlish can be unified if we assume that the additional left-peripheral structure that we find in such clauses takes the form of Bošković’s (2023) cross-linguistically motivated $A/\bar{A}P$ projection, which, as a projection that straddles the inflectional and the left peripheral domains, and hosts only locally \bar{A} -moved subjects of both the topic and focus varieties, directly accounted for the properties of both focalised and non-focalised non-agreeing subjects in Singlish.

I have further demonstrated that the proposed analysis makes accurate predictions with respect to a novel observation concerning an asymmetry in the long-distance *wh*-extraction possibilities from under an agreement-less embedded predicate, such that only *wh*-objects can be extracted, since the proposed analysis places the *wh*-subject of the embedded agreement-less clause in $\text{Spec}A/\bar{A}P$.

As it is in a mixed A- and \bar{A} -position, from which it binds a variable lower in the structure, i.e. the theta-role-bearing *pro*, the *wh*-subject establishes an operator-

variable relation from SpecA/ \bar{A} P, which in turn deactivates it in the sense of Chomsky's (2000, 2001) Activation Condition. This causes the subject *wh*-phrase to be frozen in SpecA/ \bar{A} P, and it is thus unable to undergo further operator movement into the matrix left-periphery. Since only the non-agreeing subjects of Singlish end up in SpecA/ \bar{A} P, the fact that such subjects are the only ones that cannot be extracted falls out from the proposed analysis.

As Bošković (2023) notes, the mixed A and \bar{A} properties of A/ \bar{A} P means that there is no longer a clear delineation of the left periphery from the inflectional domain; I thus turn my attention to the inflectional domain of Singlish in the following chapter, with a particular eye towards the question of whether or not tense in Singlish is syntactically realised or not.

Chapter 3

The Inflectional Domain

This chapter deals with issues pertaining to the structural configuration of the inflectional domain in Singlish agreement-less constructions. For ease of exposition, I will be referring to these constructions simply as Singlish, in contrast to the fully-agreeing paradigms, which I will refer to simply as English, though it should once again be noted that the contact nature of Singlish, alongside the multilingual nature of the speech communities in which Singlish is used, means that there is widespread code-switching and code-mixing which makes it difficult to isolate specific utterances as being Singlish or not.

Where the previous chapter dealt with issues pertaining to the syntactic projection of Agr_S (within a split-IP system) by investigating the nature of (the lack of) agreement in Singlish, this chapter continues with the probing of the inflectional domain of Singlish by considering the other half of split-IP in the form of the syntactic category of T, with a focus on determining its presence or absence within the syntax of Singlish.

Ultimately, I will be arguing that there is no T projection within the structural configuration of Singlish agreement-less constructions, but before I go into the specifics regarding my proposal, I will briefly go over a history of the syntactic status of the inflectional domain within the generative tradition.

3.1 Overview

In contemporary generative literature, TP is often taken to correspond to the basic declarative clause (putting aside the left periphery), but this was not always the case. The earliest label that was applied to the basic declarative clause was S, in reflection of the sentential identity of the corresponding clause. With the development of X-bar theory, and the associated notion of endocentricity, S was subsequently re-identified as being the maximal projection of the highest functional head within the syntax, or I(NFL).

A major paradigm shift was then initiated by Pollock (1989), who argued for the division of the then-unitary IP into several constituent projections, with a one-to-one correspondence between each individual projection and each of the distinct functions that had thus far been attributed to IP. The two projections with which we are concerned in this chapter are the projections which had the functions of regulating tense and subject-agreement; in direct reflection of their exact functions, these two constituent projections were identified as Agr_SP (for subject-agreement) and TP (for tense) respectively.

While this division of labour was motivated on empirical grounds, there was also some consideration given to the sheer breadth of functions that had then up till

then been attributed to the singular projection of IP, particularly when there were no conceptual similarities which were shared by all of the functions in question. In other words, they did not constitute a natural class, and nowhere is this more obvious than when we compare tense to subject-agreement: what theoretical basis could there be for these two semantically rather disparate concepts to be conflated and bundled into a singular functional head? The splitting of IP thus constituted a move that had both significant empirical as well as theoretical upsides for the enterprise of establishing the universal structure that underlies all of human languages.

Despite such evidence, the common assumption within the current Minimalist enterprise is now that TP corresponds to the domain of the basic declarative clause, while Agr_SP has lost its status as a syntactic projection in its own right. This about-face in syntactic theorising can be traced to the advent of the Minimalist Program in Chomsky (1995), who argued that, as part of a minimalist conceptualisation of the syntax, a necessary condition for an element to be considered part of the syntactic module proper is that it had to have semantic content; elements which do not meet this criterion can (and should) be reduced to features on other, semantically-contentful elements. One such element that was “demoted” was Agr_S, which received this treatment for not itself having any semantic significance; as a purely formal mechanism, Chomsky (2000; 2001) proposed that subject-agreement should be analysed as being a formal feature that is situated on the semantically-contentful (and thus, syntactically represented) Tense projection. The net result of this move is that at a more abstract level, we have essentially returned to the unsplit-IP conceptualisation of the basic declarative clause (at least with respect to the two projections we are discussing here), albeit with a brand new coat of paint in that TP

now serves as the new label for the maximal projection.

However, as later authors have rightly pointed out, this move to streamline the syntax of the inflectional domain has required that we give up some of the empirical gains that having a split INFL bought us in the first place. Bošković (2020), for example, points out that coordination structures such as (108) are grammatical.

(108) John [travels to Rome tomorrow] and [will fly for Paris on Sunday].

Given that co-ordination cannot apply to intermediate projections (i.e. bar-level coordination is disallowed), the grammaticality of (108) indicates that the subject, which is external to the coordination, and the modal, which is inside the coordination, have to be in separate phrases. This is straightforwardly accounted for if we assume a split-IP: the coordination applies to the lower of the split projections (i.e. TP), while the subject *John*, being situated in the specifier position of the higher, Agr_SP projection, is outside the coordination site. On the basis of such facts, a return to split IP is warranted.

Setting aside the current state of the field for the moment, one reason why establishing the configuration of the inflectional domain is of theoretical importance relates to the Extended Projection Principle (EPP); in particular, by establishing the structural properties of the inflectional domain, we may better understand where the EPP holds. Indeed, one key property that has been attributed to the once-more unified inflectional projection of TP is that this is where the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) holds. Chomsky (2013; 2015) attributes this to a deficiency of the T head in terms of its ability to project a label, which is required for interpretation at the interfaces. This deficiency is addressed via the merger of another element to SpecTP, where feature-sharing can then be established with the deficient T head,

which in turn enables labelling of the newly created syntactic object. In this way, subject agreement, as well as the EPP, is rendered epiphenomenal to the lexically determined labelling deficiency of T in some but not all languages.

With this in mind, consider that the proposal advanced in the previous chapter places Singlish subjects (of the agreement-less variety) in SpecA/ \bar{A} P, which is a mixed A/ \bar{A} position on the border of the traditional A and \bar{A} fields. Crucially, part of what makes SpecA/ \bar{A} P a mixed A/ \bar{A} position is that the EPP can be satisfied there.

To illustrate, recall that locally extracted *wh*-subjects, such as *who* in clauses like *who left*, are situated in SpecA/ \bar{A} . Recall also that the local extraction of *wh*-subjects does not pass through the canonical subject position en route to SpecA/ \bar{A} P, as indicated by the WUE paradigm below, in particular the contrast between (110a) and (110b) (if *who* were to move through SpecIP in 110b, 110b should be ruled out on a par with 110a):

- (109) What_{*i*} did he say all *t_i* that he wanted? (McCloskey 2000)
- (110) a. * They were arrested all last night
b. Who was arrested all in Duke Street?

Since the *who* in *who left* does not pass through SpecIP, and instead moves directly to SpecA/ \bar{A} P without violating the EPP, it stands to reason that the EPP must be satisfied in SpecA/ \bar{A} P, at least in such sentences where the SpecIP remains unfilled.

The proposal that Singlish agreement-less subjects are in SpecA/ \bar{A} P thus means that the EPP can, in principle, be satisfied in this higher structural position. In

fact, Bošković (2023) suggests that the EPP is necessarily satisfied in the highest projection from the EPP domain that is present within the clause. This contextuality with respect to where the EPP is satisfied directly parallels the contextual approach to phasehood developed in Bošković (2013b; 2014), in that just as there is a phasal domain and the highest projection present within it constitutes a phase, there is an EPP domain and the highest projection present within it is where the EPP is satisfied.

What this means is that the EPP in Singlish is necessarily satisfied in SpecA/ \bar{A} P, and not in SpecAgr_SP or SpecTP, regardless of whether one assumes the existence of Agr_SP or not. The range of functions covered by the Singlish TP can thus be restricted to just its semantic function of regulating temporal information.

At the same time, however, the fact that the regulation of temporal information is not morphologically transparent in a number of languages around the world has led to proposals that such languages are in fact syntactically tenseless. Examples of such languages include Yucatec Maya (Bohnemeyer 2002; 2009), Kalaallisut (Bittner 2005; 2008), various Slavic languages (see, e.g., Todorovic 2016), Turkish (Zanon 2014), and Korean (Kang 2014) (see also Bošković 2012 and Todorovic 2016 more generally). Most pertinently, given its status as an input language to Singlish (and possibly the source of the agreement-less syntax in particular), (Mandarin) Chinese has also been argued to be syntactically tenseless (Smith and Erbaugh 2005, Lin 2010), though it should be noted that the syntactic tenselessness of (Mandarin) Chinese in particular remains a contentious issue (see, e.g. Huang 1982, Li 1985, Tang 1990, Sybesma 2007).

In the following section, I investigate the (lack of) temporal marking in Singlish,

and propose that Singlish clauses which lack tense-morphology are structurally the same as the agreement-less constructions which I analysed in the previous chapter.

3.2 On Tense

The ongoing debate concerning the syntactic differentiation of subject-agreement from tense (hence the debate over split- vs. unsplit-IP) implicates the existence of a tight correlation between the two, even as they are indubitably both conceptually and functionally distinct.

Given this close correlation, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that much like the agreement-morpheme, the tense-morpheme *-ed* is also not obligatory in Singlish. This is again not the case in English, where the past-tense morpheme cannot be omitted (111).

(111) John like*(d) linguistics. [Eng.]

(112) % John like linguistics. [Sing.]

=(111)

Notably, the omission of the tense morpheme results in a surface string which is identical to a Singlish agreement-less construction of the kind we saw in chapter 2; this situation arises because of the complementary distribution of tense-marking and subject-agreement marking in English that has been inherited by Singlish, i.e. agreement arises only in a subset of present-tense constructions (i.e. those with third person singular subjects), and present-tense itself is otherwise unmarked.

The net result of this is that there is no way to distinguish between (overtly) tense-less constructions and agreement-less constructions in Singlish beyond con-

sidering the intended temporal interpretation of the clause in question: whether the string in (112) is conceptualised as being the tense-less counterpart of (114a), or the agreement-less counterpart of (114b) ultimately depends on whether the sentence is intended to be interpreted as being past or present respectively.

(113) % John like linguistics. [Sing.]

(114) a. John liked linguistics.

b. John likes linguistics.

The indistinguishability of tense-less constructions from agreement-less constructions extends to their syntactic properties: tense-less constructions retain all of the properties which I demonstrated are in place for agreement-less constructions in chapter 2. For example, consider the general incompatibility of basic agreement-less constructions with object-topicalisation; attempting to interpret the surface string as having past temporal reference rather than present (thus changing it from an agreement-less construction to a tense-less construction) does not improve the grammaticality of attempting object-topicalisation over an uninflected verb (115a).

(115) a. ?* Mary, Mr. Wu **know**.

Int.: Mary, Mr. Wu knew.

As a further illustration of the parity between tense-lessness and agreement-lessness, consider that the extraction of a more deeply embedded *wh*-adjunct is blocked regardless of whether the verb *say* is intended to be read as having present or past temporal reference.

- (116) * How_i does he think that *Mary say to her friends* that [Peter fixes cars *t_i*]?
 Int.: How_i does he think that Mary said to her friends that Peter fixes cars *t_i*?

Similarly, the reinterpretation of the following question as involving tense-lessness rather than agreement-lessness does not change the fact that the inverse scope reading is not available.

- (117) Context: There is a historical photograph of a group of people whom John, a historian, has been researching. Having spoken to John about the people previously, you now report that:

John says that someone **love** everyone.

$\checkmark \exists > \forall; \boxed{* \forall > \exists}$

‘John says that someone loved everyone.’

This demonstrates that tense-less constructions, like agreement-less constructions, involve the instantiation of A/ \bar{A} P subjects rather than canonical subjects and, accordingly, have the same left peripheral syntax. There is thus twofold parallelism between tense-less constructions and agreement-less constructions: in addition to being identical in terms of their realisations, they are also identical from the perspective of the syntactic module.

On the basis that there are no discernible means to differentiate one from the other, I propose that they together form a natural class and a unified treatment of both groups of constructions is thus warranted; for ease of exposition, I will pivot towards the use of the more neutral label of ‘inflection-less constructions’ in reference to the entire class of Singlish constructions for the remainder of the dissertation.

As part of this unified treatment of inflection-less constructions, I propose that the absence of inflection of both the tense and agreement varieties is due to a difference in the syntactic configuration of the inflectional domain, which crucially involves the syntactic absence of T in addition to Agr_S ²² (for those who are of the inclination that IP is unsplit, this would mean that IP/TP is simply completely absent).

One piece of evidence in favour of (i) the unified treatment of inflection-less constructions as a natural class in Singlish, and (ii) the syntactic tenselessness of these constructions stems from the fact that these constructions uniformly exhibit an incompleteness effect (marked using the ‘%’ symbol, following Tsai 2008) when instantiated without additional contextualisation regardless of intended temporal interpretation. In fact, I will further argue in section 3.5 that this effect can ultimately be attributed to the syntactic absence of T, on the basis that the various ameliorative measures that are available to native speakers to overcome this incompleteness are ultimately alternative means to, either directly or indirectly, provide the hearer with the missing Tense information.

Before doing so, however, I first demonstrate that the inflection-less constructions are genuinely temporally ambiguous to establish minimum baseline for a syntactically tenseless account of Singlish.

²² The motivation for eliminating Agr_S as a projection in Singlish is to maximise the transparency of the structure-form mapping in Singlish. Under this view, the lack of morphological subject agreement in Singlish is a direct consequence of the absence of any structure associated with subject agreement within the Singlish syntax. I suggest the same treatment for both T and Asp in sections 3.3.2 and 3.5 respectively.

3.2.1 Temporal Ambiguity

A necessary (though not sufficient) condition for a language to be considered syntactically tenseless is that it must be temporally ambiguous, with the exact same string being compatible with both present and past interpretations. We saw that this condition is met by Singlish in our baseline example above (112), where both the interpretation in which John presently likes linguistics as well as the interpretation in which John liked linguistics at some point in the past (and, crucially, may or may not like linguistics in the present) are available.

As confirmation of this temporal ambiguity, consider (118) and (119), where both temporal adverbials *last time* and *now* respectively are able to modify the bare inflection-less clause without issue. This is possible only because the bare clause is temporally ambiguous; it is consequently compatible with both the past temporal content of *last time* as well as the present temporal content of *now*.

(118) John **last time** like linguistics. ‘John liked linguistics in the past.’

(119) John **now** like linguistics. ‘John likes linguistics now.’

This is in contrast to the following English examples, which are obligatorily inflected for past or present; as a result of the overt tense inflection, only temporal adverbs which have the same temporal specification are allowed, hence the infelicity of (120), where the verb bears the agreement morpheme and is thus specified for present while the adverbial is specified for past, and (123), where the converse is true.

(120) # John likes linguistics in the past.

(121) John liked linguistics in the past.

(122) John likes linguistics now.

(123) # John liked linguistics now.

Note that in the absence of a temporal adverbial, however, the default interpretation of the bare clause in (112) is the present-tense interpretation. That is, without explicit tense marking via modification by a past temporal adverbial such as *last time*, the past tense interpretation of the bare clause (i.e. the interpretation corresponding to 111) is difficult, if not borderline impossible, to access. One might therefore wonder if the bare clause is truly temporally ambiguous, i.e. whether tense might instead be underlyingly present; the presence of the past temporal adverbial in examples such as (118) would then instead involve the overriding of the temporal value of the bare clause.²³

It transpires that the apparent inaccessibility of the past-tense interpretation of the bare inflection-less clause is actually moderated by the context. Ergo, with the appropriate contextual setup, the past tense interpretation can be forced. One such context is as follows:

(124) Context: John has recently passed away and while going over his belong-

²³ Smith and Erbaugh (2005) suggests that the same thing applies in Mandarin Chinese, stating “adverbs and other information may supplement or override” the temporal specification of the clause which it modifies (p. 714). This is illustrated by the following minimal pair:

- (i) Yuehan zai Meiguo.
John at USA
'John is in the US.'
- (ii) Yuehan [qu nian] zai Meiguo.
John last year at USA
'John was in the US last year.'

In the absence of the adverbial *qu nian* 'last year', the sentence is interpreted as having present reference, but once *qu nian* enters the derivation, the entire clause is obligatorily interpreted as having past reference.

ings, an extensive collection of linguistics books is found. The executor of the will, Mary, explains this as a consequence of the following:

- a. Mary: #John likes linguistics. [Eng.]
- b. Mary: ✓John liked linguistics. [Eng.]
- c. Mary: ✓John like linguistics. [Sing.]

That the tense of a sentence can interact with the lifetime of the subject of the same sentence is a phenomenon that has been noted since Kratzer (1989), who notes that the use of past tense with individual-level predicates, such as in (125), triggers the implicature that the subject of the sentence is no longer alive, while the same effect does not obtain with the stage-level predicates in (126).

- (125) a. Gregory was from America.
b. Gregory had blue eyes.
c. Gregory resembled Jörg Bieberstein. (Musan 1997; 1)

- (126) a. Gregory was happy.
b. Gregory had a cold.
c. Gregory ate cookies. (ibid.; 2)

The effect I am leveraging here is not quite the same as the lifetime effects identified in Kratzer, and can perhaps best be understood as an inverse effect whereby the knowledge that the subject is dead prevents us from using the present tense with certain predicates²⁴, since the use of the present tense triggers the implicature that

²⁴ Unlike Kratzer's lifetime effect, this does not seem to exhibit a clean split along individual/stage-level lines, and is instead dependent on the semantic properties of the predicate in question. For example, subject-experiencer verbs such as *like*, as well as agentive predicates, exhibit the relevant restrictions, while object-experiencer verbs do not.

the subjects are in fact alive.

In the example provided above, John cannot be said to presently like linguistics because John is dead and *like* is a subject-experiencer predicate.²⁵ This is reflected by the infelicity of the present-tense fully-agreeing/standard English example (124a).

Conversely, the past tense counterpart to (124a) is fully acceptable (124b). That the bare inflection-less clause is in fact felicitous in this context (124c) can therefore be taken to indicate that the clause is indeed temporally ambiguous between a present and past interpretation, since we would otherwise expect the inflection-less clause to be just as infelicitous as the fully-inflected present tense construction, seeing as the context of evaluation is the same in both cases.

3.2.2 Other person/number configurations

Thus far, we have only been considering constructions with third person singular subjects. This is no accident: as I have noted previously, it is only with this particular person/number configuration of the subject that we get any overt manifestation of agreement-marking in the present tense paradigm, while all other person/number configurations for the subject result in null tense-marking.

This is a fact of the English agreement system, but it is also a (surface-level) conundrum found in the present endeavour of establishing the properties which apply to specifically the inflection-less constructions of Singlish, since the baseline sentences are overtly uninflected. This means that when we see a surface string such as (127)

²⁵ Note that while this effect can be exceptionally voided by assuming either supernatural or other unnatural, contrived contexts, I am setting those aside for the purposes of the present discussion.

where we have a second person singular subject and no overt tense or agreement marking, we can never be sure if this is an instance of the inflection-less paradigm (which we are interested in) or if it is instead an instance of the fully-inflected paradigm (which we are not).

(127) You like linguistics. [Eng./Sing.]

Note that we do, however, know that such cases do in fact involve agreement/tense marking of the null variety in English, even though the inflection is null and is thus not directly observable, and we know this because of how *do*-support is instantiated when such sentences undergo syntactic operations such as interrogative-formation.

To further explicate: *do*-support is a last resort operation that applies in English to provide phonological support to affixes that have been stranded due to the application of certain syntactic processes. A baseline example is provided in the alternation between (128) and (129), where the *-s* agreement morpheme which surfaces in the simple present declarative (128) has undergone fronting as part of the interrogative formation process to yield (129). This results in the affix being stranded in the sentence-initial position, which is to say that it has been isolated from a suitable phonological hosts, but by virtue of its verbal affixal nature, it needs a host or the derivation will crash. To rescue the derivation, *do*-support is triggered as a last resort, thereby yielding *does* in (129).

(128) John likes linguistics.

(129) Does John like linguistics?

Now, let us consider questions in the simple present with first or second person singular subjects; that there is a bare *do* that surfaces in (131) demonstrates that

there must be a null tense/agreement affixal morpheme that is present in the syntax, since the insertion of auxiliary *do* is only triggered as a last resort to host a stranded affix.

(130) You/I like linguistics.

(131) *Do* you/I like linguistics?

Previously, in chapter 2, our inability to extricate the inflection-less and fully-inflected versions of these sentences from each other constituted a major methodological challenge, since we could not fully test if these inflection-less constructions in particular exhibited the same properties as the other inflection-less constructions where the alternation was overt.

This is in part due to the kinds of properties which were identified as differentiating inflection-less constructions from their fully-inflected counterparts: they were either unable to participate in certain syntactic process (e.g. object topicalisation), or could not receive a particular interpretation which was otherwise available (e.g. inverse scope). More abstractly, I had demonstrated that the distribution of inflection-less constructions was more restricted than that of their fully-inflected counterparts. That the ambiguous strings did not exhibit these distributional restrictions is consequently inconclusive, since we could not determine if their extended distribution was the result of code-switching to the fully-inflected paradigm or, more problematically, the non-existence of inflection-less constructions with these configurations (i.e. there is a gap in the paradigm).

However, now that we have established that inflection-less constructions more generally also have the additional property of being temporally ambiguous, we can now establish that there is no gap in the paradigm, since we can now check if the

same surface strings are compatible with past temporal adverbials. Remember that the problematic strings have to be interpreted as having present reference in English, and should therefore result in ungrammaticality if we attempt to merge an adverbial with a different temporal specification, as in (132), where the past adverbial necessitates the presence of the past tense morpheme.

(132) You like*(d) linguistics in the past. [Eng.]

Conversely, the Singlish construction in (133) is grammatical, demonstrating that it is indeed temporally ambiguous between past and present interpretations.

(133) You last time like linguistics.

‘You liked linguistics in the past.’

This temporal ambiguity extends to the first person and plural paradigms as well:

(134) I last time like linguistics.

(135) We last time like linguistics.

(136) They last time like linguistics.

These examples demonstrate that the semantic alternation (i.e. temporal ambiguity) can obtain even with subjects which, by virtue of not triggering overt agreement morphology in English, do not have non-standard agreement morphology in Singlish. In other words, inflection-less constructions may appear string-identical to fully-inflected ones, and we can identify them either by way of contextual disambiguation, or by unexpected grammaticality/acceptability in contexts which would in English result in derivational crash.

The absence of both tense and inflectional morphology also directly accounts for the absence of *do*-support in Singlish which we saw in section 2.3.5 (the relevant data is repeated below):

(137) **Who** you like?

‘Who do you like?’

(138) **Who** Mary like?

‘Who does Mary like?’

I should, however, note at this point that the temporal ambiguity of inflectionless constructions comes with a caveat in that the present tense interpretation is significantly more accessible than the past; the default interpretation of the inflectionless construction is thus always that of the present.

This is in contrast to what has been claimed of Mandarin in particular: Smith and Erbaugh (2005) observed that Mandarin does not have a singular default temporal interpretation, with different Mandarin verbs having different default interpretations. Smith and Erbaugh report the determination of the default temporal interpretation in Mandarin to be mediated by a default aspectual interpretation which is in turn conditioned by the telicity of the verb in question: telic verbs receive default perfective viewpoint Asp and, consequently, receive past interpretation, while atelic verbs have default imperfective Asp and, accordingly, receive a present interpretation, as illustrated by the contrast between the default present interpretation for the atelic predicate in (139) and the default past interpretation of the telic predicates in (140).

(139) Zhangsan hen mang
Zhangsan very busy

‘Zhangsan is very busy.’

(Lin 2005; 2a)

(140) a. Zhangsan dapuo yi-ge huaping
Zhangsan break one-Cl vase
‘Zhangsan broke a vase.’

b. Ta dai wo qu taibei
ta take me go Taipei
‘He took me to Taipei.’

(ibid.; 3)

Seeing as the Sinitic varieties are the most likely source of the tenselessness that we are observing in Singlish in the first place, this contrast between Singlish and Mandarin is surprising, and thus warrants further scrutiny. To more fully verify if Singlish patterns unlike Mandarin with respect to the default temporal interpretation, consider the direct Singlish counterparts to the Mandarin examples in (140), which have been generated by utilising the word-by-word glosses provided by Lin (2005):

(141) * Zhangsan break a vase.

(142) He bring me go Taipei. ‘He took me to Taipei.’

The judgments here are surprising, albeit for wholly different reasons. First, while the Singlish analogue to (140a), (141), does not pattern with its Mandarin counterpart in receiving default past, it is also not the case that it receives default present, as I have claimed to be the case for Singlish inflection-less constructions more generally. Instead, the construction is simply ungrammatical.

Second, the Singlish analogue to (140b), (142), receives default past, patterning exactly like its Mandarin counterpart, instead of receiving default present, as I have suggested Singlish inflection-less clauses do. Taken in conjunction, these

facts seemingly undermine my earlier claim that Singlish inflection-less clauses are overwhelmingly interpreted as default present. However, I suggest that both of these contrary empirical results can be attributed to the additional complexity in the predicate structure of the Mandarin examples which has not been entirely controlled for in the provided Singlish translations.

Concerning the unexpected ungrammaticality of (141); consider that the predicate *dapuo* in the Mandarin (140a), though glossed simply as *break* in recognition of its truth-conditional contribution, is actually a verbal resultative that can be decomposed into an action predicate *da* ‘hit’, and a result state *puo* ‘break/broken’, a fact that is noted in Smith and Erbaugh (2005), who refer to these constructions as resultative verb complements (RVCs).

Updating the Singlish analogue to more accurately reflect this enriched predicate structure yields a construction that is significantly improved in terms of acceptability (albeit still being somewhat degraded). Notably, to the extent that this sentence can be interpreted, it must receive a past interpretation, much like (142).

(143) ?? Zhangsan break apart a vase.

‘Zhangsan broke/*breaks a vase.’

What sets examples such as (142) and (143) apart from the other Singlish (as well as Mandarin) examples that we have seen so far is the fact that they both involve secondary predication in the form of the result state *apart* in the case of (143), and in the form of the secondary predicate *(to) go to Taipei* in (142). We can therefore refine the generalisation concerning the default temporal interpretation of Singlish inflection-less constructions to be sensitive to the predicate structure of the sentence in question: Singlish inflection-less constructions with simplex predicates

receive default present, while those with complex predicates receive default past.

This leaves us with one final loose thread in the form of (141); why is it that the choice of the simplex eventive *break* results in ungrammaticality rather than receiving default present? I return to this issue in the next section, but for the moment, I will note that eventivity is the key factor in causing the observed degradation, and that this eventive/stative asymmetry that exists in Singlish inflection-less constructions also addresses the lack of default past in Singlish (unlike Mandarin): statives are never telic by default, and must be lexically coerced to receive a telic interpretation. The lack of default past in the Singlish examples is thus a contingent fact that follows from the general ban on tenseless simplex eventives in Singlish.

Before I launch into a more in-depth investigation of the eventive/stative asymmetry in Singlish inflection-less constructions, however, I would like to bring the reader's attention back to the Mandarin examples which we are using as the baseline against which to compare the corresponding Singlish counterparts. In particular, notice that the atelic Mandarin example in (139) above, reproduced below, does not require the use of an overt copula, unlike English (as evidenced by the obligatory copula in the accompanying translation).

- (139) Zhangsan hen mang
Zhangsan very busy
'Zhangsan is very busy.' (Lin 2005; 2a)

Singlish, like Mandarin and the other Sinitic varieties, and unlike English, does not require the use of the copula with adjectival predicates, as illustrated in (144).

- (144) I very busy. [Sing.]
'I am very busy.'

While the default interpretation that the clause receives here is unsurprisingly the present, this is not to say that the past tense interpretation is wholly unavailable; it can be forced, either through the attachment of an adverbial that contains past temporal content, such as *justnow*, to yield (145), or through the provision of additional context; in (146), the temporal adverbial *yesterday* in the question makes the past interpretation of the adjectival predicate the preferred reading since it more directly aligns with the interrogative content of the question (though a present reading is still available if we allow for further manipulation of the context).

(145) Just now I very busy. ‘I was/*am very busy just now.’

(146) Q: Why you never go to the party yesterday?

‘Why didn’t you go to the party yesterday?’

A: I very busy.

‘I was very busy.’

The point here is that the so-called copula-drop constructions in Singlish provide another environment in which we have tenselessness. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the overt form of the copula is the locus of tense in copular constructions; for this reason, I analyse copula-drop constructions more generally as being the inflection-less counterparts of fully-inflected copular constructions (i.e. there is no null past vs. null present copula in Singlish).

3.3 Eventive/stative Asymmetry

We return now to the ungrammaticality of the telic predicate *break* in Singlish inflection-less constructions that we saw in (141) above, reproduced below:

(141) * Zhangsan break a vase.

The ungrammaticality that arises here is not due to a lexical quirk of *break*, but is in fact the result of a more general constraint on eventive predicates more broadly; this is demonstrated by the following minimal pairs between eventive fully-inflected clauses and their inflection-less counterparts:

(147) a. He eats/ate meat.

b. * He **eat** meat. [Intended: 'He eats meat.' or 'He ate meat.']

(148) a. He kicks/kicked a ball.

b. * He **kick** a ball. [Intended: 'He kicks a ball.' or 'He kicked a ball.']

(149) a. He builds/built a house.

b. * He **build** a house. [Intended: 'He builds a house.' or 'He built a house.']

In each of these cases, the omission of the agreement-morpheme/tense-morpheme results in straight ungrammaticality, regardless of whether the intended reading of the constructions is past or present.

Comparing this to the stative paradigms discussed previously, where the same omission results not in ungrammaticality but ambiguity, a stative/eventive asymmetry emerges vis-a-vis inflection-less-ness in Singlish, at least in the basic case; granted, there are some edge cases where inflection-lessness is unexpectedly allowed, as in the cases involving secondary predication, for example (cf. 142). Setting these aside for the time being, the existence of the general stative/eventive asymmetry is itself of significance, and probing deeper into the question of why there should be such an asymmetry in the first place could potentially shed some

light into the syntactic underpinnings of inflection-lessness in Singlish. To answer this question, I first turn to what the literature has claimed regarding the (syntactic) differences between eventive and stative predicates cross-linguistically.

3.3.1 A syntactic account of eventive vs. stative predicates

The syntactic relevance of the eventive/stative distinction goes back at least to Enç (1991), who proposed that while eventive predicates contain a temporal variable which needs to be licensed by a c-commanding clause-mate element which bears temporal content, stative predicates do not. One consequence of this proposal is that in languages where T is obligatorily projected, such as English, the variable is (in principle) always able to be licensed, since T is always available to serve as the licenser for the variable.²⁶

This proposal can be mapped to the proposal that there is a structural distinction between eventive and stative predicates (Noonan 1992; 1993, Travis 2010, Vander Klok and Déchaine 2014). Vander Klok and Déchaine (2014) in particular argues for the internal structures in (150) and (151) for eventive predicates and stative predicates respectively, where Inner Aspect is needed in eventives for the regulation of telicity, which is not required with statives; Enç's temporal variable would therefore be syntactically located within the Inner Aspect projection.

(150) EVENT *vP*: [_{VP} ARG [_V [_{INNER.ASPECT} [_{VP} V ARG]]]] (ibid.; 1)

²⁶ Enç (1991) actually argues that the so-called present tense in English is not a genuine manifestation of T, based on the incompatibility of the bare present with immediate temporal adverbs such as *right now*, as in:

- (i) * John eats the bread right now.

tions is semantic in nature. That is, the failure of T to license the temporal variable would be most easily captured if T were semantically bleached, thus bears no temporal content inherently.

At the same time, however, such a conceptualisation of T is quite problematic, in the following sense: consider what it means for there to be T that does not bear any temporal content inherently. First, this seems contradictory to the very use of the label T, which is characterised by temporality. Second, if the choice of T is no longer restricted to only elements that have temporal content, then this potentially opens the floodgates for literally any element to be able to stand in for T. Taking things to an extreme, nominal elements such as *John*, for example, or even non-linguistic elements, like a snort, should be able to serve as T, seeing as they have just as much inherent temporal content as the deficient T that we are hypothesising here. To prevent this would require additional stipulations to be introduced to the system, thereby making the system as a whole more unwieldy and thus less desirable.

Conversely, the absent-T account attributes the licensing failure to the absence of T entirely. Since T is absent, it is naturally unable to participate in the requisite licensing relation, and the derivation fails to converge when an eventive predicate is merged. The temporal ambiguity of the construction also follows from the absence of T, since there is no locus for the temporal content of past or present to be merged within the syntax.

Both accounts are able to achieve descriptive adequacy, and we therefore cannot tease the two apart on empirical grounds. Instead, the choice between the two rests on theoretical considerations. In a complete vacuum, the absent-T analysis is objectively more desirable, in that it provides a simpler account of the facts: there is

no morphological form and no semantic content because the syntactic category that would have coincided with both (or, indeed, either) simply is not there. Conversely, the deficient-T analysis would have to stipulate that while the syntactic category of T is indeed structurally present, it would also have to simultaneously be specified to be both semantically and phonologically null.

Syntax is not performed in a vacuum, however, so we must turn our attention to other potential reasons to adopt the deficient-T account over the absent-T account before making any conclusions. One reason for the continued privileged status of the inflectional field has to do with the cross-linguistically robust prominence of subject arguments, which has long been formalised within the generative framework as the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) (Chomsky 1981).

The desire to maintain a deficient-T, not only in Singlish, but across all the other purportedly tenseless languages as well, stems from the fact that it allows for there to be a universal locus for the EPP; a syntactically-real, but otherwise undetectable T is then posited as the locus of the EPP. The fact of the matter is, however, that the exact workings of the EPP remain largely ineffable. Furthermore, as I noted in the introduction to this chapter, the analysis which I pursued for agreement-less constructions in the preceding chapter and, by extension, the analysis for inflection-less constructions more broadly, eliminates the EPP issue since the EPP in such constructions is instead satisfied in SpecA/ \bar{A} P.

Given that I have argued in chapter 2 that the A/ \bar{A} P subjects of Singlish are necessarily instantiated in SpecA/ \bar{A} P, and, as I noted in section 3.1, the EPP has to be satisfied in the highest projection within the EPP domain, i.e. A/ \bar{A} P, this means that the EPP must be satisfied in A/ \bar{A} P, regardless of the presence/absence of TP.

With this in mind, consider that in the Chomsky (2000; 2001) system, TP has three ostensible functions, namely (i) to serve as the locus of the EPP, (ii) to serve as the locus of subject agreement, and (iii) to serve as the locus of tense information and morphology.²⁷

Since the EPP in Singlish is (always) satisfied in A/ \bar{A} P, TP is not required to fulfill this function, and as for the second and third functions of T: Singlish inflectionless constructions exhibit neither subject-agreement nor tense-marking on the surface, nor, as I have argued, do they bear any temporal content inherently; we therefore have no empirical basis for assuming that these functions are being fulfilled by T in Singlish at all.

The hypothetical T of Singlish inflectionless constructions could be fulfilling none of the three functions which we expect T to fulfill, and no one would be any the wiser. The absence of any evidence for the existence of T in exactly these contexts leads me to conclude that the null hypothesis, i.e. that there is in fact no T, best accounts for the facts, and that Singlish inflectionless constructions are genuinely syntactically tenseless.

To be clear, this does not preclude an alternative, hypothetical derivation in which there is in fact a TP projection (as desired by a universalist), and a A/ \bar{A} P subject (or a coindexed null subject argument) ultimately does end up in SpecTP (this would, however, leave the special status of Singlish subjects discussed in chapter 2 unexplained), and this argument participates in phi-agreement with T; the fact that we still do not see any morphological reflexes for any of this happening is then simply attributed to a deficiency of T.

²⁷ A fourth function of T is sometimes considered to be the assignment/licensing of nominative case; I assume that this function can similarly be fulfilled by the A/ \bar{A} head.

The point is simply that this is an extremely ad-hoc and inelegant analysis, in that whatever this deficient T is doing, it is doing so without any surface reflexes whatsoever. Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, this analysis comes with a number of theoretical complications which further detract from its attractiveness, not least of which being the fact that T here does not bear its own temporal content.

On top of requiring additional stipulations to capture the non-occurrence of other similarly tenseless elements from showing up in T, the semantically bleached nature of T actually falls afoul of the general considerations that motivated Chomsky (1995) to move to eliminate Agr_S in the Minimalist framework in the first place, namely that it lacks any interpretable features whatsoever (p. 321). The very system that would most benefit from the continued existence of T within the syntax would be forced by its own criteria to exclude T as a syntactic element, ironically enough. In the absence of genuine empirical evidence, this line of analysis is, I believe, best left abandoned.

That said, I will note that the argumentation which I have used to argue for the syntactic tenselessness of Singlish inflection-less constructions is such that any single piece of evidence which irrefutably demonstrates the presence of T in exactly those contexts would need to be independently accounted for. It is thus imperative that we consider any and all such pieces of evidence and determine if they can be addressed independently before we can confidently conclude that Singlish is syntactically tenseless.

I dedicate the next section of the dissertation to exploring a potential source of evidence of exactly this nature: Singlish inflection-less constructions which have future reference.

3.4 On future reference in Singlish

In the preceding discussion of the temporal ambiguity in Singlish inflection-less constructions, I have presented the alternation as being between past and present, rather than being between past and nonpast. This suggests that there is a three-way tense distinction in Singlish, with future being currently unaccounted for. In fact, under the tenseless analysis of Singlish inflection-less constructions I have sketched out above, we might expect there to be freely available future reference, much in the same way that past and present are, in principle, freely available.

However, this empirical prediction is not borne out; while the bare inflection-less construction is compatible with explicitly past temporal adverbials, e.g. *yesterday* in (196), repeated below, it is incompatible with future-oriented temporal adverbials such as *tomorrow*, as demonstrated by the ungrammaticality of (152); instead, either the future-oriented modal *will* (153) or the progressive aspect (154) must be used, mirroring the standard English strategies for expressing future eventualities.

(196) He run a marathon yesterday. ‘He ran/*was running a marathon yesterday.’

(152) * He run a marathon tomorrow. [Int.: ‘He will run a marathon tomorrow.’]

(153) He will run a marathon tomorrow.

(154) He running a marathon tomorrow. ‘He is running a marathon tomorrow.’

This is in contrast to Mandarin; while future-oriented modals can be used to express futurity (cf. *yao* and *hui* in 155), future-oriented temporal adverbials are by themselves sufficient for this purpose (cf. the grammaticality of 156).²⁸

²⁸ I suggest that the source of this contrast has to do with the aspectual inventories of Singlish and

- (155) Ta mingtian hui/yao pao malasong
 He tomorrow HUI/YAO run marathon
 ‘He will run a marathon tomorrow.’
- (156) Ta mingtian pao malasong
 He tomorrow run marathon
 ‘He is running a marathon tomorrow.’

It should be noted that the bare verb cannot express future eventualities even in contexts where the present-tense morpheme is able to do so in English, as evidenced by the contrast between (157) and (158); the use of the progressive morpheme is instead required (159).

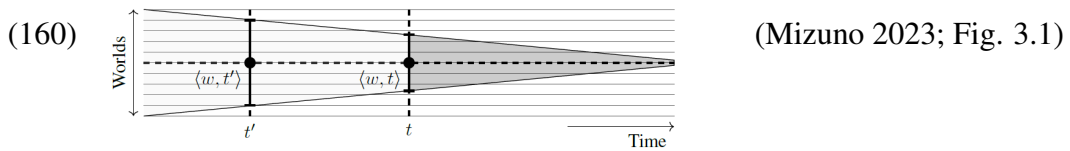
- (157) John flies back to Singapore next week.
- (158) ?* John fly back to Singapore next week.
- (159) John flying back to Singapore next week.

That the bare verb cannot be used to express future reference could be taken to indicate that Singlish is not a genuinely tenseless system, in that it still exhibits a sensitivity to the future/non-future distinction. This is obviously an empirical issue that must be overcome if we are to maintain the tenseless account of Singlish inflection-less constructions which I have laid out in the preceding passages.

The solution to this issue, I suggest, can be found in the semantic interpretation of future/non-future. A number of semantic frameworks, the most pertinent of which perhaps being Thomason’s (1984) $T \times W$ -frames model, have noted that there is an asymmetry between future and non-future, as encapsulated by the twin notions of ‘future uncertainty’ and ‘historical necessity’ respectively (see also, e.g. Mandarin respectively; see section 3.6).

Kaufmann 2005, Mizuno 2023). Intuitively, what this means is that the past is fixed when viewed from the present, i.e. what has happened in the past cannot be changed, while the future remains (relatively) open with respect to the possible outcomes that may yet materialise.

This can be visually represented using the *filter-funnel* model of historical necessity, as in (160), where the x-axis represents the linear progression of time, while individual worlds are represented as parallel lines stretching from the y-axis.



Notice that the world w (indicated by the dotted horizontal line) has different historical alternatives (represented by the vertical bars) at times t' and t respectively, where the earlier time t' has more historical alternatives than the later time t . Here, the historical alternatives of a world w at a time t refers to the worlds that share the same past as w up to time t . Note that the notion of sharing the same past is a reflexive notion, i.e. if w shares the same past as w' , w' also shares the same past as w , meaning that the historical alternatives of a world w at any time t together constitute an equivalence class.

Assuming t to be the present time, the model captures historical necessity by clearly establishing the relevant historical alternatives at both t and any and all preceding times. That is, at time t' , we are able to identify that we are in any of the 10 possible worlds that are spanned by the vertical bar, whilst the passage of time to t further rules out some of these 10 worlds such that we now know we are in one of the five worlds that are historical alternatives to w at t . While the filter funnel projects into the future, there is no way of knowing which of those worlds we are

actually in, since the future projection of the filter funnel (i.e. the shaded portion of the image) depends on the world we are *actually* in.

For example, if we are in the topmost of the five worlds that are in the historical alternatives to w at t , then the projection of the funnel into the future cannot be as depicted, since it would quickly rule out the actual world that we are in. In this way, anything past the present time t within the filter funnel model is only a projection, and we cannot be certain that that is indeed the actual world.

The ineffability of the future really comes down to the fact that we are unable to know, at the present time t , which of the possible worlds which together form the historical alternatives to w at t we are in exactly, since the only thing we can use to verify the identity of the actual world is historical information, and this is uniform across all worlds within the equivalence class, yet which world we are in will affect what the future historical alternatives are.

What of eventualities that are seemingly set in stone, due to logical or metaphysical laws, such as the examples in (161) and (162)?

(161) The sun rises from the East.

(162) One plus one is two.

Are the future counterparts to (161) and (162) in the form of (163) and (164) unknowable in the same way that the less determinate future eventualities that one more commonly encounters are?

(163) The sun will rise from the East tomorrow.

(164) One plus one will (still) be two tomorrow.

The fact of the matter is that even in these cases, the future remains unknowable, since they depend on the relevant logical or metaphysical laws continuing to hold at the relevant future interval (in these cases, tomorrow), and one can always think of a possible world in which those laws cease to apply, unlikely as that may be. For example, it is possible (albeit only infinitesimally so) that the sun implodes the moment after you read this passage; the truth of (161) relative to the moment of reading then, becomes false.

Any statement concerning a future eventuality is therefore necessarily modal (since it is not, or indeed, cannot be, known to be true at the time of utterance), and it is this modal nature of future eventualities that I turn to as an explanation for the absence of the future reading of bare inflection-less clauses. The account that I will be presenting for Singlish therefore mirrors Zanon's (2014) analysis of Turkish in that elements which are seemingly tense-denoting are in fact modal in nature.

3.4.1 Will

At this point, I would like to acknowledge that any discussion of *will* in Singlish will also intersect with an orthogonal body of literature concerning the syntactic status of tense in Chinese, which remains an issue of much contention (Huang 1982, Li 1985, Tang 1990, Lin 2005, Smith and Erbaugh 2005, Sybesma 2007, Lin 2010; a.o.). One piece of evidence which has been presented in support of the existence of tense within the syntax in Mandarin relates to the behaviour and properties of the future-oriented lexical item *jiang*; Huang (2015) argues that these properties indicate that *jiang* is a bona fide future tense marker, and not a modal.

The relevance of this finding to the present endeavour is amplified by the ge-

neological link between Chinese and Singlish, particularly in relation to the tenselessness that I have argued arises in Singlish. Evidence relating to the presence of T in Chinese therefore has some bearing on the discussion of whether T is present in Singlish or not, particularly when there is an easy parallelism between Mandarin *jiang* and Singlish *will*. Indeed, the translations accompanying the *jiang* constructions in Huang (2015) utilise (English) *will* as the closest approximation of the meaning of Mandarin *jiang*, as demonstrated in (165).

- (165) Lisi jiang hui qu Beijing.
 L JIANG HUI go Beijing
 ‘Lisi will go to Beijing.’ (Huang 2015; 2a)

Huang demonstrates that *jiang* patterns differently from other future-oriented tense auxiliaries that can be found in Mandarin with respect to some but not all of the diagnostic tests that are suggested in Ren (2008) (diagnostic f was independently added in Huang 2015):

(166)	Diagnostics for auxiliaries (after Ren 2008)	Is it true for <i>jiang</i> ? (Huang 2015; 4)
a.	Occur only with a main verb	Yes
b.	Cannot take a direct object	Yes
c.	Cannot take aspect markers	Yes
d.	Can form A-not-A questions	No
e.	Can be negated with <i>bu</i> “not”	No
f.	License VP ellipsis	No

As the discussion of *jiang* falls outside the scope of the dissertation proper, I point interested readers to Huang (2015) for a more detailed discussion of the Man-

darin facts. I will also note that the other Sinitic varieties that are prominent in the development of Singlish, in the form of the Southern Min varieties of Hokkien and Teochew, do not appear to have a *jiang* analogue, and this may therefore represent a split between the Sinitic varieties moreso than anything relating to Singlish. That aside, the point that I am trying to make by introducing Huang's findings is simply that further scrutiny of *will* in Singlish is warranted for a variety of reasons.

However, there are a few preliminary issues that need to be dealt with before we can engage in this investigation. The first issue is that it is often difficult to isolate Singlish *will* from English *will*. Recall that the distinction between Singlish and English is based on the presence/absence of agreement; the problem here is that *will* bleeds overt subject-agreement morphology from being realised even in Standard English. Consequently, all *will* constructions are, at least on the surface, inflection-less. How then can we differentiate between Singlish *will* and English *will*? Alternatively, for each instance of *will* that we find from a Singlish speaker, how can we ascertain that it is being used in an inflection-less construction, rather than being the result of cross-clausal code-switching to the fully-inflected English-like paradigm?

To attempt to disambiguate Singlish (i.e. inflection-less) *will* constructions from their string-identical English counterparts, I must take an excursion from directly discussing tense and temporality in Singlish to introduce a number of diagnostic tests which may allow us to fix the object of our investigation in the first place. The first of these potential diagnostic tests comes from the formation of polar questions in Singlish.

3.4.2 An excursion into polar question formation in Singlish

There are three alternative strategies that are available to Singlish speakers for the formation of neutral polar interrogatives.

Of the three, the first option involves the use of subject-auxiliary inversion, as per Standard English, which yields an interrogative of the form in (167). However, the fact that the auxiliary plays a crucial role for the application of this particular question-forming strategy does also mean that it necessarily involves agreeing, rather than inflection-less constructions, at least in non-modal questions, and is therefore a strategy that involves code-switching away from inflection-less constructions; they are thus of limited relevance to the present discussion.

(167) Does Mary like meat?

‘Does Mary like meat?’

The second involves just the use of rising intonation, which is exemplified in (168). The use of this strategy is marked in that it results in incompleteness parallel to what one finds in bare inflection-less constructions. This indicates that there is some pragmatic deficiency that needs to be addressed with interrogatives of this form, as compared to the other interrogative-forming strategies which are available.

(168) % Mary like(*s) meat?

‘Does Mary like meat?’

As before, this sort of pragmatic incompleteness can be addressed in a number of ways, including contextual enrichment. As an example, a context which licenses the rising interrogative may have the following properties: (i) there is a salient decision problem, and (ii) said decision problem can be settled by the answer to the

rising interrogative. In other words, the answer to the rising interrogative constitutes sufficient information for the resolution of the overarching QUD. To analogise, the production of a rising interrogative is much like asking for the final puzzle piece to complete a jigsaw puzzle.

(169) Context: We are currently deciding between a vegetarian and a meat pizza for a party later in the day. Of the invitees to the party, the only person whose dietary preferences I am not entirely certain about is Mary's.

Unlike the first strategy, which is also used in English, this strategy cannot be directly replicated in English. While intonation does play an important role in English interrogatives, with different intonational contours adding different nuances to the interrogative being uttered, crucially, intonation alone is insufficient for the formation of canonical polar interrogatives, even in contexts which have been sufficiently enriched, unlike in Singlish. That is, even if we are in a context such as (169), the English interrogative in (170), which is distinguished from its declarative counterpart only by intonation, cannot be understood as a polar interrogative; (170) can only be used to express incredulity.

(170) * Mary likes meat?

The third strategy that Singlish employs involves the merger of the question-forming particle *anot*, which yields an A-not-A question of the form in (171). This particle is derived from the English *or not*, which is also used in polar interrogatives, as indicated by the accompanying English translation.

(171) Mary like meat anot?

Approx.: 'Does Mary like meat or not?'

Though I have presented the options available for polar question formation in Singlish as distinct strategies thus far, it should be noted that they can be co-instantiated, albeit with some slight degradation, as in (172).

(172) ? Does Mary like meat anot?

This degradation can, I believe, be tied back to a deeper distinction between the Singlish *anot* questions and the English *or not* questions, in that *or not* questions are distributionally restricted relative to *anot* questions. Consider that the *or not* question in (173), while grammatically perfectly well-formed, comes across as stilted or unnecessarily aggressive, an effect which has been noted in the literature as a cornering effect (see, e.g. Biezma 2009).

(173) Does Mary like meat or not?

(174) * Mary likes meat (anot)?

(175) * Mary **do** like meat (anot)?

(176) * Mary **does** like meat (anot)?

Similarly, the use of *anot* is in complementary distribution with the agreement-morpheme, as indicated by the ungrammaticality of (174).

This ungrammaticality is critically not due to a failure in instantiating do-support, as indicated by the ungrammaticality of both bare and inflected *do* in (175) and (176) respectively. In other words, non-inversion is possible only in inflection-less constructions. The latter two question-forming strategies may therefore provide some insight into the status of *will* in Singlish. If *will* constructions are genuinely underlyingly inflection-less, then we should expect *will* to be acceptable when left in-situ. This turns out to not be the case, with *will* being degraded when left in-situ.

(177) Will Mary eat chicken rice for dinner (anot)?

(178) ?* Mary will eat chicken rice for dinner (anot)?

Compare this previously unreported restriction on *will* questions to the behaviour of the other modals in the same context: unlike *will*, they can remain in-situ, i.e. they do not have to undergo inversion, as demonstrated by the grammaticality of (180).

(179) Can Mary eat chicken rice for dinner (anot)?

(180) Mary can eat chicken rice for dinner (anot)?

This indicates that of the modals that one finds in Singlish, *will* exceptionally disallows non-inversion. If we take the lack of inversion to correlate to the absence of (null) inflection, this could be taken to indicate that *will* either is itself inflectional (i.e. it is future T) or necessarily bears inflection (i.e. it must co-occur with null T), which would mean that there is no inflection-less *will* construction in Singlish.

This property of *will* can be understood in three different ways: (i) *will* proves the existence of T, which distinguishes between future/non-future, in Singlish, (ii) *will* constructions, where they surface in Singlish, involve code-switching away from the inflection-less grammar into the fully-agreeing, English-like grammar, or (iii) the general incompatibility of *will* with non-inversion is due to independent constraints which are not related to its (non)status as T.

That *will* cannot be left in-situ is particularly interesting because the following discourse is coherent with both the *will* and progressive forms of the answer, (182a) and (182b) respectively, despite *will* being disallowed in the leading question. This means that *will* can be used in response to what is clearly an inflection-less question.

(181) Question:

- a. * Mary will eat what for dinner?
- b. Mary eating what for dinner?

(182) Answer:

- a. She will eat chicken rice for dinner.
- b. She eating chicken rice for dinner.

Note, however, that the two constructions carry different nuances, with the intuition that (182a) is being used in a predictive manner, and there is consequently an inference that the speaker does not have full confidence in Mary's eating of chicken rice actually being realised. (182b), on the other hand, does not bear any such nuance. The results here are a tad perplexing, since the distribution of *will* in Singlish is doubly marked, first by its unavailability in questions without inversion, and second by its distinctive, i.e. non-English-like, modal flavour.

More succinctly, if we take the first property, the unavailability of *will* in questions without inversion to indicate that it is not inflection-less underlyingly (contrary to the account of syntactic tenselessness which I have established for Singlish more generally), we would predict that it should behave like *will* in fully-inflected constructions (i.e. identically to *will* in Standard English), which is contrary to the second property of Singlish *will*, the fact that it always has a flavour of uncertainty.

This second property of Singlish *will* actually rules out possibility (ii) which I laid out above, where the instantiation of *will* in Singlish is always a result of code-switching into the English-style grammar.

At the same time, it highlights the modal dimension as being one in which

Singlish *will* always operates, which in turn motivates an analysis of Singlish *will* along the lines of possibility (iii), where *will* does in fact have a non-agreeing form, and is not itself an instance of T, but is subject to independent constraints which cause it to behave unlike the other modals which were being considered.

One possibility here is that the independent constraint in question pertains to the semantic content of the modal: unlike the other modals that allow for non-inversion, *will* has an “irrealis” flavour (in the loose sense), as reflected by the sense of uncertainty it necessarily conveys. It may therefore be that non-inversion is sensitive to “irrealis” modality and simply does not tolerate “irrealis” modals within its scope. The apparent inability of Singlish, non-agreeing *will* to be instantiated in uninverted questions can then be directly attributed to its “irrealis” modal content.

Though this might have seemed a bit of a wild goose chase, the semantic differences between the different types of *will* that were uncovered do constitute evidence in favour of a genuinely Singlish *will*, which is, syntactically speaking, a modal, though it also has future temporal content.

Note also that the treatment of *will* as a modal does not preclude it from bearing future temporal content; just as temporal adverbs can explicitly contribute temporal meaning, so too can modals like *will*.

In this way, we get a weak two-way correlation between future reference and *will*: future reference *can* be expressed using *will*, but *will* must express future eventualities.

More generally, we have also seen that temporal adverbs alone are insufficient for expressing future reference in Singlish, though they do not exhibit this same restriction when referencing past or present. This indicates that the (Singlish) future

is inherently modal (see also Cariani 2021; for a general treatment of future as modal).

That said, the exact properties of *will* will only be made apparent when we consider it in contrast to the other strategy that Singlish speakers use to express future reference in the form of the bare progressive.

3.4.3 Future Progressives

The use of the progressive form for the expression of future reference does not involve the same sort of modality that *will* employs. To understand the use of the progressive to express future eventualities, we must first consider the semantics of the progressive. In short, the progressive aspect encodes that the time of evaluation falls within the runtime of the eventuality being expressed. In this way, the progressive circumvents the issue of mood marking entirely by instead expanding the runtime of the future eventuality being described, such that the time of utterance falls within the runtime of the eventuality. In the case of the present progressive interpretation of the bare progressive, the expansion of the runtime to the present is at once both sufficient and necessary, while with the past interpretation, the inclusion of the time of utterance is necessary but not sufficient; the expansion must extend to include the relevant past interval as well. In this way, the entire eventuality being described is no longer unrealis in nature, even though the telic endpoint that constitutes the actual semantic content of the clause remains wholly indeterminate.

This is not to say that the modal and progressive solutions to the conundrum posed by having to express the future are equal, however, and the two approaches come apart when we consider their not-at-issue contributions. To illustrate this,

consider the contrasts between the construction in (183) (which I will refer to as the modal construction below, for ease of exposition) and the progressive construction (184) on the one hand, and the same progressive construction (184) and an alternative progressive construction (185) on the other.

(183) I haven't tell²⁹ John yet, but he will run a marathon tomorrow.

(184) ?* I haven't tell John yet, but he running a marathon tomorrow.

(185) I haven't tell John yet, but he going to run a marathon tomorrow.

The first conjunct clause establishes the context as being one in which the indirect object of the verb *tell*, *John*, has no foreknowledge of the future eventuality which he has become a participant in, namely one which involves his running a marathon. In such a context, the modal construction is perfectly licensed, while the use of the bare progressive is not, at least not without further contextual enrichment.

There is a context in which (184) improves significantly, however, namely one in which the speaker is assumed to have control over John's activities, but crucially, absent such a context, (184) is not acceptable. Note that this is a subset of the contexts in which (183) is licensed, since (183) is also compatible with situations in which the speaker has knowledge of but no control over John's running.

This does not mean that the use of any progressive form is ruled out though, since the use of the *going to/gonna* progressive form is possible here, as evinced by the grammaticality of (185).

Abstracting over the distinction between *gonna* and *will* strategies for expressing future reference, which has been inherited from English, details of which can

²⁹ The construction here involves the use of the present perfect which is realised in Singlish without inflection.

be found in Copley (2009), Klecha et al. (2008), Klecha (2011), Matthewson et al. (2022), I will simply note that there is a slight difference in flavour between the two acceptable constructions, with (185) generating the intuition that the eventuality is somehow more concrete than (183), and that this is expected if the *gonna* construction involves the extension of the event to include the present, the eventuality is therefore connected to the present, and is therefore no longer temporally remote from the context of utterance, while this is not true of the *will* construction.

Interestingly, this also presents another context in which the fully-inflected constructions come apart from its inflection-less counterpart: while the non-culmination of the future eventuality can be expressed with the use of the overt past tense copula in Standard English, the absence of the copula in the Singlish inflection-less construction bleeds this reading, as can be seen in the contrast between (186) and (187).³⁰

(186) I haven't told John yet, but he was going to run a marathon tomorrow (before it was cancelled due to inclement weather). [Eng.]

(187) * I haven't tell John yet, but he going to run a marathon tomorrow (before it was cancelled due to inclement weather). [Sing.]

The contrast above is predicted by the analysis of how the bare progressive is able to express future reference in inflection-less constructions, in the following manner: since the semantic contribution of the progressive morpheme is to extend the runtime of the future eventuality minimally to the extent that it includes the present, regardless of whether the extension continues into the past, the eventual-

³⁰ This contrast also serves as independent evidence that copula-drop in Singlish does not involve a null copula, since we would expect (187) to pattern like (186) otherwise.

ity must now encompass both its original runtime as well as the present interval, which means that once-accessible but now remote worlds are not made available by this operation, hence the requirement that the future eventuality in question must presently be live.

The presence of the syntactically realised past tense that is spelt out on the copula in the English example is able to circumvent this requirement, since it is able to explicitly shift the time interval that we are using to evaluate the truth-conditions of the statement into the past (and indeed, has to do so, given that this is its sole semantic contribution), such that the worlds being evaluated expand to include those that are now remote, so long as they were accessible from the actual world at the relevant past time interval.

The effect of the overt past tense can be simulated in Singlish through the use of the temporal adverbial *at first*, as illustrated in (188), which additionally has an irrealis modal flavour, in that it additionally conveys that the event being described is part of an original course of events which is no longer a live possibility. Crucially, the modal nature of this particular adverb is required to license the expression of the eventuality's non-culmination; a purely temporal adverbial such as *yesterday* is unable to license the same reading (cf. the ungrammaticality of 189). The use of the past temporal adverbial is allowed in such a context only if the eventuality is embedded under a *verbum dicendi*, such as *say* (190), since the embedding verb allows for the embedded eventuality to be irrealis without issue.

(188) At first he going to run a marathon tomorrow (but then it *tio* cancelled because of the rain).

'He was going to run a marathon tomorrow, but it was cancelled because of

the rain.'

- (189) * Yesterday he going to run a marathon tomorrow (but then it *tio* cancelled because of the rain).

Int.: 'Yesterday, he was going to run a marathon tomorrow (=today), but it was cancelled because of the rain.'

- (190) Yesterday he say he going to run a marathon tomorrow (but then it *tio* cancelled because of the rain).

'Yesterday, he said he was going to run a marathon tomorrow (=today), but it was cancelled because of the rain.'

While future reference cannot be expressed using bare inflection-less constructions in Singlish, we have seen that this is compatible with the syntactic account of tenselessness in Singlish endorsed here in that this incompatibility with the future can be attributed to the inherent modality of future-directed language, and it is this modality and not futurity itself that must be encoded explicitly.

3.5 Aspect in Singlish

Recall that the hypothesised temporal variable in eventive predicates that is the basis of the eventive/stative split in inflection-less constructions can be licensed by a clause-mate element that bears temporal content: along with T and adverbs of the appropriate type, Asp(ect) is one such element.

We now face an interesting question of how aspect figures in the picture I have sketched above of the syntax of inflection-less constructions. First, since Asp too fits the bill as a potential licensor for the temporal variable, we predict the merger of

Asp to alleviate the ungrammaticality of having inflection-less eventive predicates.

This is indeed the case, as demonstrated by the contrast in grammaticality between the bare inflection-less (191) and the progressive morpheme-bearing (192). One might wonder how we can be certain that the overtly-marked *-ing* form of the predicate is an instance of an inflection-less verb, seeing as this *-ing* form is invariant in English, regardless of tense or agreement specification. However, note that these alternations are not completely obliterated in English, since they are instead spelt out on an obligatory copula which is coinstantiated with the progressive verb. As with the previous examples involving adjectival predicates, then, I take the absence of the copula in the progressive constructions to be an indicator that the progressive is being instantiated in an inflection-less clause.³¹

(191) * John eat cake.

(192) John eating cake. ‘John is eating cake.’

As before, we retain the same sort of temporal ambiguity that characterises inflection-less constructions more generally; in (193), the temporal adverbial *just now* forces the past interpretation of the progressive predicate, while the past temporal adverbial *yesterday* in the immediately preceding question heavily biases the hearer towards the past tense interpretation of the progressive over the present in the answer clause (though again, the present tense interpretation can be accessed if we assume a sufficiently complex context).

(193) Just now I writing my dissertation. ‘I was/*am writing my dissertation just now.’

³¹ See fn. 8 for evidence that the absence of the copula is genuine absence from the syntax in the same way that I am analysing the absence of tense/agreement marking more generally.

(194) Q: Why you never go to the party yesterday?

‘Why didn’t you go to the party yesterday?’

A: I writing my dissertation.

‘I was writing my dissertation.’

The positive interaction of inflection-less eventive clauses with the progressive morpheme here serves as further evidence that the ungrammaticality observed in the bare clauses is due to the failure of the temporal variable to get licensed. However, it does simultaneously raise the question of whether we might want to say that the bare clauses are also aspectless, on top of being tenseless.

This is of increased significance given the cross-linguistic generalisation explored in works such as Todorovic (2016) that the class of purportedly tenseless languages are all characterised as having an enriched inventory of aspectual markers, which allows for them to establish the relevant temporal relations without necessarily invoking tense directly in the syntax.

One fact which sets Asp apart from T in English inflection-less constructions is that while there is an overt progressive aspect marker which can surface in inflection-less constructions, there are no such T markers.

Now, we might wonder if this is simply an artefact of how we have chosen to represent the paradigm under consideration, in that the entire class of constructions under discussion is *defined* as involving the absence of inflectional morphology. Under this view, the availability of tense-marking outside of inflection-less constructions should be evidence for the syntactic projection of T much in the same way that the availability of the progressive marker signals the syntactic projection of Asp.

This concern can be addressed by noting that the absence of agreement corresponds to a much broader difference in syntactic structure than just temporal ambiguity, as established in chapter 2, while the presence/absence of aspectual marking does not correspond to this same alternation. We can therefore set the syntactic configuration of inflection-less constructions which we are presently discussing completely aside from that of the fully-inflected constructions, and within this restricted set, we only find evidence for the syntactic projection of aspect rather than both aspect and tense.

There is, conversely, evidence to suggest that while Asp is *available* in inflection-less constructions more generally, and that it licenses eventive predicates when it is overtly merged, in *bare (i.e. Asp-less) inflection-less constructions* it is either (i) not merged or (ii) sufficiently semantically deficient such that the temporal variable licensing cannot obtain, since we would not expect an eventive/stative contrast in exactly those cases otherwise.

Throughout the dissertation thus far, I have provided evidence at every turn that the relevant potentially null elements are simply not present in the structure. That is, Singlish appears to be a language where what you see is truly what you get in the relevant respect. I therefore suggest that this extends to the aspectless inflection-less clauses. Since we do not see any overt aspectual marking, Asp is simply not present in the structure. A key point of note here is that Asp is not assumed to be projected in every clause, unlike T, even in English. Hence, English clauses that do not involve aspectual marking are standardly assumed to not contain any AspP projection whatsoever (see, e.g. Bošković 2014). I am thus extending this treatment to Asp in Singlish.

Given this, the reason why progressive readings of bare clauses are impossible, even when we attempt to force said progressive readings by manipulating the choice of adverbial and by controlling for the form of the object (i.e. when we force an interaction between the adverbial and the singular object to eliminate all other possible readings, cf. the ungrammaticality of 195³²) is because progressive meaning must be expressed using the progressive morpheme.

(195) * He run a marathon now.

[Int.: 'He is running a marathon now.']

(196) He run a marathon yesterday.

'He ran/*was running a marathon yesterday.'

(197) He running a marathon now.

'He is running a marathon now.'

Note that the source of the ungrammaticality there cannot be a failure to license the temporal variable in the eventive predicate, since the presence of the overt temporal adverbial is a sufficient condition to take care of the licensing requirement, as evidenced by the grammaticality of (196).

Interestingly, if the intended meaning is habitual instead, the merger of the temporal adverbial actually becomes sufficient to address the licensing issue, as demonstrated by the grammaticality of (198), albeit with a plural object, since this is necessary for a habitual reading of the entire clause. In fact, the nature of the event

³²The interaction that I am attempting to use to force the progressive reading is also what causes (i) to be ungrammatical in English.

(i) They run a marathon now.

[Eng.]

being described here, i.e. the running of marathons, interacts with the temporal adverbial to force the habitual reading of the clause, since one cannot, at any singular point of time, be running multiple marathons simultaneously.

(198) He run marathons now.

‘He (habitually) runs marathons now.’

Even when we switch to a different minimal pair, where the progressive is in principle allowed, due to the possibility of executing multiple instances of the same event, such as in the baking of cakes, the progressive interpretation is ruled out in favour of the habitual.

(199) He bake cakes now.

‘He {(habitually) bakes/*is baking} cakes now.’

It is clear that the expression of progressive meaning requires the use of the progressive morpheme. The question then is: why?

To account for this, I turn to an insight from Chierchia (1998) regarding the obligatory realisation of a different lexical category, namely that of D in languages which have a corresponding lexical item for the definite determiner.

Chierchia’s (1998) proposal centres around the idea that in languages which lack morphological determiners, the appropriate interpretation of the bare nominal can be achieved by means of a type-shifting operation in the semantics. However, to prevent such a type-shifting operation from allowing free interpretation of any bare nominal even in languages with dedicated lexical items which perform the same type-shifting function, Chierchia proposes the following constraint on the applicability of the null type-shifter:

(200) *Blocking Principle* ('Type Shifting as Last Resort') (Chierchia 1998; 26)

For any type shifting operation τ and any X:

* $\tau(X)$

if there is a determiner D such that for any set X in its domain,

$D(X) = \tau(X)$

Chierchia's proposal is particularly conceptually appealing, since it represents a rare attempt to constrain the enormously powerful operation of type shifting, by forcing type shifting to be morphologically transparent where possible.

Though Chierchia's formalisation of the principle preventing the use of the type shifter when an overt determiner is available is formulated to be specific to operations which change the semantic type of their arguments, at a more abstract level the effect of the blocking principle can be restated as the following:

(201) *Generalised Blocking Principle*

If there is a lexical item with semantic function x , that lexical item must be used for function x instead of a semantic operation without morphological reflex.

This similarly forces a more direct mapping between form and content, which is especially desirable given my characterisation of Singlish as a language in which what you see is truly what you get in the domains which we have examined thus far.

This more general reformulation of the blocking principle accounts for the obligatory use of the *-ing* morpheme for the expression of regular progressive meaning, and can also be applied more generally to the use of either the progressive

or *will* in future-oriented constructions as well: either the progressive is merged, thereby changing the modality of the future eventuality, or the eventuality remains “irrealis” and the generalised blocking principle kicks in and forces the realisation of *will* to salvage the situation.

However, there is one place where the general blocking principle does not seem to force the realisation of any particular morpheme, namely when it comes to the regulation of habitual vs. perfective meaning, in that we can arrive at the appropriate habitual or perfective meaning by referencing the temporal adverbials that are being used. To illustrate, changing the temporal adverbial in (199) from *now* to *yesterday* changes the interpretation from habitual to perfective (202).

(202) He bake cakes yesterday.

‘He baked cakes yesterday.’

The suggestion here is that Singlish simply does not have the appropriate dedicated morphology which is able to directly encode either perfective or habitual aspect as a direct result of English also not having dedicated perfective or habitual aspectual morphology.

English instead largely relies on simple tense morphology to disambiguate between perfective and habitual, as indicated by the accompanying translations for (199) and (202).

Consider that the application of the blocking principle which I proposed is conditioned upon there being a lexical item with the relevant semantic function; since there is no dedicated morphology to express either perfective or habitual meaning, the blocking principle does not apply in this case.

A secondary problem remains, however: why is it that the disambiguation be-

tween habitual and perfective requires the use of an overt temporal adverbial here when the disambiguation between past and present with stative predicates only required contextual enrichment?

Firstly, I would like to say that this supposed contrast between aspect and tense with respect to the possible disambiguation strategies is in fact somewhat illusory. While the usage of a temporal adverbial does indeed resolve the aspectual ambiguity we find above, it actually also addresses the temporal ambiguity simultaneously. Consider that in (202) above, repeated below, the temporal adverbial *yesterday* not only forces perfectivity, but also past interpretation.

(202) He bake cakes yesterday.

‘He baked cakes yesterday.’

Recall that I proposed that, like English, AspP is projected in Singlish only when there is overt aspectual morphology. These constructions are thus both Asp-less and T-less, since they lack both aspectual and tense morphology.

The need for a temporal adverbial in such cases is therefore not the immediate result of a need to resolve the ambiguity in the aspectual domain. Instead, it follows from the fact that the licensing requirement that eventive predicates exhibit would not otherwise be satisfied, since neither Asp nor T are present structurally. That the temporal adverbial resolves the aspectual ambiguity is thus entirely incidental.

To reiterate: the temporal adverbs *now* and *yesterday* in (199) and (202) respectively are required to satisfy the licensing requirement of the eventive predicate *bake*, and not to resolve the aspectual ambiguity, though they happen to perform this function as well.

There is also the possibility that there are additional pragmatic considerations

which are feeding the obligatory use of the temporal adverbial in exactly those contexts. Consider that bare Singlish inflection-less clauses are ambiguous both in terms of tense as well as aspect, and consider that these ambiguities can, in principle, be dealt with by means of contextual enrichment. The issue may therefore be that there are limits on what the pragmatics module can salvage: while it can deal with either ambiguity, the compounding of one ambiguity on top of the other leads to interpretational difficulties which manifest as ungrammaticality.

The hypothesised dependence on the pragmatics module for the temporal situation of the semantic content of any given clause would, I argue, account for the incompleteness effect that arises in uncontextualised bare statives, which does not have a temporal variable, and thus should not be sensitive to the absence of both tense and aspect at all. Under this account, the stative would still require support from the pragmatics module for the requisite tense information, and in the absence of additional context, the pragmatics module simply does not contain the appropriate amount of information to consistently provide the relevant temporal information.

Another upside of the pragmatic account I have sketched here is that it captures the apparent exception to the ban on bare eventive inflection-less predicates in the case of *verba dicendi* in the following manner. First, consider that the use of the simple present is exceptionally allowed with *verba dicendi* in English even when the actual event of saying is clearly situated in the past.

This is because the habitual interpretation of *verba dicendi* entails the perfective interpretation of the same verb, in the following way: if an individual is reported to presently say X, then the individual must have said X. At the same time, the use of

the habitual in these cases is exceptionally allowed, even when the speaker does not actually repeatedly make the same claim, because of how we keep track of speaker commitments within a discourse: if an individual said X, and has not rescinded or amended their speaker commitments to reflect the cessation of their commitment to the proposition, then we can reasonably expect them to continue to say X, regardless of if they do or do not actually perform the speech act of saying again. This is exemplified by the availability of the simple present on *say* in (203), where there has been no interim revision to A's speaker commitments, and the unavailability of the simple present in (204), where there has.

(203) A: I'm going to Malaysia tomorrow

... *later in the day* ...

B [to C]: A says/said he is going to Malaysia tomorrow.

(204) A: I'm going to Malaysia tomorrow

... *later in the day* ...

A: It turns out that I'm no longer going to Malaysia tomorrow.

... *even later in the day* ...

B [to C]: A {said/*says} he {was/*is³³} going to Malaysia tomorrow.

The ambiguity between habitual and perfective with *verba dicendi* is thus, in a sense, inconsequential to the contribution of the entire structure to the discourse,

³³ The unavailability of the simple present in the embedded clause here may either be attributed to the fact that the eventuality of *going to Malaysia tomorrow* is now contrary to fact, and thus must be explicitly marked as being counterfactual by using Fake Past (i.e., an occurrence of Past or Perfect morphology that apparently lacks its ordinary temporal meaning; cf. Iatridou 2000), or because the future eventuality of *going to Malaysia tomorrow* is accessible only if evaluated from a past temporal point that is indicated by the past copula, a past temporal point which is possibly being provided by means of Sequence of Tense from the past tense on the matrix embedding *say*.

and can be innocently ignored by the pragmatic component in determining the interpretation of the clause. The cognitive difficulty with categorising the informational update is thereby circumvented entirely. In the absence of additional context, we thus only get incompleteness, despite the eventive nature of the inflection-less verb here.

(205) % He say he going to Malaysia tomorrow.

‘He says/said he is going to Malaysia tomorrow.’

Finally, this analysis also provides a potential account of the perplexing example (142) presented above, repeated below. This particular example constitutes another case in which there is a bare inflection-less eventive, in the form of the main predicate *bring*, but none of the corresponding ungrammaticality that we predict to surface with bare inflection-less eventives.

(142) He bring me go Taipei.

‘He took me to Taipei.’

I suggest that the secondary predicate here *go Taipei* is serving to resolve the aspectual ambiguity that causes the catastrophic interpretational challenges which arise in other bare inflection-less eventive constructions. This is evidenced by the fact that the string cannot be interpreted habitually:

(206) He bring me go Taipei.

‘He {took/*habitually takes} me to Taipei.’

In fact, the habitual interpretation is not easily accessible, in that it cannot be forced even through the use of a present temporal adverbial such as *now* (207), cf.

(195). The only way to get a habitual reading is through the use of a quantifier over events (208).

(207) * He bring me go Taipei now.

Int.: 'He takes me to Taipei now.'

(208) He always/sometimes/nowadays bring me go Taipei.

'He always/sometimes/now takes me to Taipei.'

This suggests that the secondary predicate corresponds to a result state that is more generally incompatible with the habitual (unless there is explicit quantification over events); this incompatibility is illustrated using the English examples below, where the present tense marker in the resultative construction is much more naturally interpreted as historical present rather than habitual (209) *unless* there is a quantificational adverb such as *everyday* (210).

(209) He sweeps the floor clean. [Eng.]

(210) He sweeps the floor clean everyday. [Eng.]

The inclusion of the secondary predicate therefore resolves the ambiguity in aspectual interpretation in favour of the perfective, and thus circumvents the doubled pragmatic penalty that usually arises with bare inflection-less eventives.

3.6 The aspectual inventory of Singlish

The picture which I have presented so far indicates that Asp is projected in Singlish only with progressives. I present further evidence for the existence of Asp more

broadly, by considering other aspectual specifications which are present within the Singlish aspectual system.

Bao (2015) provides a summary of the various aspectual categories that are attested in Singlish, and proposes that while the individual lexical items that serve as realisations of the aspectual categories are drawn from the English lexicon, their functional content and distribution is instead drawn from Chinese.

Completive *already*, sometimes also rendered *ore di* to more directly reflect its phonological realisation, attaches to events and expresses the completion of the modified event, as approximated by the use of the simple past and present perfect in the translation in (211a).

Bao (2015) reports that *already* also has an inceptive and an inchoative function; reflected by the translations in (211b) and (211c) respectively:

- (211) Miss Lin eat noodles already. (adapted from Bao 2015; (9))
- a. ‘Miss Lin ate/has eaten noodles.’ (completive)
 - b. ‘Miss Lin has started/is about to eat noodles.’ (inceptive)
 - c. ‘Miss Lin eats noodles now (and she did not before).’ (inchoative)

However, I report that access to the inceptive and inchoative readings is subject to variation, with some speakers requiring the presence of additional aspectual markers, namely the progressive *-ing* and the existential *got* for the inceptive and the inchoative respectively.

(212) Miss Lin eating dessert already. (inceptive)

(213) Miss Lin got eat dessert already. (inchoative)

Bao (2015) suggests that while *already* is, for these speakers, ambiguous, the same cannot be said of the corresponding Mandarin constructions, due to a difference in word order for *le* that does not apply to Singlish *already*, which always occurs sentence-finally, as demonstrated by the two alternative positions for *le* in (214).

- (214) Mandarin *le* (adapted from Bao 2015; (13))
- a. Mary chi-le mian.
Mary eat-ASP noodles
'Mary has eaten noodles.' (completive)
 - b. Mary chi mian le.
Mary eat meal ASP
 - i. 'Mary started/is about to eat noodles.' (inceptive)
 - ii. 'Mary eats noodles now.' (inchoative)

Incidentally, though perhaps not coincidentally, the domain of aspectual markers is one in which the distinct Sinitic substrates of Singlish come apart, with Singlish patterning more like Southern Min than Mandarin; like Singlish *already*, Southern Min's cognate for Mandarin *le*, *liao*, only appears sentence-finally.

- (215) a. * Mary jia-k-liao mee
Mary eat-ASP noodles
Int.: 'Mary has eaten noodles.' (completive)
- b. Mary jia-k mee liao
Mary eat noodles ASP
'Mary has eaten noodles.' (completive)
- (216) Mary to jia-k mee liao

Mary at eat noodles ASP

‘Mary started/is about to eat noodles.’ (inceptive)

(217) Mary u jiak mee liao

Mary have eat noodles ASP

‘Mary eats noodles now.’ (inchoative)

This split, between Mandarin on the one hand and Singlish and Southern Min on the other, is corroborated by the fact that the verb-adjacent *le* and sentence-final *le* ‘come from two different sources historically and are thus functionally distinct and occupy different syntactic positions’ (Liu 2015; p. 280); Southern Min *liao* is therefore a cognate only of the *le* that appears sentence-finally, but not of verb-adjacent *le*. In turn, the distribution of Singlish *already* patterns with Southern Min *liao* rather than Mandarin *le*.

This account of Singlish *already* also has the upshot of capturing the judgments of the alternative speaker population who do not find the Singlish constructions ambiguous. As demonstrated in the Southern Min examples above, the three-way ambiguity reported by Bao (2015) for Singlish *already* is resolved by the interaction between sentence-final *liao* and the presence of the aspectual markers *to* ‘at’ and *u* ‘have’; for the speaker population that I am looking at, these are mapped into Singlish as the progressive morpheme *-ing* and existential *got* respectively.

Southern Min *u* also has a direct Singlish analogue in the form of *got*, derived from English *got*, but having a function that more closely aligns with *have*, in that it existentially quantifies over the main predicate and asserts direct experience of it.

There are two other experiential markers in the form of *ever* and *before*, both derived from English; interestingly, these aspectual markers seem weak, and need

support from at least one other experiential marker to be fully acceptable.

(218) I ever got go Taipei.

(219) I ever go Taipei before.

(220) I got go Taipei before.

The surface form of the completive marker *finish* is drawn from English verb *finish*, which bears the semantic meaning of completion, but has the distribution of the Southern Min *ho* or the Mandarin *wan*, in that it surfaces in the verb-adjacent position.

(221) He eat finish the cake.

‘He (completely) ate the cake.’

Bao (2015) further claims that there are two other states which are present in Mandarin but not in Singlish in the form of the stative imperfective, which is derived by attaching the durative marker to statives, and the so-called tentative aspect, that is used in Chinese and has the function of highlighting the short duration of an event; the morphological realisation of this aspectual viewpoint takes the form of verbal reduplication.

Bao (2015) reports that while there are a number of verbs that appear to undergo reduplication, and when they surface in their reduplicated forms, they express a meaning similar to the tentative, they appear to be constrained to a closed class of lexical verbs. That is, the use of verbal reduplication as a genuine, freely productive tentative aspectual marker does not appear to be present in Singlish, given the purported ungrammaticality of examples such as (222b) and (222c).

and therefore does not have a cognate for Mandarin *zhe*. For eventive imperfectives, Singlish instead employs the progressive *-ing* morpheme, which is drawn from English, but because *-ing* does not attach to statives, the stative imperfective is inexpressible in Singlish.

The fact that the progressive morpheme *-ing* exhibits constraints based on its properties in the source language of English may also shed some light on a puzzling contrast between Singlish and Mandarin which I observed earlier in section 3.4, where Chinese is able to express future meaning with just the use of a future-oriented temporal adverbial, where Singlish requires the use of either the future-oriented modal *will* or the progressive morpheme *-ing*. The suggestion here is that there are two properties which differentiate the English progressive morpheme *-ing* from its Mandarin counterpart *zhe*, with the first being the (in)ability to attach to statives, and the second being a difference in its ability to extend the runtime of a future eventuality. This is illustrated by the ungrammaticality of *zhe* in (225), in contrast to the obligatory use of *-ing* in the corresponding Singlish example.

(224) John running a marathon tomorrow. [Sing.]

(225) Yuehan mingtian pao (*zhe) malasong
John tomorrow run ZHE marathon
'John is running a marathon tomorrow.'

Recall that in a system which has a generalised version of Chierchia's blocking principle active, morphemes which bear semantic content cannot be dropped without losing the relevant semantic meaning; the strategy in which we extend the future eventuality to contact, i.e. to abut, the present, so as to change its modality, requires the use of *-ing* in Singlish because it has the appropriate semantic function

that achieves this, while the same cannot be said of the Mandarin *zhe*, which does not, and thus, it cannot be used, much less be forced, in these contexts.

At any rate, the facts surrounding the aspectual inventory of Singlish indicate that here, just like everywhere else, we see the combined influence of both Chinese and English. The Chinese influence on the development of Singlish has resulted in an aspectual system that is enriched relative to that of English, but at the same time, we see some constraints from English being inherited into the system; in line with the superstrate status of English, where it is the source for the bulk of the lexical inventory of Singlish, these constraints appear to have been introduced by the lexical properties of individual morphemes.

At any rate, an implication of the generalised blocking principle which I proposed above is that the presence/absence of tense morphology cannot be purely optional, since this would contravene the blocking principle; bare inflection-less clauses should never be able to receive a past interpretation, since the dedicated *-ed* morpheme is not realised. Yet – the fact remains that Singlish speakers alternate between using and not using both tense and agreement markers in their daily speech. How can we best reconcile this disconnect between the proposed blocking principle and the empirical facts that we observe?

One avenue for reconciliation is to suggest that Singlish speakers do not purely speak *just* Singlish in their day-to-day, and utterances containing overt manifestations of tense or agreement (i.e. fully-inflected/non-inflection-less constructions), are in fact instances of code-switching into English.

This view receives some support from the complementary distribution of many of the sentence-final particles that exist in Singlish and overt tense morphology,

i.e. many particles in fact resist attachment to overtly tensed clauses (which itself constitutes a further argument that the absence of inflectional morphology cannot be a simple PF alternation), as below:

(226) ?* John eats watermelon meh?

(227) * John ate watermelon meh?

(228) John got eat watermelon meh?

(229) ?* John said he damn smart sia.

(230) ?* John says he damn smart sia.

(231) John say he damn smart sia.

The determination of where (or, even, whether) we find code-switching in Singlish constitutes a project that is immensely large in its own right, and thus falls far beyond the established research questions which I am trying to answer in this dissertation, and I must therefore leave it to future research.

3.7 Conclusion

In summary, I have demonstrated that the absence of agreement-morphology in the Singlish clauses discussed in chapter 2 also results in temporal ambiguity. I have thus proposed that all clauses which lack regular inflectional morphology in Singlish, be it tense or agreement, should be treated in a unified fashion, i.e. they lack Agr_S/TP but involve the projection of $A/\bar{A}P$, where the subjects of these clauses are situated.

I have argued that the temporal ambiguity that we find in inflection-less constructions is best accounted for if such clauses are syntactically tenseless. I have presented novel empirical data concerning the existence of an eventive/stative asymmetry with respect to the acceptability of inflection-lessness in simplex clauses, where the absence of inflection results in ungrammaticality with eventive predicates and not with stative ones, and suggested that the asymmetry is due to a failure to explicitly (semantically) license the temporal variable which is found in eventive but not stative predicates, in part because T, which is usually able to perform this licensing function (e.g. in English), is simply not present in Singlish.

I have argued against an account of the facts where T would be syntactically present, on the basis that such a T would have to be virtually undetectable. One particular function which null-T approaches to morphologically tenseless languages often attribute to T is that it is the locus for the EPP; I have argued that in Singlish the EPP can (and indeed, must) instead be satisfied in A/ \bar{A} P, under the contextual approach to the EPP established in Bošković (2023). The net result of this is that I have proposed that the inflectional system of Singlish is one in which what you see is what you get: the absence of inflectional morphology follows directly from the absence of any underlying syntactic material in the relevant domain.

I have also demonstrated that while future-oriented statements require additional morphological marking, this requirement does not stem from their inherent futurity, but their modal nature, paired with independent constraints on the morphological realisation of modality, which I have attributed to a generalised blocking principle modelled after Chierchia's (1998). This generalised blocking principle essentially forces the use of dedicated morphology where possible, and allows for

the reconciliation of the apparent need to distinguish between future and non-future tense with the tenseless system I have built, by recasting it as a need to morphologically realise the modality inherent to future eventualities.

I also noted that an alternative strategy which is employed when expressing future eventualities involves the use of the progressive morpheme *-ing*, which I attributed to the modality-changing properties of the use of the progressive. I then proposed that the transparency between the syntax and the surface realisation of Singlish clauses extends to the aspectual system of Singlish, where the absence of aspectual morphology corresponds to the absence of the syntactic category of Asp. The ungrammaticality of eventive predicates in Singlish clauses which lack both inflection and aspectual marking is thus due to the simultaneous absence of both T and Asp in such constructions.

In addition to this, I outlined a supplementary pragmatic account that can capture the overall pattern of unacceptability with bare eventives, while also capturing a number of exceptions and the incompleteness that arises in uncontextualised bare statives. Under this account, the pragmatic module is, in principle, able to provide the relevant temporal and aspectual information, but is restricted to only being able to perform one of the two rescue functions at any given time, which results in incompleteness with bare statives, but not with eventives, which are ungrammatical either because of the aforementioned licensing failure, or because of a doubled pragmatic violation.

Finally, I considered the aspectual inventory of Singlish, and compared it to that of Chinese. I observed that the differences in the distribution and behaviour of the Singlish aspectual morphemes and their Mandarin counterparts could be attributed

either to cross-linguistic variation across the Sinitic varieties, with Singlish patterning with Southern Min where it comes apart from Mandarin, as is the case of the completive aspect marker, or to the lexical properties of the aspectual morpheme being preserved from the original source language, as in the case of the progressive morpheme *-ing* vs. its Mandarin counterpart *zhe*.

This latter observation suggests that while the various aspects of Singlish which I have investigated in the dissertation so far have patterned more so with Chinese than with English, the primarily English-derived nature of the Singlish lexicon also means that we sometimes see the interaction of English lexical properties with Chinese structural configurations in Singlish.

In the next chapter of the dissertation, I discuss another area in which Singlish exhibits mixed influence from both Chinese and English in the form of the nominal domain of Singlish.

Chapter 4

The Nominal Domain

We turn our attention now to the structural configuration of the nominal domain of Singlish. Various properties of the Singlish noun phrase have been reported sporadically in the literature, Gil (2003) in particular makes a number of claims regarding the distribution of different types of nominals, while Alsagoff and Ho (1998) provide a description of relative clauses in Singlish.

In this chapter of the dissertation, I will evaluate some of the claims made in Gil (2003), and present new empirical data which show that the judgments reported by Gil's informants do not hold for the speaker population whose judgments I am reporting in this dissertation. In fact, I will demonstrate that some of the constructions which Gil reports as being grammatical or possible are extreme violations for my speakers.

However, to begin, I will establish some basic word order facts for the Singlish nominal phrase.

4.1 The overlap between Singlish and English nominals

The nominal structure of Singlish is, at first blush, simply inherited directly from English. As in English, Singlish allows only for the Dem > Num > A(dj) > N word order in a noun phrase containing all four elements. All other logical combinations result in unacceptable strings.

To more fully illustrate this, I provide the full paradigm comprising all 24 logically possible word orders for the four elements, beginning with the six word orders where the demonstrative appears phrase-initially. As noted above, only the order in (232a), where the demonstrative, numeral, adjective, and noun appear exactly as listed, is acceptable, and any other ordering of the non-demonstrative elements leads immediately to ungrammaticality:

- | | | | |
|-------|----|-------------------------|--------------------|
| (232) | a. | Those three red books | Dem > Num > A > N |
| | b. | * Those three books red | *Dem > Num > N > A |
| | c. | * Those books three red | *Dem > N > Num > A |
| | d. | * Those red three books | *Dem > A > Num > N |
| | e. | * Those red books three | *Dem > A > N > Num |
| | f. | * Those books red three | *Dem > N > A > Num |

As mentioned previously, the demonstrative is necessarily phrase-initial within the nominal phrase. This is corroborated by the fact that none of the word orders where the numeral comes first is grammatical, as illustrated in the following:

- | | | | |
|-------|----|-------------------------|--------------------|
| (233) | a. | * Three those red books | *Num > Dem > A > N |
|-------|----|-------------------------|--------------------|

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|--------------------|
| b. | * Three those books red | *Num > Dem > N > A |
| c. | * Three books red those | *Num > N > A > Dem |
| d. | * Three books those red | *Num > N > Dem > A |
| e. | * Three red those books | *Num > A > Dem > N |
| f. | * Three red books those | *Num > A > N > Dem |

Similarly, the adjective cannot be phrase-initial either:

- | | | | |
|-------|----|-------------------------|--------------------|
| (234) | a. | * Red those three books | *A > Dem > Num > N |
| | b. | * Red those books three | *A > Dem > N > Num |
| | c. | * Red books those three | *A > N > Dem > Num |
| | d. | * Red three those books | *A > Num > Dem > N |
| | e. | * Red three books those | *A > Num > N > Dem |
| | f. | * Red books three those | *A > N > Num > Dem |

To complete the paradigm, consider that all the word orders in which the noun appears phrase-initially are similarly unacceptable:

- | | | | |
|-------|----|-------------------------|--------------------|
| (235) | a. | * Books those three red | *N > Dem > Num > A |
| | b. | * Books those red three | *N > Dem > A > Num |
| | c. | * Books red those three | *N > A > Dem > Num |
| | d. | * Books red three those | *N > A > Num > Dem |
| | e. | * Books three red those | *N > Num > A > Dem |
| | f. | * Books three those red | *N > Num > Dem > A |

The first hint that the nominal domain of Singlish does not completely pattern off of its English input can be seen when we try inserting a possessor into the nominal structure: while English does not allow for a prenominal possessor to be coinstantiated with a demonstrative, instead requiring the use of a postnominal possessor, as demonstrated by the contrast in grammaticality between (236) and (237), Singlish does not exhibit such a restriction (cf. the grammaticality of 238 where *John* is a possessor). A further point of distinction here is that unlike in English, the Singlish possessor does not have to be marked with the genitive morpheme *-s*, and in fact, does not allow for the realisation of the genitive morpheme (cf. the ungrammaticality of 239).

(236) * John's those three red books [Eng.]

(237) Those three red books of John's [Eng.]

(238) John those three red books Poss > Dem > Num > A > N

(239) * John's those three red books

This prenominal unmarked possessor also has a fixed position within the nominal phrase: it necessarily precedes all the other elements, and attempting to realise the possessor in any position other than the phrase-initial one results in ungrammaticality. Since we have already established that the other elements are strictly ordered, in the interests of legibility, I illustrate the obligatory phrase-initiality of the possessor only with the partial paradigm in (240), which represents all the logically possible positions for the possessor in a nominal phrase where the relative order of the other elements is fixed. Note that while I do not explicitly rule out the other logical combinations with the data below, they are similarly unaccept-

able. This point of divergence between Singlish and English is nonetheless very interesting; however, I set the issue aside for the time being, as I will be presenting another Singlish construction which exhibits comparable qualities in section 4.3. I will present a unified analysis for both phenomena only then.

- (240) a. * those John three red books *Dem > Poss > Num > A > N
 b. * those three John red books *Dem > Num > Poss > A > N
 c. * those three red John books *Dem > Num > A > Poss > N
 d. * those three red books John *Dem > Num > A > N > Poss

We have seen repeatedly in the preceding chapters that as a contact language, Singlish exists somewhere between its various input varieties, and that the language (family) that has had the greatest role in determining and shaping the structural configuration of Singlish in particular is (or, at the very least, has been) Chinese, while the lexicon has largely been derived from English. This is in line with the widely-accepted characterisation as English being a superstrate variety to Singlish, and Chinese being the (primary) substrate.

The word order facts which I have presented here seem to indicate that the nominal domain is one in which the general pattern of transfer from Chinese to Singlish does not hold as strongly, in that the NP-internal word order of Chinese has been reported to be much freer than what we have seen in Singlish. This is illustrated in the following examples from Bošković and Hsieh (2015), who demonstrate that Chinese nominals, while strictly head-final (i.e. N must be phrase-final), possessors and adjectives are not subject to a relative ordering requirement, hence the grammaticality of both (241a) and (241b).

- (241) a. Zhangsan-de hong-de chenshan
 Zhangsan's red shirt
 Poss > A > N
- b. hong-de Zhangsan-de chenshan
 red Zhangsan's shirt
 A > Poss > N

Similarly, the demonstrative can appear on either side of both the adjective (242a vs. 242b), and on either side of the possessor (242c vs. 242d).

- (242) a. na-bu hong-de paoche
 that-CL red sport-car
 'that red sports car'
 Dem > A > N
- b. hong-de na-bu paoche
 red that-CL sport-car
 =(242a)
 A > Dem > N
- c. na-bu Zhangsan-de paoche
 that-CL Zhangsan's sport-car
 Dem > Poss > N
- d. Zhangsan-de na-bu paoche
 Zhangsan's that-CL sport-car
 Poss > Dem > N

Additionally, while Chinese is a classifier language, Singlish is not. Taken in sum, it seems that despite the differences between Singlish and English with respect to the form and behaviour of possessors within the nominal domain, the influence of English manifests much more strongly in Singlish than that of Chinese in terms of the internal organisation of Singlish nominals.

This is unsurprising when we consider that Singlish has inherited the determiner system of English: in addition to the demonstratives which we have seen above,

Singlish also has inherited both the dedicated definite article *the* and the indefinite article *a* from English.³⁴

The availability of these free-standing (i.e. non-clitic) articles has been argued in Bošković (2012) to be deeply correlated to a host of properties, one of which is in fact a lack of freedom with respect to the word order within the nominal phrase (cf. the NP/DP hypothesis, as formulated in Bošković 2012). When considering the cross-linguistic word order facts above, what we find is that we have Chinese (an NP language) on the one hand, and English and Singlish (both DP languages) on the other; in fact, one of the arguments for the lack of DP in Chinese stems from the freedom of the word order within the traditional noun phrase of Chinese (Bošković 2012). That Singlish nominals do not display the word order freedom found in Chinese nominals actually provides further evidence for the argument in question, given that Singlish nominals do have DP.

Like English, and unlike Chinese, Singlish also has morphological marking for plurality, in the form of the suffix *-s*. Number marking on the noun interacts and constrains the distribution of the articles that exist in Singlish, just as it does in English.

For example, while the definite determiner can be used with both singular and plural nominals, the same cannot be said of the indefinite article, which can only be used with singular nouns (as in English). Indefiniteness with plural nominals, is expressed either through the use of the bare plural, or through the use of the

³⁴ Singlish also uses the English-derived numeral *one* like an indefinite article, which may be mirroring a similar development in Mandarin reported in Wang (2019) where *yi*, the numeral *one*, is undergoing grammaticalisation into an indefinite article. Additionally, the distribution of the indefinite article is more restricted than that of the definite article, possibly due to competition with both this article-like usage of *one* as well as the bare nominal, which has been attested to be available in Singlish.

That *the* exhibits no sensitivity to plurality is unsurprising (249), given its clear English source and the lack of number sensitivity in *the*'s English counterpart. In contrast, Gil's reporting of the converse with *that*, is extremely surprising, especially since I have demonstrated above that it alternates with *those* when the head noun is plural; to account for these facts Gil stipulates the existence of a "determiner non-plurality effect" (p. 474). The contrary judgments which I am reporting, however, do not necessitate any such effect, and are thus much easier to account for, since Singlish behaves (almost) entirely like English in the relevant respect.

(249) Geraint eat the apples.

(250) (*) Geraint eat that apples.

The variation between the speakers whose judgments I have reported here and those recorded by Gil (2003) may suggest either that this particular linguistic feature, where the plurality of the noun only partially interacts with the distribution of the indefinite article, is undergoing generational change, or that it is a characteristic feature of a *subdialect* of Singlish and the individuals whom I have consulted for judgments simply did not belong to that particular subdialect, or that the language variety has undergone (rapid) diachronic change since the judgments reported in Gil (2003). While the question of whether the variation I am reporting here vis-a-vis the judgments recorded in Gil (2003) is synchronic or diachronic in nature is undoubtedly an interesting one, it is orthogonal to the desiderata of this dissertation, and I therefore leave it to future research. For the purposes of the present dissertation, I will simply report the judgments of speakers more like myself, and present an analysis of the grammar that is able to account for these judgments in an

internally-consistent fashion.³⁷

What we have seen then, of the configuration of the traditional noun phrase of Singlish indicates that while Singlish has thus far patterned more with Chinese with respect to its structural configuration at the clausal level, this overall pattern seems to be inverted in the nominal domain. The Singlish nominal paradigm can therefore be understood as further evidence in favour of the NP/DP hypothesis, where it is the inheritance of D from English to Singlish that so abruptly disrupts the parallelism between Singlish and Chinese.

Despite the clear English influence on the structure of the Singlish nominal, however, it is still premature to declare that there is minimal influence from Chinese, and one area within the Singlish nominal domain where we see clearer Sinitic influence is in the structure of relative clauses (RCs), to which I turn next.

4.2 Relativisation in Singlish

The configuration of the relative clause in Singlish has received scant attention in the literature on Singlish, and I therefore dedicate this section of the dissertation to reporting novel data concerning relativisation in Singlish, as well as discussing the implications that these structures have for the configuration of the Singlish nominal phrase.

Singlish speakers are able to employ a considerable number of alternative rela-

³⁷ This state of affairs is admittedly undesirable, in that the analysis which I am advancing has limited generalisability. However, I must note that the human language faculty is necessarily individuated, in that no two individuals share the same human language faculty. This means that the judgments of a single individual have just as much theoretical import in our endeavour to model the human language faculty as the averaging of a larger population of speakers.

tivisation strategies, but the following are the most naturalistic.

(251) The **man** that sell ice kacang
‘The man that sells ice kacang (a local ice-based dessert)’

(252) Sell ice kacang the **man**
=(251)

(253) That sell ice kacang the **man**
=(251)

The relativisation strategy exemplified in (251) was, to my knowledge, first reported in Alsagoff and Ho (1998) (henceforth A&H). The influence on English on relatives of this type is clear, and is especially salient when we compare (251) to its accompanying English translation: the two phrases are distinguished only by the absence of inflection on the verb in the relative clause in the Singlish case. A&H go as far as to say that such relatives are “obviously the same as StdE NP_{RCS}” (p. 131), in recognition of the fact that the relative order of the relative clause *that sell ice kacang* and the head noun *man* is also the same as in English, with the relative clause following the head noun.

While I will present evidence demonstrating that these relatives and their English counterparts are not actually equivalent, *pace* A&H, for ease of exposition, I will refer to relatives of this type as the *English-style* relatives of Singlish throughout the remainder of the dissertation.

The second strategy, exemplified in (252) is clearly not derived from English, however, with the relative clause now appearing phrase-initially. Of the three language varieties/families that have had the largest influence on the development of

Singlish, in the form of English, Malay, and Chinese, only Chinese has prenominal relative clauses; Malay, like English, only allows for relative clauses to appear after the head noun. Attempting to order the relative clause and head noun differently results in ungrammaticality across all three languages, as illustrated by the following minimal pairs.

(254) English Relatives

- a. The **boy** [who pinched my mother] is very naughty.
- b. * [Who pinched my mother] the **boy** is very naughty.

(255) Malay Relatives

- a. **Budak** itu [yang mencubit ibu saya] sangat jahat.
 child the YANG pinch mother 1SG very naughty
 ‘The boy who pinched my mother is very naughty.’ (A&H; 4)
- b. * [Yang mencubit ibu saya] **budak** itu sangat jahat.
 YANG pinch mother 1SG child the very naughty
 Int.: ‘The boy who pinched my mother is very naughty.’

(256) Mandarin Relatives

- a. [Nie wo-de mama de] nei-ge **haizi** hen huaidan.
 pinch 1SG-DE mother DE that-CL child very naughty
 ‘That boy who pinched my mother is very naughty.’ (A&H; 5)
- b. * Nei-ge **haizi** [nie wo-de mama de] hen huaidan.
 that-CL child pinch 1SG-DE mother DE very naughty
 Int.: ‘That boy who pinched my mother is very naughty.’

The relativisation strategy and structure in the Singlish example (252) is therefore clearly inherited from Chinese. For this reason, I will refer to Singlish relatives of this type as *Chinese-style* relatives. Notably, the relative clause precedes the definite determiner in these constructions; this poses a challenge for compositional

semantics under standard assumptions concerning the semantic types of the various elements involved, and I return to this issue when discussing the parallel issue in the corresponding Chinese examples in section 4.2.1.

Finally, we have (253), which patterns with (252) in that the relative clause appears prenominal, but appears to pattern with (251) in the form that the relative clause takes, with both (251) and (253) containing exactly the same lexical items, albeit in a different word order.

The lexical similarity between the two constructions is deceptive, however, in that while the instance of *that* in (251) is a complementiser, the same lexical item *that* in (253) is in fact a demonstrative determiner. This can be verified by the contrast between (257) and (258), where a different determiner, i.e. *the*, has been substituted for *that*.

(257) * The man the sell ice kacang

(258) The sell ice kacang the man

For this reason, I will refer to constructions like (253) and (258) as *determiner doubling* relatives.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide further examples of these three relativisation strategies, as well as discuss the interpretive possibilities that are afforded by each in turn. I will also connect them to literature concerning relative clauses in Chinese, before suggesting an account of relativisation in Singlish that is able to capture the distribution of these constructions in Singlish.

Before doing so, however, a brief foray into the literature concerning relativisation in Chinese is in order, given that two of the three relativisation strategies presented have clearly been influenced by Chinese.

4.2.1 A brief survey of Chinese Relatives

To facilitate the upcoming cross-linguistic comparison of Singlish relative clause constructions with both its English and Mandarin counterparts, some background regarding relativisation in Chinese, which is admittedly fairly complex, is first required.

The first point of complication is that there are two alternative positions in which relative clauses can be realised in Mandarin. Both positions are prenominal, since Mandarin is uniformly head-final in the nominal domain, so the two positions are instead distinguished by their order relative to the demonstrative-numeral-classifier (DNC) sequence, with the first relative clause position *preceding* the DNC, and the second *following* it. This is schematised by Lin and Tsai (2014) as (259): for ease of exposition, I similarly adopt the use of the labels RC₁ for pre-DNC relative clauses and RC₂ for post-DNC relative clauses.

(259) (RC₁) Demonstrative Numeral Classifier (RC₂) Noun

The issue of whether RC₁ and RC₂ are semantically distinct is a matter of long-standing debate; Chao (1968) reported that realising the relative clause in the RC₁ position results in a restrictive reading of the relative clause, while realising the relative clause in the RC₂ position results in a non-restrictive reading instead. This is illustrated by the difference in the provided translations for (260a) and (260b) respectively.

(260) a. [dai yanjing de] nei-wei xiansheng shi shei?
wear glasses DE that-CL mister be who
'Who is the gentleman who is wearing glasses (not the one who is not wearing glasses)?'

- b. nei-wei [dai yanjing de] xiansheng shi shei?
 that-CL wear glasses DE mister be who
 ‘Who is the gentleman (who incidentally is) wearing glasses?’

(adapted from Lin and Tsai 2014; 2)

Lin and Tsai (2014) note that there is, however, no consensus concerning this particular claim, with a second group of researchers, including Lü (1999) and Tsai (1994), having instead suggested the opposite, where RC₁ yields non-restrictive readings and RC₂ restrictive ones, and a third group of researchers, including Zhang (2001), Del Gobbo (2003; 2004; 2005), Shi (2010), who argue that *both* RC₁ and RC₂ have to be interpreted as restrictive relatives.

4.2.2 RCs Modifying Proper names/pronouns (RMPs)

While Lin (2003) adopts the latter position, he also notes that there are exceptional cases in which Mandarin RCs can be interpreted as being non-restrictive, with a key exception concerning the cases where the relative clause modifies a proper name or pronoun, an example of which is provided in (261); indeed, in these cases, the non-restrictive interpretation of the RC is more naturalistic than its restrictive counterpart.

- (261) [hen ai chi niupai de] Laowang jintian que dian-le yupai.
 very love eat beef-steak DE Laowang today but order-ASP fish-steak
 ‘(To our surprise), Laowang, who loves eating beef steak very much, ordered fish steak today.’

Lin and Tsai (2014) further develop the position espoused in Lin (2003), and they observe that RMPs do not uniformly exhibit the properties of non-restrictive

relatives, but instead exhibit a mix of properties of both non-restrictive and restrictive relatives. They consequently concur with Del Gobbo (2010) in treating RMPs as a type of integrated non-restrictive relative clause.

To account for the mixed properties of RMPs, they adopt Matushansky's (2006) analysis of proper names as being of semantic type $\langle e, t \rangle$, rather than of semantic type e , i.e. they are predicates on a par with common nouns. Matushansky's proposal is motivated by the observation that in various languages such as European Portuguese, Pima, some Italian, Spanish, Scandinavian and German dialects, Catalan, among others, proper names in argument positions must be marked with a definite determiner, as exemplified in the Portuguese example in (262).

- (262) o president nomeou a **Maria** ministra.
 the-M.SG president named-3SG the-F.SG Maria minister
 'The president named Maria minister.' (Portuguese; Matushansky 2006; 1)

This account is supported by the occasional use of bare proper names (i.e. without the definite determiner) in such languages, such as in the so-called 'naming constructions', exemplified in (263), where the proper name *Petro* appears without an accompanying definite determiner; proper names, she argues, behave like common nouns in the absence of the determiner.

- (263) vaftisa to Yani **Petro**
 baptised-1SG the-ACC Yani-ACC Petro-ACC
 'I baptised Yani Petro.'

Lin and Tsai (2014) extend this analysis of proper names to Mandarin, and suggest that the contrast between restrictive and non-restrictive readings of RMPs has to do with proper names, while of the same semantic type as common nouns, being different in that they denote singleton sets. The semantic computation of an

RMP therefore results in vacuous restriction of the referent set, since the singleton set cannot be further restricted without returning the empty set; this gives RMPs its non-restrictive flavour, since it hasn't actually managed to actually restrict anything.

One upside of this analysis is that they claim to be able to capture the “cross-linguistic variations in the (im)possibility of non-restrictive relatives” by ascribing it “to the inherent semantic type of proper names, which can be either type e , type $\langle e, t \rangle$, or ambiguous” (p. 125), though they also suggest that this singular ambiguity may also be driving the heightened interspeaker variation that we find across Mandarin speakers regarding the degree of distinction that exists between RC_1 and RC_2 .

For reasons which will become clearer later, I propose that the core of Lin and Tsai's account of RMPs in Chinese can be preserved even when we assume proper names to begin as type e . Consider that the problem with assuming proper names are of type e is that the type e proper name/pronoun would be of the right semantic type to immediately compose with the RC via functional application. However, this would incorrectly result in the entire nominal phrase being interpreted as a type t object, which is the desired interpretation for a clause, but not a nominal.

However, consider Chierchia's (1998) proposal that even common nouns are of type e in Chinese, which means that all predicative uses of nominal elements in Chinese involve a type-shifting operation from e to $\langle e, t \rangle$. The availability of such a type-shifting operation allows for the desired interpretation of a proper name as a singleton set (except in contexts where there are multiple individuals with the same name); attempting to further restrict this singleton set with the relative clause results in vacuous restriction, thereby preserving Lin and Tsai's core insight.³⁸

³⁸ In fact, Bošković and Hsieh (2015) present an analysis of Chinese RC_1 constructions (more precisely, of restrictive modification) which adopts Chierchia's (1998) proposal as a starting point.

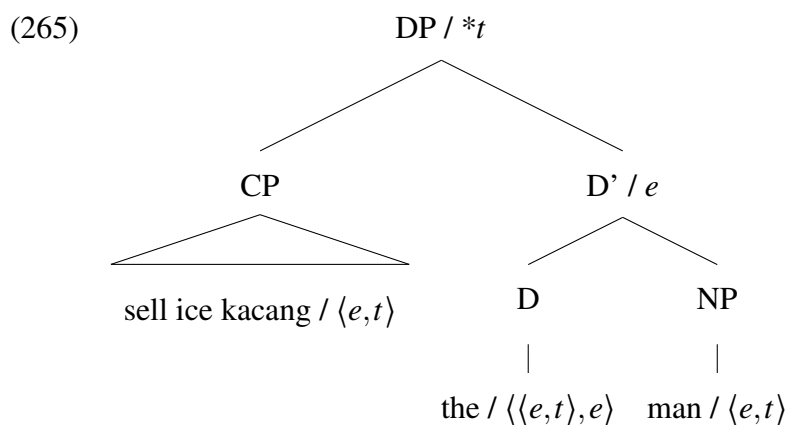
Setting aside the details of their analysis for the moment, I will simply note that the Chinese-influenced relativisation strategies which we find in Singlish appear to only tolerate restrictive readings, in line with the general position espoused in Lin and Tsai (2014), though the behaviour of RMPs in Singlish is something which I will return to in a later subsection.

4.2.3 Returning to Singlish

When we consider the semantic composition of Chinese-style relatives in Singlish like (264), we see that there is a problem that arises as a direct result of the relative order of the RC and the determiner.

(264) Sell ice kacang the man

Namely, standard compositional semantics would result in the entire relative being interpreted with the wrong semantic type, because the determiner composes with the noun *before* the modifying RC is introduced; this is illustrated in (265).



Determiners are standardly assumed to be elements of the semantic type $\langle\langle e,t \rangle, e\rangle$ (see, e.g. Heim and Kratzer 1998; p. 74). In the problematic Chinese-style relatives,

the determiner, being a sister to the type $\langle e, t \rangle$ common noun, immediately combines with it to yield an element of type e at the level of D' , as illustrated above. The CP, which is of type $\langle e, t \rangle$, then composes with D' , and this yields a DP that is of semantic type t . The problem here is that t is the semantic type for clauses and not nominal phrases.

Given that the root of the issue lies in the relative word order/structural height of the RC and the (innermost) determiner, Chinese RC_1 constructions, which similarly have the RC > (demonstrative) determiner > head noun word order, are faced with the same problem, and various attempts have been made in the literature to tackle this challenge.

One proposal that has been made to resolve the present conundrum comes by way of Bošković and Hsieh (2013), who present a modified version of a proposal by Lin (2003) which targets the interpretation of the (demonstrative) determiner as the source of the problem. The solution is thus to adopt a different semantics for the determiner, which allows for the avoidance of the catastrophic mis-typing problem that arises at the level of D' in (265) above.

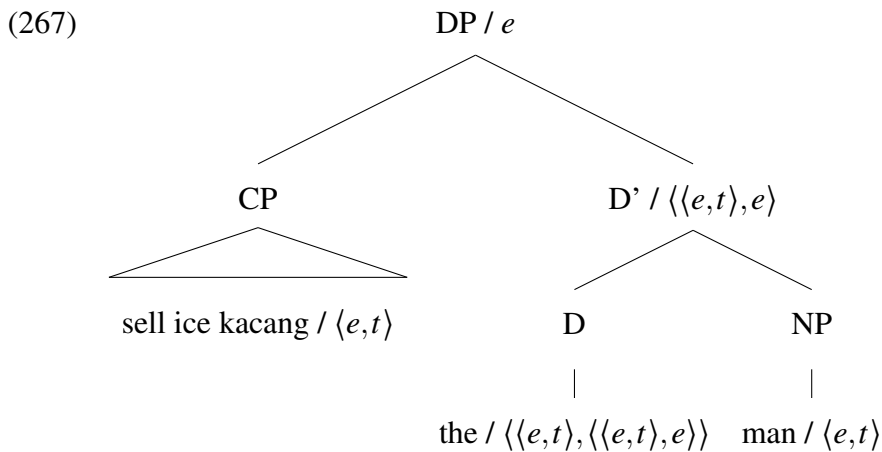
To replace the regular demonstrative, Lin (2003) extends the treatment of relative clause constructions containing quantification determiners by Bach and Cooper (1978) to demonstrative relative clauses in Chinese. More specifically, Lin (2003) analyses the demonstrative NP that surfaces in RC_1 constructions as a generalised quantifier, with the demonstrative itself being treated as an object of type $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle \rangle$ instead of type $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, e \rangle$.

Bošković and Hsieh's (2013) proposed modification to Lin's analysis is to assume that the demonstrative is instead of type $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle \langle e, t \rangle, e \rangle \rangle$. This modification

allows for the composition of the CP with D' to yield an element of type e , as desired.

I propose that Bošković and Hsieh's analysis can be extended to Singlish as well, at least in prenominal relatives. That is, in addition to a regular *the*, Singlish has access to a second *the* which has the interpretation in (266)³⁹; this resolves the typing problem in (265), as shown in (267).

$$(266) \quad \llbracket \text{the} \rrbracket = \lambda P_{\langle e,t \rangle} . \lambda Q_{\langle e,t \rangle} . \iota x [P(x) \wedge Q(x)]$$



With the interpretation of Chinese-style relatives in Singlish out of the way, recall that there are two positions in Chinese where the relative clause may be instantiated. This raises the following question for Singlish: have both RC₁ and RC₂ been transferred into Singlish? That is, do we get, in addition to (252), which is directly analogous to RC₁ in that the relative clause appears phrase-initially, a relativisation structure that is analogous to RC₂, where the relative clause appears phrase-medially in the noun-adjacent position? As a full discussion of the RC₂ relativisation structures will end up intersecting with the upcoming discussion concern-

³⁹ This also applies to the demonstratives *that* and *those*, which can similarly appear in prenominal relatives.

ing the third relativisation strategy, I will simply note for now that this is possible, albeit degraded, as demonstrated in (268). I return to this issue later in section 4.3.

(252) [Sell ice kacang] the **man**

(268) ?? The [sell ice kacang] **man**

One other question concerns the (un)availability of non-restrictive interpretations of Singlish relatives: as I noted, the Chinese-like relativisation strategies, i.e. the ones in which the relative clause appears prenominal, appear to disallow non-restrictive readings, while the English-like relativisation strategy, i.e. where the relative clause is postnominal, does not. While the overall picture is unsurprising and, indeed, is directly accounted for with the proposed interpretation of *the* which is utilised in Chinese-style relatives in Singlish, where the iota operator scopes over both the properties expressed by the common noun and the relative clause, there is a loose thread that concerns the core data that Lin and Tsai (2014) were investigating in Mandarin, namely the behaviour of RMPs.

If Singlish prenominal relatives are simply patterned off of Mandarin relatives, then we expect that Singlish prenominal relatives which modify proper names or pronouns should similarly exceptionally allow for non-restrictive readings.

Therein lies the catch, however: Singlish prenominal relatives which modify proper names or pronouns do not seem to exist, as illustrated by the contrast in grammaticality between (269) on the one hand, and (270) and (271) on the other.

Crucially, the ungrammaticality here is not due to the general incompatibility of proper names/pronouns with the determiner *the*, since the omission of the determiner does not ameliorate the degradation that we see here.

- (269) [Like to eat beef] the **boy** order fish today sia.
- (270) * [Like to eat beef] (the) **John** order fish today sia.
- (271) * [Like to eat beef] (the) **him** order fish today sia.

Singlish therefore diverges from Chinese in that it disallows RMPs, and this raises the question: why?

I suggest that the answer to this question is two-pronged: the ungrammaticality of the RMP in Singlish in the absence of the determiner is due to the semantics module interpreting the RC-proper noun sequence via functional application, which results in the entire relative clause construction being interpreted as being of type t , which is not the appropriate type for a DP. Conversely, Chinese-style RMPs (i.e. with the overt determiner) run into a type-mismatch problem, since proper names and pronouns are of type e , and not type $\langle e, t \rangle$, they cannot combine with either the regular type $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, e \rangle$ determiner or the alternative type $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle \langle e, t \rangle, e \rangle \rangle$ determiner. The transparent semantic composition of RMPs is therefore impossible due to type-mismatches.

However, this does not preclude the possibility of type-shifting the proper name/pronoun: the issue therefore appears to be a problem with the type-shifting operation which is being used to form a singleton set (which generates the non-restrictive reading of the RC) in Chinese, such that it is disallowed in Singlish. This is corroborated by the fact that the ungrammaticality of the RMP in (270) dissipates when there are multiple different individuals each named John in the context, as in (272).

- (272) Like to eat beef the John (and not the others) order fish today sia.

Consider that there are two distinct type-shifting operations from e to $\langle e, t \rangle$,

labelled Ident and Pred respectively by Partee (1986), which are distinct in that Ident maps “[an] element onto its singleton set” while Pred applies to “entities which are entity-correlates of properties, and returns the corresponding property” (p. 122).

I therefore take the contrast between Singlish and Chinese with respect to the availability of RMPs to be due to Singlish only allowing for the use of the type-shifting operation Pred with proper names, but not Ident, which is responsible for the non-restrictive reading of RMPs that arises in Chinese.

This treatment receives further support from the fact that relative clauses modifying pronouns are never allowed in Singlish (cf. the ungrammaticality of 273); pronouns, unlike proper names, can only be type-shifted by Ident, and not Pred.

(273) * Like to eat beef the {he/him} (and not the others) order fish today sia.

4.2.4 Non-restrictive relative clauses in Singlish

I have claimed above that non-restrictive readings of Singlish relatives are only available when we have English-style relatives. This is not entirely accurate, since even within the English-style relatives of Singlish, the non-restrictive relatives must be further distinguished from their restrictive counterparts through the use of intonational breaks, just like in English. Accordingly, only (275), which is distinguished from (274) only by the intonational breaks on either side of the relative clause, can be interpreted as a non-restrictive relative.

(274) The man who sell ice kacang go home already.

(275) The man, who sell ice kacang, go home already.

Additionally, just as in English, the complementiser *that* cannot be used to introduce a non-restrictive relative clause; attempting to do so results in ungrammaticality.

(276) * The man, that sells ice kacang, has gone home already. [Eng.]

(277) * The man, that sell ice kacang, go home already. [Sing.]

Just as prenominal relatives were unable to form RMPs in Singlish, English-style relatives which do not have the appropriate intonational breaks do not constitute legitimate RMP constructions, as demonstrated by the ungrammaticality of (279).

(278) John, who like to eat beef, order fish today sia.

(279) * John who like to eat beef order fish today sia.

Again, this general pattern, where the non-restrictive relative clause has to be in its own intonational phrase, is one that we find in English as well, and has in fact been identified as an argument in favour of the proposal that non-restrictive relative clauses are syntactically distinct from their restrictive counterparts (see Cinque 2020 and the references therein).

Some further evidence for the existence of a syntactic difference between Singlish restrictive English-style relatives and non-restrictive English-style relatives comes from the fact that the non-restrictive relatives (which are marked by an intonational break) allow for the instantiation of the sentence-final particle *one* within the relative clause, as shown in the examples in (280).

(280) a. The man, sell ice kacang one, go home already.

b. The man, who sell ice kacang one, go home already.

(adapted from Alsagoff and Ho 1998; 17b–c)⁴⁰

This is in contrast to restrictive relative clauses, which do not. This is illustrated by the ungrammaticality of *one* in (281), where the intonational breaks are no longer present, in the Chinese-style relative in (282), in the English-style relative in (283), where the *wh*-relative has been replaced with the complementiser *that*, thereby forcing a restrictive reading, and in the determiner doubling relative in (284).

(281) * The man sell ice kacang one

(282) * Sell ice kacang one the man

(283) * The man that sell ice kacang one

(284) * That sell ice kacang one the man

Non-restrictive relatives in Singlish therefore constitute a fourth distinct type of Singlish relative.

Despite the break in parallelism with respect to the (un)availability of non-restrictive readings of RMPs, the Chinese influence on the structural configuration of Singlish relatives more broadly can also be seen when we consider the internal organisation of the relative clause, particularly when the relative in question involves an adjectival predicate.

⁴⁰ Alsagoff and Ho (1998) do not report these examples as being instances of non-restrictive relatives, and in fact, appear to analyse such constructions as being regular, i.e. restrictive, relative clauses; as such, the original examples did not contain intonational breaks. These judgments are not replicated in my grammar, and I accept these constructions only when they contain the indicated intonational breaks, and are thus accordingly interpreted as being non-restrictive.

4.2.5 A detour into adjectival and clausal predication

First, consider the baseline relativisation paradigm that I presented for Singlish:

(285) The man that sells ice kacang [Eng.]

(286) Singlish

- a. The man that sell ice kacang
- b. Sell ice kacang the man
- c. That sell ice kacang the man

One property which differentiates the Singlish relatives from the baseline English example above is the fact that the Singlish relatives disallow inflection within the relative clause; with the exception of the English-style relative in (286a), where the addition of inflectional morphology makes it indistinguishable from the baseline English example, the realisation of inflectional morphology in the form of the agreement suffix *-s* in (286b) and (286c) results in ungrammaticality, as in (287b) and (287c) respectively.

- (287) a. The man that sells ice kacang
- b. * Sells ice kacang the man
 - c. * That sells ice kacang the man

This is true of the tense morpheme as well, as illustrated in the following paradigm:

(288) The professor who taught me syntax [Eng.]

- (289) a. Teach me syntax the professor
- b. * Taught me syntax the professor

- (290) a. The teach me syntax the professor
b. * The taught me syntax the professor

First off: the unavailability of inflectional morphology in these contexts serves as further evidence in favour of the syntactic treatment of inflection-lessness in Singlish which I developed in chapters 2 and 3, since we now have a well-defined syntactic context in which inflection is disallowed.

That only relative clauses which lack inflection are allowed to be realised prenominally is a byproduct of both syntactic structures having been inherited into Singlish from Chinese. This requirement that only inflection-less predicates be allowed to surface within the relative clause proper manifests more clearly, as I have previously intimated, when the predicate that is being used is adjectival in nature.

Consider the following English construction, where we have an adjectival relative, as the baseline:

- (291) The book that is yellow [Eng.]

Given what we have seen to be possible in Singlish, we might expect the following to be one way of expressing an adjectival relative in Singlish, yet this is not the case.

- (292) * [Is yellow] the book

Clearly, the issue here is that we have an instance of the copula, which is at once obligatory in adjectival relatives in English, but also an instance of overt inflection, as we have seen in chapter 3. One would therefore expect that the way to ameliorate the ungrammaticality of (292) is to simply drop the copula, as in (293).

(293) * [Yellow] the book

Yet, this remains ungrammatical. In fact, this pattern extends to the entire Singlish relative paradigm; the bare adjective cannot be used in English-style relatives (294), nor can it be used in determiner doubling relatives, regardless of whether the copula is realised (295) or not (296).

(294) * The book that yellow

(295) * That is yellow the book

(296) * That yellow the book

This, it transpires, is due to the existence of additional constraints which apply on the derivation of inflection-less adjectival predicates in Singlish, which have in turn been inherited from Chinese. Namely, this constraint applies to gradable adjectival predicates, and effectively disallows them from being instantiated without support; this is illustrated by the obligatory use of the degree intensifier *hen* with the adjectival predicate *congming* ‘smart’ in (297).

(297) zhe-ge xuesheng *(hen) congming
this-CL student very smart
‘This student is smart’ (Bošković and Hsieh 2015; fn. 6;v)

Although colour words are terms that are generally able to surface as regular adjectives in Singlish, as evidenced by the grammaticality of (298), where *yellow* is used adjectivally in a copula-drop construction, they exhibit similar restrictions when used predicatively, hence the ungrammaticality of (299), regardless of the presence/absence of the sentence-final particle *one*.

(298) The yellow book very interesting.

(299) * The book yellow (one).

Int.: ‘The book is yellow.’

To express the meaning *the book is yellow*, we instead need to nominalise the predicate, as in (300). This is also true of Chinese, which does not allow for the colour term *huang* to be a predicate on its own.⁴¹

(300) The book yellow colour one.

(301) * zhe-ben shu huang.

this-CL book yellow

Int.: ‘This book is yellow.’

(302) zhe-ben shu huang se de.

this-CL book yellow colour DE

‘This book is yellow.’

Alternatively, a degree intensifier can be used instead, as in (303), though it should be noted that in these cases the inclusion of the degree intensifier does have semantic import; (303) is thus not exactly equivalent to (300), which more directly corresponds to the intended interpretation of (299).

(303) The book very yellow one.

‘The book is very yellow.’

⁴¹ Note that both the sentence-final particle *one* in Singlish and the particle *de* in Mandarin are mandatory in the respective examples.

(i) * The book yellow colour.

Int.: ‘The book is yellow.’

(ii) * zhe-ben shu huang se.

this-CL book yellow colour

Int.: ‘This book is yellow.’

This restriction is notably not a requirement on intensification, since other degree adverbials have similar ameliorative properties when merged into the structure.

(304) The book kinda yellow one.

‘The book is kind of yellow.’

(305) The book a bit yellow one.

‘The book is a little yellow.’

An alternative to the use of the degree adverbial is to reduplicate the adjective, though it should be noted that this strategy is not fully productive, and can only apply to a subset of adjectival predicates, hence the contrast in grammaticality between (306) and (307). Bao (2015), reporting on reduplication in Singlish, suggests that, where licensed, it has the effect of intensification; the reduplication of the colour term *yellow* in (307) is thus semantically equivalent to the *very* construction in (303).

(306) * The book interesting-interesting.

(307) The book yellow-yellow one.

These constraints on adjectival predication in Singlish matrix clauses are partially preserved when forming Singlish relatives, as illustrated by the grammaticality of the following prenominal relatives in Singlish:

(308) a. Yellow colour the book

b. That yellow colour the book

(309) a. Yellow-yellow the book

b. That yellow-yellow the book

- (310) a. Very yellow the book
b. That very yellow the book

The caveat that these strategies only *partially* manifest in relativisation contexts is due to the fact that these strategies do not apply when forming the English-style postnominal relatives:

- (311) * The book that yellow colour
Int.: ‘The book that is yellow’
- (312) * The book that yellow-yellow
Int.: ‘The book that is yellow’
- (313) * The book that very yellow
Int.: ‘The book that is yellow’

I suggest that this contrast between English-style relatives and Chinese-style and determiner doubling relatives is syntactically driven, on the basis that the problematic adjectival predicates cannot be instantiated without the support of the sentence-final particle *one*, while the clausal predicates do not exhibit the same restriction. These properties have, in turn, been directly inherited from the Chinese input varieties to Singlish, alongside the prenominal relativisation strategies.

In this way, relative clauses in Singlish therefore not only depend on, but also are constrained by, the inflection-lessness of the relativised predicate.

The prenominal relative clause constructions of Singlish also constitute a syntactic context in which fully-inflected clauses are disallowed, i.e. the presence/absence of inflection is sensitive to the syntactic configuration in which they appear, which provides further evidence in favour of the syntactic analysis of the phenomenon of

inflection-lessness which I developed over chapters 2 and 3 over the alternative PF-based approach.

With that out of the way, we now turn to the third group of Singlish relatives, the determiner doubling relatives of Singlish.

4.3 Determiner Doubling

The third group of Singlish relatives is exemplified in (253) above, reproduced below.

(253) That sell ice kacang the man

Superficially, this appears to be the result of having fronted the relative clause in the English-style relative over the head noun, as depicted in the following:

- (314) a. the man [that sell ice kacang]
b. [that sell ice kacang] the man [~~that sell ice kacang~~]

However, as I noted earlier in section 4.2, the phrase-initial instance of *that* in (253) is in fact not the complementiser *that* that we find in the English-style relative, but is a bona fide determiner in its own right, and can be replaced with a definite determiner *the* without issue.

(315) The sell ice kacang the man

These nominal phrases thus involve the realisation of two determiners, once phrase-initially and once more in the noun-adjacent position. This is impossible both in English, as well as in the English-style Singlish relatives, since the *that*

that one finds in those constructions is not in fact a demonstrative determiner, but is a complementiser instead. Unlike *that*, *the* is unambiguously a determiner, and does not have a corresponding complementiser function that would allow for its substitution for *that* in the English(-style) relatives, hence the ungrammaticality of the (316).

(316) * That man the sell ice kacang

That said, it is possible that while the two constructions no longer correspond structurally, determiner doubling relatives may have historically been derived by fronting the relative clause of the English-style relative over the head noun, before the fronted complementiser was subsequently reanalysed as a genuine determiner. However, evidence against this hypothesis comes from the fact that modified adjectival predicates are licensed in determiner doubling relatives, but not English-style relatives, as shown by the contrast between (317) and (318).

(317) That yellow-yellow the book

(318) * The book that yellow-yellow

Further evidence against such an account of determiner doubling relatives comes from the fact that English-style relatives can also involve the use of the relative pronoun *who* when the head noun is human, and *which* elsewhere, instead of the complementiser *that*, as in (319); just as in English, the coinstantiation of both *that* and *who* is ruled out, an effect famously attributed to the doubly-filled COMP filter Chomsky and Lasnik (1977).

(319) The man who sell ice kacang

- (320) a. * The man that who sell ice kacang
 b. * The man who that sell ice kacang

The key fact is that the fronting of the *wh*-relative clause is impossible, hence the ungrammaticality of (321).

- (321) * Who sell ice kacang the man

However, the idea that the determiner doubling construction is based on the reanalysis of an element that is ambiguous can also be applied in the opposite direction.

That is, consider the possibility that the determiner doubling construction is derived from a Chinese source rather than an English one.

4.3.1 The Chinese source of determiner doubling

To see how this might have happened, let us first compare the determiner doubling construction in Singlish to the Chinese relative(s).

- (322) [The yellow colour the book] very interesting.

- (323) [Nà-běn huáng sè de shū] hén yǒuqù.
 that-CL yellow colour DE book very interesting.
 ‘That book that is yellow is very interesting.’

The first issue that we run into is that there is no doubling of any of the lexical items in the Chinese relative clause construction above. Indeed, doubling of the element corresponding to the demonstrative determiner, i.e. the demonstrative-classifier sequence, *nà běn*, results in ungrammaticality in Standard Mandarin (324;

Xuetong Yuan, p.c.).⁴²

- (324) * [Nà běn huáng sè de nà běn shū] hén yǒuqù.
that CL yellow colour DE that CL book very interesting.
'That yellow book is very interesting.'

However, if we compare the baseline examples in (322) and (323) respectively, there is almost a word-for-word correspondence between the individual elements in the Singlish example and the Mandarin one, save for the noun-adjacent definite determiner *the* and the mysterious Mandarin *de*. Now consider that the two elements, *the* and *de*, are in fact pronounced identically in Singlish; unlike in Standard English, where *the* is pronounced with a voiced interdental fricative [ð], *de* is instead pronounced using the voiced alveolar stop instead, meaning that both *the* and *de* have the same phonological realisation, [də].

It is therefore possible that the ambiguity that has fed the development of determiner doubling in Singlish is not between the English complementiser *that* and the English determiner *that*, but between the Mandarin particle *de* and the English definite determiner *the*.

Some evidence for this conflation of *the* and *de* in Singlish comes from the surprising distribution of *the* when written. In particular, one occasionally finds *the* being optionally realised in phrases that are clearly not nominal at all, such as in (325). This has a clear Chinese source in (326), where *de* is optionally inserted as a linker between the degree adverbial *feichang* and the gradable adjective *congming* 'smart'.

- (325) John very (the) smart.

⁴² The (Singaporean) Southern Min analogue to (324) is similarly ungrammatical (Cheng Moi Choy, p.c.).

- (326) Yuehan feichang (de) congming.
 John extremely DE smart
 ‘John is very smart.’

While the *the* that shows up in these contexts cannot be substituted with *that*, unlike in the determiner doubling constructions, the point is simply that the “reanalysis” of Mandarin *de* as the English definite determiner *the* is something that happens elsewhere in Singlish. The fact that there has been no “reanalysis” of *the* in adjectival predicates on a par with what I am suggesting happens in determiner doubling constructions may be attributed to the fact that adjectival predicates are not inherently nominal in the relevant sense, and are thus incompatible with the demonstrative *that*, which, unlike *the*, does not have a nominalising function when attaching to adjectives (cf. the contrast between 327 and 328).⁴³

- (327) The rich are greedy
 (328) * That rich are greedy
 Int. := (327)

Further evidence that noun-adjacent determiner position in determiner doubling constructions has to have undergone full “reanalysis” into a genuine determiner comes from the fact that when the position is occupied by a demonstrative, the demonstrative form necessarily agrees with the head noun for number, just as canonical demonstratives in Singlish do, as indicated by the contrast between (329) and (330).

- (329) the red colour **those books**

⁴³ See also Bošković (2013a) and the references therein (particularly Despić 2011) for further discussion of the nominalisation (or substantivisation) of adjectives in the context of the NP/DP hypothesis.

(330) * the red colour *that* **books**

This is also true of the phrase-initial determiner, which similarly has to reflect the (non-)plurality of the head noun:

(331) a. **those** red colour the **books**

b. ? **those** red colour **those** **books**

(332) a. * *that* red colour *that* **books**

b. * *that* red colour **those** **books**

There is one caveat to this, however, in that the use of proximal demonstratives, i.e. *this* or *these*, depending on the plurality of the head noun, is extremely marginal in demonstrative doubling constructions; they are marginal when both determiner positions host proximal demonstratives, and are straight up ungrammatical otherwise. In other words, they do not exhibit the same substitutability that we find with *the* and *that*, where the two elements are largely interchangeable.

(333) a. ?* **This** yellow colour **this** **book**

b. * The yellow colour **this** **book**

c. * **This** yellow colour the **book**

(334) a. ?* **These** yellow colour **these** **books**

b. * The yellow colour **these** **books**

c. * **These** yellow colour the **books**

I suggest that this is because the interpretation of determiner doubling relatives is directly parallel to that of Chinese-style relatives, at least with respect to the

interpretation of the innermost determiner. This line of analysis is supported by the fact that the use of the proximal demonstratives are similarly marginal in Chinese-style relatives.

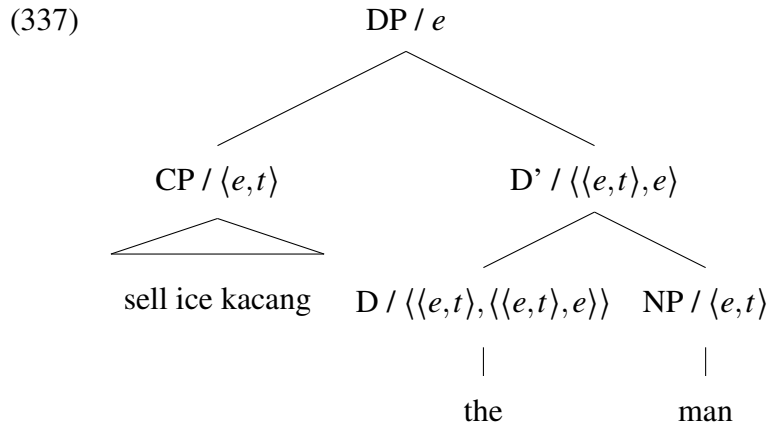
(335) ?* Red colour these books

(336) ?* Red colour this book

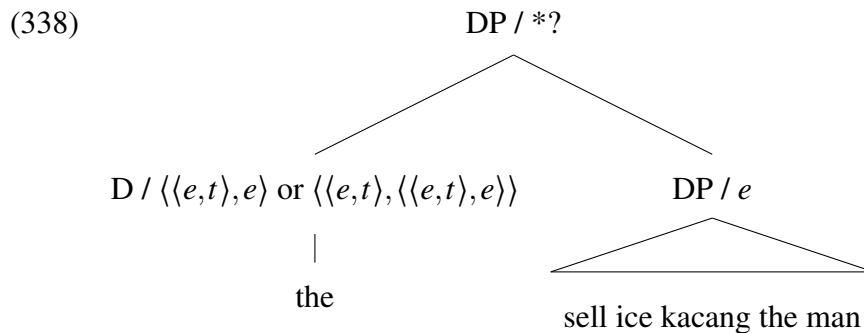
Recall that the interpretation of the innermost determiner in Chinese-style relatives sketched out in section 4.2.3 assumes the existence of an alternative determiner which is able to derive the interpretation of a restrictive modifier (in the form of the relative clause) that is structurally higher within its scope. That proximal demonstratives are unacceptable in prenominal relatives of both types indicates that the proximal demonstratives are not similarly polysemous, and therefore always result in the interpretational problems that are associated with the relative ordering of the RC, demonstrative, and noun discussed previously.

However, in appealing to the semantics of the innermost determiner to account for the restricted distribution of proximal demonstratives, we have now introduced an elephant into the room. Namely, how are determiner doubling relatives interpreted, if they, like Chinese-style relatives, involve the use of an instance of the alternative determiner in the lower position?

Recall that Chinese-style relatives have the following syntax, which allows for their semantic composition:

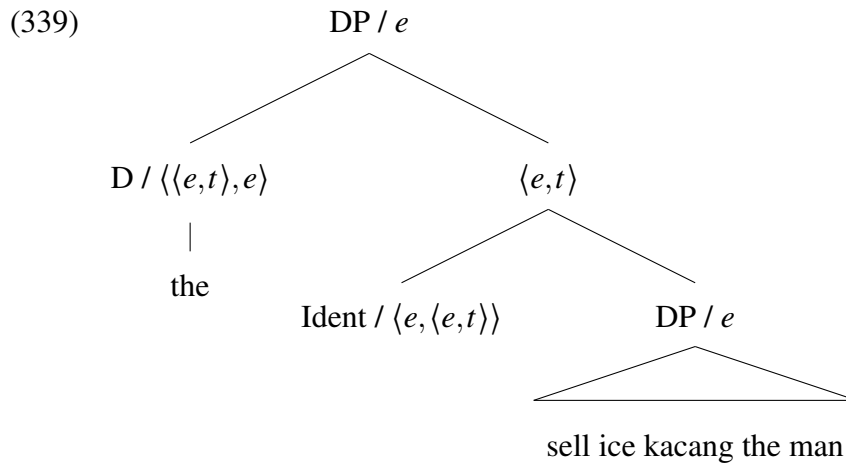


If determiner doubling constructions share the same structure in the lower domain, as is implicated by the shared ban on proximal demonstratives, then we run into a composition problem when we introduce the higher determiner, regardless of whether we employ the regular or alternative form of the determiner:



I suggest that this is resolved by the use of Partee's (1986) Ident type-shifting operation on the Chinese-style relative, which then allows for the application of a regular determiner at the top of the structure.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ This raises the question as to why Ident is disallowed lower in the structure to generate non-restrictive RMPs in Singlish. One possibility is that the use of Ident is independently constrained, such that it is exceptionally allowed as a last resort only in determiner doubling contexts, possibly because of the relative frequency of the Chinese source construction (see section 4.3.2) as compared to the non-restrictive Chinese RMP. An alternative account is suggested by the fact that the interpretation of determiner doubling relatives in Singlish is reminiscent of what is known in the literature as a Haddock description: in a context with multiple hats and multiple rabbits, the definite phrase *the*



Note that the use of covert type-shifting operation *Ident* is not ruled out by the Blocking Principle, repeated below, since there is no lexical item which performs the same function within the Singlish lexicon.

(340) *Blocking Principle* ('Type Shifting as Last Resort') (Chierchia 1998; 26)

For any type shifting operation τ and any X:

* $\tau(X)$

if there is a determiner D such that for any set X in its domain,

$D(X) = \tau(X)$

Setting aside the ad-hoc nature of the proposed solution for the moment, and returning to the proposal that distribution of determiners within the Singlish nominal is due to a pattern where an element is first transferred from Chinese to Singlish followed by the “reanalysis” of said element into a different English-derived ele-

rabbit in the hat can be felicitous so long as there is a unique “rabbit in a hat” combination, despite there not being a unique rabbit nor a unique hat, i.e. neither definite descriptions *the rabbit* nor *the hat* are felicitous when evaluated in isolation. Semantic accounts of Haddock descriptions (e.g. Charlow 2014; 2021, Bumford 2017) may therefore offer a more principled way of interpreting the determiner doubling relatives of Singlish; such an account would also extend to the Chinese-style relatives discussed in this chapter, which, abstractly speaking, has the same problem of definiteness needing to be evaluated too early (i.e. before the RC is introduced).

ment: this pattern may also account for the mysterious distribution of possessors in the basic Singlish nominal phrase which I observed earlier in the chapter.

As a reminder, the word order within the basic Singlish nominal patterns almost entirely with English with the key exception that it allows for possessors to be coinstantiated with both definite and demonstrative determiners, as shown in (341) and (342) respectively.

(341) John the three red books.

(342) John those three red books

Note also that the relative order of the possessor and the determiner is fixed in such a way that the possessor obligatorily precedes the determiner (343).

- | | | | |
|-------|----|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (343) | a. | * those John three red books | *Dem > Poss > Num > A > N |
| | b. | * those three John red books | *Dem > Num > Poss > A > N |
| | c. | * those three red John books | *Dem > Num > A > Poss > N |
| | d. | * those three red books John | *Dem > Num > A > N > Poss |

What is important here, then, is the fact that Mandarin possessors are also marked with *de*, as shown in (344).

(344) Yuehan-de shu
John-DE book
John's book

The suggestion is that the possessor-*de* sequence in the Mandarin nominal was first transferred into Singlish on the basis of the *the/de* conflation which I discussed previously, thus yielding (341). This *de*-derived *the* is subsequently “reanalysed”

into a genuine determiner, opening the door for constructions such as (342). An upside of this analysis is that it also captures the strict relative ordering of the possessor and the determiner: the *de* which marks the possessor must appear following the possessor even in Mandarin. This is illustrated in the following partial paradigm:

- (345) a. na-bu Zhangsan-de paoche
 that-CL Zhangsan-DE sport-car
- b. * na-bu-de Zhangsan paoche
 that-CL-DE Zhangsan sport-car
- c. Zhangsan-de na-bu paoche
 Zhangsan-DE that-CL sport-car
- d. * De Zhangsan na-bu paoche
 DE Zhangsan that-CL sport-car

Additionally, this also captures the fact that the bare possessor can only be used if there is a determiner following it. In the absence of the overt determiner, the bare possessor is disallowed, and the possessor+possessive suffix must instead be used.

(346) John's book

(347) John *(the/that) book

4.3.2 Determiner doubling constructions as RC₂

Finally, I return to my earlier comment regarding the relative unacceptability of Chinese-style relatives that pattern with Mandarin RC₂s, as exemplified in (268) above, repeated below:

(268) ?? The [sell ice kacang] **man**

I suggested that the degradation that we find in these examples may be correlated to the availability of determiner doubling relatives, and the reason why I suggested that is that if the source of the noun-adjacent determiner is indeed Mandarin *de*, then what we have in determiner doubling constructions is essentially an RC₂ configuration. To illustrate this, I have reglossed the baseline determiner doubling construction to more directly reflect this link between *the* and *de* in the following:

(348) That sell ice kacang the man
DEM sell ice kacang DE man

The suggestion is thus: for some speakers of Singlish, the transfer of Mandarin RC₂ into Singlish has been taken a step further with the development of determiner doubling. The innermost determiner is required in direct reflection of the obligatory nature of *de* in Mandarin RC₂ constructions, though its “reanalysis” into a genuine determiner (albeit one that bears the alternative semantics), has resulted in the seemingly needlessly-complicated semantics for determiner doubling relatives which I presented earlier.

That is, the semantically vacuous sequence, in which the Pred type-shifting operation is first applied followed by the merger of a higher determiner, is motivated by pressure resulting from continued contact with Mandarin pushing speakers to maintain an RC₂ equivalent in Singlish, despite the “reanalysis” of *de* into *the* in exactly those contexts having made the higher determiner unnecessary for the interpretation of the entire nominal phrase as a relative clause construction.

On the flip side, for other speakers, the transfer of RC₂ into Singlish has involved the elimination of *de* entirely. For these speakers, the semantic composition of the prenominal relative is relatively simple, since there is no need for a determiner (regular or otherwise) in the lower position (since there is no overt determiner

in that position for such speakers), and there is no need for Pred to be applied at the top solely to allow for the reapplication of the (regular) determiner; the RC and the head noun are interpreted together via Heim and Kratzer's (1998) Predicate Modification rule (349).

(349) For any branching node α whose daughters are β and γ , if both β and γ are of type $\langle \sigma, t \rangle$, then $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket = [\lambda x \sigma. \llbracket \beta \rrbracket (x) \text{ and } \llbracket \gamma \rrbracket (x)]$, where σ is any type.

In any case, the prediction here is therefore that there should be a bimodal distribution between speakers who accept determiner doubling and those who accept a relative-clause construction that more directly parallels Mandarin RC₂.⁴⁵

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reported novel data pertaining to the configuration of the nominal domain of Singlish, which represent an updated snapshot of the linguistic properties of Singlish.

As part of this effort, I have reported on the determiner system of Singlish, which has become more English-like since Gil (2003), and also on the configuration of the relative clause in Singlish, noting that the preeminent relativisation strategies for speakers like myself involve prenominal relatives, *pace* Alsagoff and Ho (1998).

⁴⁵ In fact, a third possibility also exists: given the general correspondence between *one* and *de* in Singlish and Mandarin respectively, a third group of speakers may have adopted the RC₂ structure but substituted *de* with *one* instead, yielding (i). Interestingly, this logical possibility was noted in a footnote in Alsagoff and Ho (1998), who reported that while such constructions were attested in the general populace, they were rejected by the speakers whom they had consulted (fn. 7).

(i) The sell ice kacang one man

These prenominal relatives are, like their Chinese-source counterparts, obligatorily restrictively interpreted, a restriction which manifests as a general incompatibility with proximal demonstratives.

I have also documented a hitherto unreported construction that has developed in a subsegment of Singlish speakers in the form of determiner doubling constructions, where there are two instances of the determiner in a single relative clause. I have proposed that these determiner doubling constructions have developed from the “reanalysis” of the Mandarin particle *de*, which is obligatorily instantiated in Mandarin relatives, into the English definite determiner *the*, on the basis of phonological identity; I have also demonstrated the second *the* that we find in determiner doubling constructions has since developed into a genuine determiner, thus allowing for the use of demonstrative determiners in such constructions. This proposed transfer of the Mandarin particle *de* into Singlish as *the* also accounts for the one point of divergence between the basic Singlish nominal and its English counterpart with respect to the ability of possessors to be coinstantiated with determiners.

Finally, I have advocated for the extension of a slightly modified version of Bošković and Hsieh’s (2013) analysis of (the interpretation of) Mandarin relatives to the prenominal relatives which we find in Singlish (with the appropriate further modifications for the determiner doubling relatives).

In the concluding chapter, I first present a short discussion of the rampant interspeaker variation that we find to varying degrees across the different domains of Singlish, and speculate on the possibility that this interspeaker variation is driven by patterns of first language acquisition by Singlish speaking children before wrapping up with a summary of the findings of the dissertation.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Singlish's place in the sociolinguistic landscape of Singapore

The interspeaker variation that exists within the Singlish speaking population has been well documented in the literature, with Gil (2003) noting that “in many cases, speakers will disagree with regard to the well-formedness of the translational equivalents” and that “the grammar of Singlish often appears to be variable and unstable” beyond what we find in language varieties such as Standard English (though even such varieties are in fact subject to interspeaker variation) (Gil 2003; p. 470).

The volatility of the grammar of Singlish that has persisted despite its ubiquity across the broader Singlish population can be attributed in part to the sociolinguistic situation surrounding Singlish. More specifically, I point to the historical absence of any formal institutional support for Singlish as a key factor for Singlish having yet to coalesce towards a singular norm or standard; unlike English, Malay, Tamil,

and Mandarin, which together form the official languages of Singapore, Singlish has no official status.

Indeed, not only does Singlish not receive any institutional support, in recent years, it has been subjected to hostile language policies, perhaps best exemplified in the “Speak Good English Movement” (SGEM) campaign that was launched by the Singaporean government in the year 2000. This hostility against Singlish was evident from the outset: in the speech inaugurating the campaign, then-Prime Minister of Singapore Goh Chok Tong claimed of Singlish that it was “not only ungrammatical and truncated but often incomprehensible” (Goh 2000). This stance, that Singlish is “ungrammatical”, is also reflected in the very name for the campaign, which positions Singlish as the “broken” counterpart of Standard Singaporean English (SSE), the eponymous “good” English of the campaign.

In the two decades since the inauguration of the campaign, however, the SGEM has walked back some of this messaging, as trained linguists have joined its advisory board and subsequently pushed back against the prescriptivism that underlies the characterisation of Singlish as a “broken” variety of English that is in competition with SSE. Instead of blatantly discouraging the use of Singlish, the SGEM now positions itself as promoting the use of SSE, as a variety which is largely mutually intelligible with other Standard Englishes used around the world, whilst recognising and respecting the cultural and linguistic value of Singlish as a variety, particularly given recent discourse in the public sphere over the cultural value of Singlish as a marker of Singaporean identity (see, e.g. Khoo 2019).

At present, the SGEM adopts a three-way distinction between “good” or “standard” English, “bad” or “broken” English, and Singlish, and campaigns for the

individual to gain fluency and proficiency in SSE in particular, such that individual Singaporeans are able to code switch effectively and at will.

While this is a welcome change, and one that I believe portends well for future language planning policies pertaining to Singlish, the unfortunate reality is that there remains much institutional bias against Singlish in the linguistic landscape of Singapore.

The continued institutionalised bias against Singlish is most saliently reflected in the fact that its use on nationally televised channels was and continues to be explicitly restricted, as a direct consequence of the government's historic language policy position surrounding the use of Singlish: the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), the regulatory body overseeing mass media content in Singapore, allows for the use of Singlish on television only "in interviews where the interviewee speaks only Singlish" and disallows the interviewer from using Singlish in turn (Infocomm Media Development Authority 2019; p. 7).

Indeed, the IMDA continues to refer to Singlish as the "ungrammatical local English, and includes dialect terms and sentence structures based on dialect" (ibid.; fn. 4), in direct contrast to the developments which we saw in the SGEM campaign.

In spite of the lack of representation in the mass media, Singlish "continues to be used in everyday interactions within some, if not most, segments of the population" (Yeo 2010a), though one would not be able to discern this reality when reviewing official governmental documentation: in the 2020 census of the population of Singapore, Singlish is not recognised as a possible home language, nor is its existence even acknowledged (Singapore Department of Statistics 2021).

Despite this shortcoming of the 2020 census, the same survey does report some

other statistics surrounding the linguistic landscape of Singapore which have immediate bearing on our understanding of the status of Singlish: one such statistic pertains to the fact that a supermajority of approximately 75% of the population maintains literacy in at least two languages, directly reflecting the multilingualism that is prevalent in Singaporean society.

Another notable statistic is that 48.3% of individuals reported using English as the primary language of home in 2020, compared to only about 32.3% in 2010. On top of this sizeable increase, of the 48.3% who reported using English at home in 2020, only 13.2% (6.5% of total respondents) reported not using a secondary language variety at home; Mandarin, the various Chinese “dialects”, and Malay form the bulk of the secondary languages used in addition to English at home, in line with my earlier characterisation of these varieties as the most salient substrates to Singlish.

This picture of home language use in Singapore is also relevant in that it clearly establishes that the contact situation that resulted in the development of Singlish remains in place even today, with both the lexifier and the substrate varieties remaining in continued contact with Singlish.

While evidence from certain contact varieties (e.g. Jamaican Creole English) indicates that prolonged contact with the lexifier variety in particular leads to a “historical tendency for the creole to drop its most noticeable non-European features, often (but not always) replacing them with European ones” in a process sometimes termed decreolisation (Holm 2000; p. 10), it is not immediately clear what the effect of prolonged contact with *both* the lexifier and substrate varieties should be.

One possibility is implied by Bao (2015) when he notes that Singlish has “ac-

cumulated, over the past 200 years, lexical and grammatical features” from the its input varieties: in other words, continued contact may well result in continued transfer. Given that different households use different language varieties to differing extents across Singapore, the individual contact situations which are feeding the development of the individual idiolects of Singlish are going to be wildly variable across speakers, thus feeding into the interspeaker variation that has been noted in the literature.

Furthermore, if we assume that the use of Singlish at home is reported in the census as the use of English (which would have been the next best alternative option which a Singlish-speaking respondent would have selected), this also indicates that for most Singaporeans, the use of Singlish is not necessarily dictated by diglossic considerations; in addition to possibly alternating with English, it would also alternate with a secondary language for the vast majority of respondents, further complicating the language acquisition picture for children acquiring Singlish.

Stepping back from the specifics for a moment, the broader point that I want to make at this juncture is simply that the historical changes that have affected the linguistic landscape of Singapore (particularly over the past twenty years or so) have meant that Singlish-speaking children from the corresponding period were faced with a couple of key challenges in their language acquisition process; I *speculate* that these challenges have, in turn, exacerbated the degree of interspeaker variation that we find across Singlish speakers today.

At the same time, however, some of the more recent changes which I outlined above are likely part of a broader pattern of change which are likely to ameliorate these same challenges moving forward, such that future generations of Singlish-

speakers may well exhibit more interspeaker uniformity.

5.2 Some speculations on the acquisition of Singlish

The challenges that were faced by Singlish-speaking children over the past two decades or so can be characterised as follows: (i) that there continues to be no single prominent standard adult grammar which is available within the speech community to serve as a unifying target grammar, particularly given the anti-Singlish sentiment that has been expressed by the government, and (ii) that the input which they receive at home in particular has become increasingly multilingual, and has also increasingly included as part of the mix Standard Singaporean English. This has resulted in increased code-switching and code-mixing at home, where children are most likely to identify a target Singlish grammar given the lack of any external norms. In turn, this makes the isolation of bona fide Singlish linguistic input (i.e. input that is not from another language variety) particularly tricky.

The first of these issues is one that is shared across many contact languages (particularly pidgins): while some contact varieties (e.g. Tok Pisin) have gained official status and become established lingua francas, many others (e.g. Jamaican Creole English) are in a similar situation to Singlish in that their vitality is directly threatened by the existence of an alternative, more highly-regarded lingua franca variety (i.e. English in both Jamaica and Singapore; see Holm 2000 for further discussion). There is thus no impetus for the standardisation of the contact variety, since standardisation of the contact variety is important only insofar as a common lingua franca is required for intracommunity communication.

In other words, since there is a standard English variety that is available to bridge any communicative gaps within the community, there is no additional pressure to standardise the use of Singlish from a communicative perspective, since it is not being conscripted to fulfill this function within the broader speech community.

The second factor, namely the rampant multilingualism that has been developing both in the domain of home, as well as within the society at large, adds further stationary inertia against the standardisation of Singlish in that because all Singlish speakers find themselves in a multilingual community, inconsistencies across speakers with respect to any single grammatical feature in Singlish does not necessarily pose an insurmountable problem for communicative efficacy, since code-switching into any variety that is more standardised (the most prominent of which would be English, but any of the other input varieties with official status would also do the trick) is always an option to ensure the effectiveness of communication.

Additionally, the expectation held by many Singaporeans that their fellow Singaporeans may actually speak within the context of home languages that are distinct from their own has also led to an impressive degree of tolerance when it comes to the accommodation of non-standard language.⁴⁶

These factors cumulatively lead me to suggest that Singlish-speaking children have, over the past two decades in particular, largely ended up acquiring the Singlish which they are exposed to in the household, since unlike with the other language varieties acquired by the multilingual child learner, Singlish does not have an es-

⁴⁶ This is a problem for the collection of grammaticality judgments in particular, since the standard procedure of presenting a construction for judgment may be understood as judging another Singlish speaker's use of the construction, which can easily be tolerated, vs. the actually-desired acceptability of the construction per the informant's internal grammar.

established external standard, meaning that Singlish input from outside the household that directly contradicts specific hypotheses adopted by the Singlish-speaking child can easily be written off as noise. In other words, when faced with an alternative version of Singlish, the child can easily treat it as a different (albeit largely mutually intelligible) language variety altogether, rather than taking it as genuine Singlish input which would subsequently trigger a retreat to some prior grammar state, which would ultimately result in greater uniformity across speakers.

If children are simply sticking to their guns with respect to whatever version of Singlish they acquire from home, this may account for the (asymmetrical) bimodal distribution which I reported in chapter 2 in the following way (see fn. 3): since the two competing clausal configurations from English and Chinese are both viable starting hypotheses for the Singlish-speaking child learner, if said child assumes the Singlish-as-Chinese position during their critical period, perhaps due to the specific variety of Singlish spoken by the child's caregivers at home, and never receives enough negative input that is deemed reliable enough to motivate a retreat from said position, then said child will eventually develop an adult grammar in which the absence of agreement morphology in Singlish reflects a structural configuration that is distinguished from full-agreement, which patterns with English.

Conversely, if a child learner adopts the Singlish-as-English position, then that child will come to develop an adult grammar which lacks any sensitivity to the presence/absence of agreement, since for said speakers, Singlish has the same underlying syntax as English, and the presence/absence of agreement is genuinely a PF-level phenomenon.

The suggestion that whether a speaker belongs to the Singlish-as-Chinese group

or the Singlish-as-English group is determined by the Singlish variety spoken in the home also potentially accounts for the asymmetry between the relative sizes of the two groups: Chinese was historically more prevalent as the language of home, with approximately 58% of respondents in the 2000 census reporting using one of the Chinese varieties, compared to 23% for English (Singapore Department of Statistics 2001), and this results in greater mixing (i.e. contact) between Singlish and Chinese for a larger segment of the population.

More abstractly, however, such a choice (e.g. between English and Chinese) can (and indeed, has to) be made wherever the different input varieties exhibit cross-linguistic variation. The development/adoption of more general principles such as the generalised blocking principle which I argued for in chapters 3 and 4 may then be taken as a means to simplify the decision algorithm which a child must engage with to arrive at a fully specified grammar, particularly given the standard poverty of the stimulus considerations that are being amplified by the noisy data which the Singlish learning child is exposed to. In the case of the generalised blocking principle in particular, the transparency which its adoption imposes on syntax-morphology mapping means that the acquisition of structure is greatly simplified, since what you see is in fact what you get.

With all that said, however, I would like to note that the rampant variation which we find across the Singlish-speaking population is liable to change in the near future: in addition to the destigmatisation of Singlish within the public sphere that is clearly in progress, the proliferation of decentralised media and social media content has also resulted in Singlish language media being more readily available. This means that we may soon see the establishment of some standard(s) which learn-

ers can target as an ideal end-state for their grammars, thus alleviating some of the noisiness of the input data that the Singlish-learning children in years past have faced. Acquisition studies of Singlish-speaking children in this interim stage may well prove to be instructive in the longer term, though for reasons of scope I must leave this for future research.

5.3 Summary of this dissertation

In this dissertation I have investigated some of the claims surrounding potential universals in contemporary syntactic theorising by scrutinising data from the contact language Singlish.

In chapter 2, I demonstrated that the absence of agreement results in a wide range of both syntactic and semantic reflexes for many speakers, indicating that a phonological treatment of the phenomenon à la Wee and Ansaldo (2004) is untenable.

In particular, I demonstrated that in the absence of agreement morphology results in (i) the bleeding of object topicalisation, (ii) the blocking of adjunct-extraction from lower in the structure, (iii) scope-freezing, (iv) an incompatibility with embedding under regret-class predicates, (v) a ban on quantificational “subjects”, (vi) interpretational constraints on wh-“subjects”, and (vii) a subject-object asymmetry with respect to cross-clausal wh-extraction.

To account for these findings, I instead proposed an alternative syntactic account where the surface “subjects” in clauses lacking agreement are in a left peripheral position, where they are interpreted topically.

I further considered a second type of agreement-less clause, which exhibits most but not all of the properties of agreement-less clauses of the first type, and is distinguished by the presence of overt focus marking in the left periphery, and proposed a unified treatment of both types of agreement-less clauses, where the non-agreeing “subjects” of Singlish are realised in the specifier of Bošković’s (2023) mixed A/\bar{A} projection ($A/\bar{A}P$). That is, the topical or focal interpretation of these “subjects” follows from them being obligatorily realised in a mixed A/\bar{A} position in the absence of agreement morphology.

I discussed the further consequences of this analysis of Singlish agreement-less clauses for our understanding of the EPP more broadly, and argued that it constitutes evidence for the contextual satisfaction of the EPP, as argued for in Bošković (2023).

I then demonstrated that the proposed analysis makes the right predictions with respect to a novel subject-object asymmetry with respect to the (im)possibility of long-distance *wh*-extraction in Singlish.

In chapter 3, I discussed the optionality of tense marking in Singlish, and suggested that clauses which lack overt tense morphology and those which lack overt agreement morphology should be considered a natural class of clauses which lack inflectional morphology and advanced a unified treatment of all inflection-less clauses.

I then showed that such constructions lack temporal specificity, i.e. they are ambiguous between past and present interpretations, and have to be disambiguated by pragmatic factors, and also presented novel data indicating that there is an eventive/stative asymmetry in inflection-less clauses, such that bare inflection-less clauses involving eventive predicates are ungrammatical, while ones involving sta-

tive predicates are not. Drawing on an insight from Enç (1991), who suggests that eventive predicates are distinguished from stative predicates in that they must be licensed by a c-commanding clausemate element which bears temporal content, I argued that the observed empirical facts can most easily be captured under an analysis of inflection-less clauses in Singlish as being syntactically tenseless.

I argued that this analysis is made more plausible in Singlish by virtue of the contextual satisfaction of the EPP implicated by the A/ \bar{A} P analysis of inflection-less clauses in Singlish developed over chapters 2 and 3, since the EPP is excluded as a potential reason for the projection of TP.

Next, I discussed an apparent exception to the general absence of temporal marking in Singlish, in the form of clauses with future reference, which I showed must be marked with either the future-oriented modal *will* or the progressive morpheme *-ing*. I argued that the relevant property of futurity which forces the use of overt morphological cues is not its future temporal content but its modal nature, thus allowing for the reconciliation of the empirical data with the proposed syntactically tenseless account of Singlish.

I then argued that the need to morphologically realise the modal future in Singlish could be attributed to the application of a generalised blocking principle modelled on Chierchia's (1998) Blocking Principle, which forces the use of overt functional elements where possible in Singlish (in the relevant domains).

I further suggested that this generalised blocking principle, in conjunction with the fact that the functional inventory of Singlish is primarily derived from English, can also account for the distribution of the various aspectual markers available in Singlish.

In other words, mismatches in the lexical properties of specific Chinese aspectual markers and their corresponding English-derived Singlish counterparts can result in certain aspectual specifications which are attested in Chinese being unavailable in Singlish, while at the same time, the inverse can also be true, where the lexical properties of the English-derived aspectual markers force the instantiation of an aspectual marker, per the generalised blocking principle, in Singlish where it is not required in Chinese.

In chapter 4, I examined the nominal structure of Singlish, and demonstrated that the nominal word order of Singlish is clearly English-derived. I also showed that Singlish is unambiguously a DP language, with an article system which is largely drawn from English, and that the correlation between Singlish's DP nature and the rigidity of the word order within the Singlish nominal is in line with the NP/DP hypothesis proposed in Bošković (2009; 2012), i.e. the stark contrast between Singlish and Chinese, despite the latter having deeply influenced the structure of Singlish elsewhere, provides further evidence that, per the NP/DP hypothesis, the syntactic projection of D is in fact not universal.

I further demonstrated that this contrast between Singlish and English on the one hand and Chinese on the other is indeed due to the article system of Singlish, and is crucially not due to a lack of Chinese influence on the structure of the nominal domain by documenting novel empirical data relating to relativisation strategies in Singlish. In particular, I demonstrated that Singlish utilises two prenominal relativisation strategies which are clearly derived from Chinese, and in doing so, I also provided the first description of *determiner doubling* relatives in Singlish, so-named because they contain two instances of D within a single relativisation construction.

I demonstrated that the mixing of the determiner system of English with the syntactic structure of Chinese has led to some interesting interactions in terms of semantic composition, and presented an extension of Bošković and Hsieh's (2013) analysis of a subtype of Mandarin relatives which are similar to the Singlish cases being considered in that they reflect the same relative word order between the relative clause, (demonstrative) determiner, and head noun. Crucially, this account is able to capture the facts while still preserving the Chierchia's (1998) blocking principle.

In sum, across chapters 2 through 4, I have demonstrated that Singlish can be characterised as a language where the syntax-morphology mapping is largely transparent, and I proposed the formalisation of this transparency in the form of the generalised blocking principle. Since the generalised blocking principle forces the use of functional morphology where possible in the relevant domains, the absence of overt morphological elements which we otherwise expect to be present, e.g. tense/agreement morphology, indicates that the use of such morphological elements is impossible, a fact which I attribute to the absence of the corresponding syntactic structure where the relevant (missing) morphological elements would have been introduced in the first place.

Finally, I have presented a brief discussion of the sociolinguistic factors surrounding the present day perception of Singlish earlier in this chapter, and further discussed how these factors may have affected patterns of child acquisition as a possible account for the heightened interspeaker variation that we find in Singlish today.

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