

Adjective-headed sentences in Singlish

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The project

- Research project for Master's at Nanyang Technological University supervised by Francis Bond
- The creation of a Singlish branch of the English Resource Grammar (ERG)
 - Extended with some rules and types, replaced very few
- Some included features
 - Singlish sentence final particles: *they don't know anything **one lah**.*
 - Aspect introduced by certain words: *I **ever** come here before.*
 - Different relative clause structure: *The man **sell ice cream one** never come today.*

Singlish

- Has a mainly English lexicon
- Main substrates: Malay, Chinese vernaculars like Hokkien and Cantonese

Ben: *Wahlau! Really buay tahan dat cao ah beng! Sibe! atas!*
M/H E H M E H H H M
EXPL NEG tolerate that smelly ah beng EXPL ADJ(up)

‘Damn! I really cant stand that nasty Ah Beng! He’s extremely arrogant!’

Alan: *Really meh⁵⁵? I tot he better liao⁵³ after he kena by that officer.*
E C E E E E H E E M E E E
PART thought already PASSIVE(hit)

‘Really (indicating disbelief)? I thought he’s not as arrogant now, after he was chastised by the officer.’

Adjectival sentences

- There is a “strong collocation between the Singapore English syntactic frame ‘noun phrase (NP) + [empty] copula + adjectival phrase (AP)’ and overstated expressions” (Wong, 2015)
- Possibility of this phenomenon originating from Chinese (Wong, 2015)

1a. That cake shop very famous.

b. That cake shop famous *sia*.

c. ?That cake shop famous.

2a. 她 真 美

she really beautiful

b. ?她 美

Current Approach

- Allow some overgeneration
- Adjectives are seen as possible head of sentences
- Particles also head sentences by taking a sentence as its complement
- Collocation taken as a pragmatic instead of grammatical phenomenon

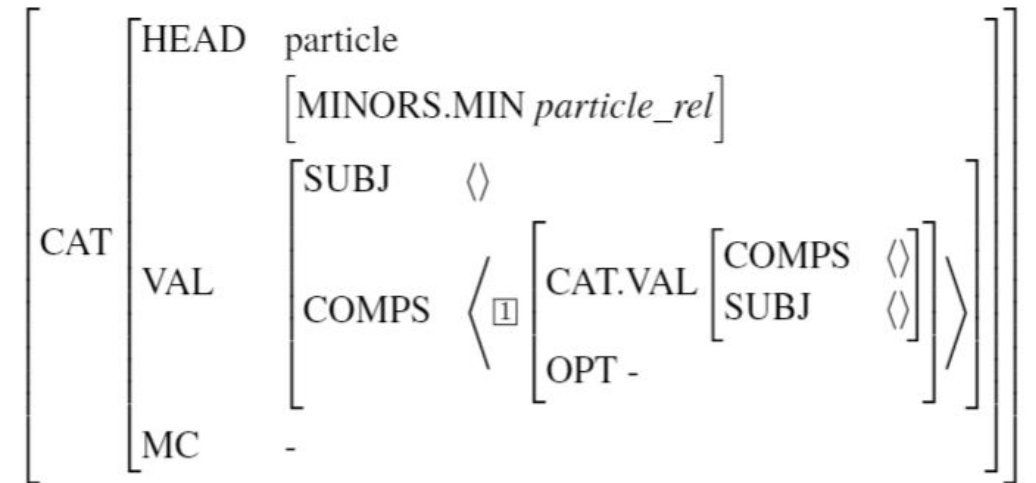
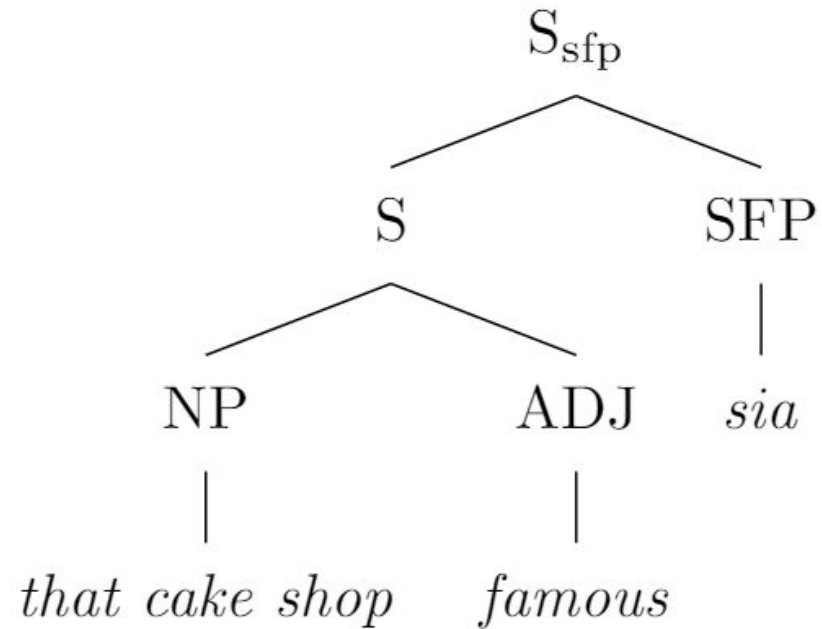
Adjectives as sentence heads

- added in adjectives as possible heads in roots and parse nodes to allow the syntax trees to be constructed
- Added in VFORM (underspecified) as a feature of adjectives
- Created a new lexical rule that takes the MOD value and moves it to the SUBJ

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{INPUT} \\ \text{OUTPUT} \end{array} \left\langle \left[\text{SYNSEM} \left[\text{CAT} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{HEAD} \text{ adjective \& } \\ \text{MOD} \# \text{mod} \\ \text{VAL} \left[\text{SUBJ} \text{ < > } \right] \end{array} \right] \right] \right] \right\rangle \right]$$

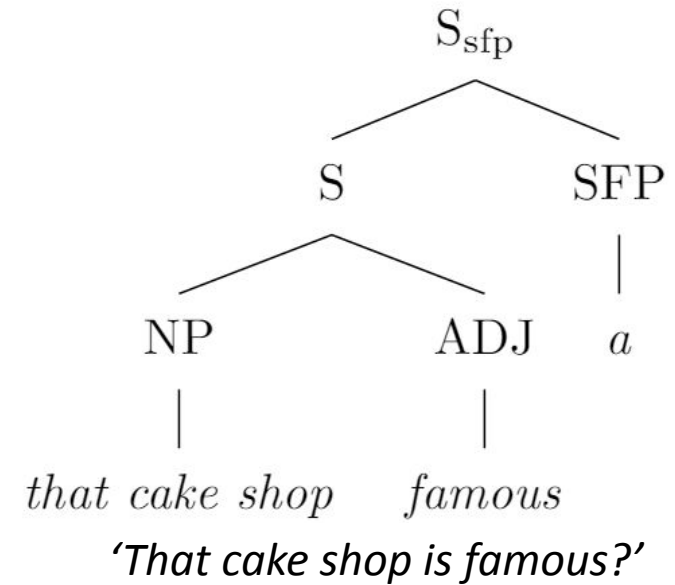
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{OUTPUT} \end{array} \left\langle \left[\text{SYNSEM} \left[\text{CAT} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{HEAD} \text{ adjective} \\ \text{VAL} \left[\text{SUBJ} \# \text{mod} \right] \end{array} \right] \right] \right] \right\rangle \right]$$

Sentence Final Particles



Possible approach to reduce overgeneration

- Have particles attach directly adjectives
- With a new feature e.g. INTENSIFIER +, such that only adjective phrases with this feature can head sentences.



- 3a. That cake shop lousy, but the other cake shop good.
b. ?The other cake shop good
c. ?That cake shop lousy.
- 4a. ?I hungry.
b. I now very hungry (NUS SMS corpus)
c. I hungry already.

Thank you

References

- Wong, J. (2005). “Why you so Singlish one?” A semantic and cultural interpretation of the Singapore English particle one. *Language in Society*, 34(2), 239-275.
- Tan, Y. Y. (2017). Singlish: An illegitimate conception in Singapore's language policies?. *European Journal of Language Policy*, 9(1), 85-104.
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