Argument Ellipsis in Colloquial Singapore English and the Definite

Subject Restriction at the Syntax-Discourse Interface

Abstract: This paper provides new data from Colloquial Singapore English/CSE showing a hitherto unnoticed subject-object asymmetry with respect to the possible interpretations of bare arguments. Specifically, empty objects in CSE can exhibit the sloppy/quantificational readings whereas empty subjects can only exhibit the strict/E-type readings. A recent theory of argument ellipsis in East Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean (Oku 1998; S.-W. Kim 1999; Saito 2007; Takahashi 2008a, b) argues that the sloppy/quantificational readings obtain as a result of the copying of a linguistic expression from a full-fledged clause onto the corresponding empty argument slot in an elliptical clause. This paper proposes that this copying process is blocked in the subject position in CSE because the subject must be a definite NP, a grammatical restriction which I show has been inherited into CSE from its substrate languages – Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien. The present results lend new empirical support to the Sinitic substratist hypothesis, amply motivated in the literature (Platt and Weber 1980; Platt and Ho 1989; Bao 2001, 2005; Bao and Lye 2005; Lee et al. 2009), that CSE has received deep underlying grammatical influences from the Sinitic languages in the dynamic, endogenous contact ecology in Singapore.

Keywords: argument ellipsis, sloppy reading, quantificational reading, definiteness restriction; Colloquial Singapore English, Sinitic substrate

1.   Introduction

This paper investigates a certain interpretive asymmetry between subjects and objects in Colloquial Singapore English (henceforth, CSE), an English-lexified variety which has arisen and developed with a constant Chinese substratum in the multi-lingual endogenous contact ecology in Singapore. It is well-known that CSE makes extensive uses of pro-drop/topic-drop (Tay 1979; Platt and Weber 1980; Bao 2001, Tan 2003, 2007, 2009). However, I provide new evidence from CSE showing that null subjects differ from null objects in a minute but systematic way with respect to their possible semantic interpretations: the latter can exhibit the sloppy/quantificational readings as well as the strict/E-type readings whereas the former can only exhibit the strict/E-type readings. Recent works on the syntax and semantics of null arguments in East Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean (Oku 1998; S.-W. Kim 1999; Saito 2007; Takahashi 2008a, b) hypothesize that the sloppy/quantificational reading of a null argument is derived by the copying of an overt argument in a full-fledged clause onto the null argument position at Logical Form, the interface between syntactic structure and semantic interpretation. I propose that the afore-mentioned asymmetry in CSE follows from the obligatory definiteness on the subject position, a restriction which I show has been inherited from its Sinitic substratal languages (Mandarin, Hokkien and Cantonese). Specifically, the sloppy/quantificational readings can only be obtained by the LF Copy process targeting an indefinite use of an overt antecedent NP into the elliptical subject position. However, this copying process is blocked for the empty subject in CSE because of the afore-mentioned definiteness restriction on the subject. As a result, the only recovery procedure available in CSE which is compatible with this requirement is the insertion of the null pronominal/*pro*, which necessarily gives rise to the strict/E-type readings. The results obtained here, therefore, provide further empirical support for the hypothesis, amply

motivated in the literature, that CSE has received systemic grammatical influences from the Sinitic languages in the endogenous contact ecology within which it has evolved and developed.

2.   The Socio-historical Background of CSE and the Robust Sinitic Substratum

CSE, most intimately known as Singlish, is an English-lexified variety spoken in Singapore by a growing number of young Singaporeans on an everyday basis. According to Lim and Gisborne (2009), CSE has already attained endonormative stabilization in Phase 4 of the Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes (Schneider 2007). CSE is labeled a New English (Kachru 1985; Pakir 1991), a non-native English variety that has been indigenized in the community where it is spoken. Today, CSE is acquired by children as their mother tongue (Kwan-Terry 1986, 1989; Gupta 1991, 1994), despite the continued social stigma commonly associated with it in the Singapore society. The uniquness of CSE can be detected even by causual foreign observers in all aspects of its grammar/usage, including phonology/phonetics, morphology, and syntax. CSE is a contact language because its grammatical system has evolved in the dynamic endogenous multilingual contact ecology (Platt 1975; Gupta 1994; Ansaldo 2004, 2009a, b); it has arisen and developed in contact communities in which the languages of the indigenous opulation have been used together with it (Chaudenson 1977). Due to its continued presence in the dynamic multilingual contact ecology in Singapore, CSE exhibits substratal effects at various levels of grammar from more than one local variety, including English, Malay, Hokkien, Cantonese, Mandarin, and, to a lesser extent, Tamil, though the language policies in Singapore in the second half of the 20th century have made Sinitic influences on CSE more pronounced, as in the recent contact ecology of Hong Kong English (Lim 2009).

When it comes to the actual *linguistic* significance of the primary substrate language(s) of CSE, researchers' positions are split. On one hand, Gupta (1998), Low and Brown (2005) and Deterding (2007) argue that the vernacular varieties of Malay (i.e., Bazaar Malay and Baba Malay) are two principal substrates, with the assorted southern varieties of Chinese being comparably less significant secondary substrates. On the other hand, the majority of researchers on CSE (see Bao 2001, 2005, Bao and Wee 1999, Bao and Aye 2010, Lee et al. 2009 and many references cited therein) claim that Sinitic languages, i.e., Hokkien, Cantonese and Mandarin, are primary substrates of CSE. This second position is quite natural in light of the socio-historical fact that early Chinese settlers to Singapore spoke one or the other of these varieties and in light of the sheer numerical dominance of ethnic Chinese people vis-à-vis Malays and Indians reported in Pan (1998). According to Pan (p. 200), in 1840, 50.0% of the population was of Chinese descent compared to Malay (37.3%) and Indian (9.5%). In 1980, this Chinese dominancy had further accelarated with Chinese (76.9%) as opposed to Malay (14.6%) and Indian (6.4%), a distributional trend that still holds true in the current Singapore demographics.

It is not that influences from Bazaar Malay/Baba Malary are completely absent in CSE. The Malay traits can be observed at several different modules of grammar, including lexical items such as *makan* 'to eat' and *jalan* 'to walk', reduplication and, most importantly, the so-called *kena*-passive (Bao and Wee 1999). However, given the compelling overall Sinitic influences on CSE that have received lots of linguistic and socio-historical support, it is safe to conclude that the influences of the vernacular varieties of Malay are generally much less significant in comparsion to the Sinitic languages and perhaps have made only negligible contributions to the formative stage of CSE.

3.   Argument Ellipsis in CSE

It is widely acknowledged in the literature on CSE (Tay 1979; Platt and Weber 1980; Gupta 1994; Alsagoff and Ho 1998; Bao 2001; Tan 2003, 2007, 2009) that this variety allows liberal omission of grammatical elements, including subjects, objects and possessors, as shown in (1a-c).

(1)   a.   After ∅ get some sickness, ∅ can't help it.   (subject omission)

               'After <u>one</u> falls ill, <u>one</u> can't help it.'

        b.   I never try ∅ before.   (direct object omission)

               'I have never tried <u>it</u> before.'

        c.   ∅ Head very pain.   (possessor omission)

               '<u>My</u> head is very painful.'

                                          ((1a, b) adopted from Tan (2003, p. 1))

A standard analysis of the pro-drop phenomenon in East Asian languages such as Japanese has been that the empty argument slots are occupied by empty pronouns/*pro*'s (Kuroda 1965; Ohso 1976; Hoji 1985; Saito 1985). However, certain interpretive asymmetries between empty subjects and objects in CSE discussed below show that this traditional analysis is not completely satisfactory.

3.1.   *Sloppy Readings and Quantificational Readings under Ellipsis*

This section provides new data showing that in CSE, null subjects behave differently from null objects with respect to the sloppy and quantificational readings. I show that this discrepancy cannot be accounted for by the pronominal analysis of null arguments.

Suppose that the null object construction in (2b) is preceded by (2a), and that the null object in (2b) is somehow anaphoric to the overt object in (2a).

(2) a. David like his school.

  b. John also like *e*.

  c. John also like it.

The null object in (2b) can refer back either to David's school (the strict reading) or to John's school (the sloppy reading). Given the plausible heuristic that the structure and function of empty pronouns mirrors that of their overt variants, the strict reading in (2b) can be easily accommodated by the *pro* in the object position, because the overt pronoun *it* in (2c) yields the strict reading. The problem with this *pro*-analysis, however, is that if the null object in (2b) were unanimously an empty pronoun, the sloppy reading would be mysterious. This is because the overt pronoun *it* in (2c) can only yield the strict reading (i.e., John also likes David's school).

A similar argument against the *pro*-analysis can be made on the basis of the E-type vs. quantificational readings (Takahashi 2008a, b; Şener and Takahashi 2010). Consider examples in (3a-c).

(3) a. David like three students in the class.

  b. John also like *e*.

  c. John also like them.

Limiting our attention to the context where the null object in (3b) is anaphoric to the overt object in (3a), the sentence in (3b) has two interpretations. One interpretation is that John likes those

three students that David also likes. Under this interpretation, the set of the three students from the class whom John likes must be the same as the set of the three students from the same class whom David likes. Takahashi (2008a, b) calls this reading the E-type reading because the null object in this case functions semantically as the so-called E-type pronoun in the literature (Evans 1980). The other reading is that the set of students in the class whom John likes is different from the set of students in the class whom David likes. The sentence in (3b) under this reading is true in the context where David likes Tom, Jeff and Mary whereas John likes Tom, Jeff and Susan. However, the same context renders the sentence in (3b) false under the E-type reading. Now, if null objects in CSE were always null pronouns, we would erroneously predict that (3b) should only allow the E-type reading, because overt pronouns only allow the E-type reading. Thus, the example in (3c) with the overt pronoun *them* in object position can only yield the E-type reading. This observation, therefore, shows that in addition to the *pro*-strategy, we need something else to fully account for the whole range of interpretations actually available to the null object in CSE.

Let us now turn to elliptic subjects in CSE and how they behave with respect to the two interpretive diagnostics discussed above. (4b) illustrates a null subject construction in CSE.

(4)   a.   David say [his mother speak Teochew].
        b.   John say [*e* speak Hokkien].

In contrast to the null object, the null subject only allows the strict interpretation. That is, (4b) can mean that John say David's mother speaks Hokkien (the strict reading) but cannot mean that John say John's mother speaks Hokkien (the sloppy reading). The same interpretive restriction emerges under the quantificational context. (5b) exemplifies the kind of null subject constructions in CSE at stake.

(5) a. Three students came to see David.

  b. *e* came to see John, too.

The null subject in (5b) must refer back to the same set of three students who came to see David (the E-type reading); it does not allow the interpretation where the set of three students who came to see David is different from the set of three students who came to see John (the sloppy reading).

  Table 1 summarizes the subject-object asymmetry in CSE with respect to the range of interpretations available to empty subjects and objects.

	Subject	Object
Strict Reading	YES	YES
Sloppy Reading	NO	YES
E-Type Reading	YES	YES
Quantificational Reading	NO	YES

Table 1: Subject-Object Asymmetries in CSE with respect to Sloppy/Quantificational Readings

The results shown in Table 1 raise two important theoretical questions. One question is what grammatical mechanism gives rise to the sloppy and quantificational readings. The other question is why it is that this mechanism, whatever it may be, is prevented from targeting the

empty subject position in CSE. In section 3.2, I review one recent analysis for the origin of the sloppy/quantificational readings originally proposed by Oku (1998) and further developed by Takahashi (2008a, b) and Şener and Takahashi (2010) on the basis of their detailed comparative syntax of argument ellipsis in Japanese and Turkish. These researchers hypothesize that empty arguments can be the by-product of the LF Copy process but this process is blocked by the presence of subject agreement. In section 3.3, however, I demonstrate that this anti-agreement analysis cannot explain the lack of the sloppy/quantificational readings for null subjects in CSE. Instead, I propose that the subject-object asymmetry in CSE receives a straightforward substratist explanation. Specifically, the subject position cannot be filled in by the LF Copy process due to the definite restriction imposed on preverbal subject positions in CSE. I further demonstrate that this restriction is a grammatical feature which has been transferred to CSE from its Sinitic substrate languages (i.e., Hokkien, Cantonese and Mandarin).

3.2.   *LF Copy, Agreement and Anti-Agreement*

Takahashi (2008a, b) and Şener and Takahashi (2010) propose that in Japanese, both null subjects and null objects exhibit the sloppy/quantificational readings whereas in Turkish, only null objects do (see those works for the complete paradigm of data to make this point). Oku (1998) proposes that the sloppy/quantificational readings are the by-product of the LF Copy process, according to which an overt argument is copied at LF from the preceding full-fledged clause to the corresponding argument slot in the following elliptical clause. To illustrate this analysis, consider a null object construction in (6b) from Japanese.[1]

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[1] The following abbreviations are used in data in this paper: ACC, accusative; AOR, aorist; ASP, aspect; CL, classifier; DAT, dative; FUT, future; GEN, genitive; NOM, nominative; PFV, perfective; PL, plural; POSS, possessive; SG, singular; TOP, topic; 1, first person.

(6) a. Taroo-wa   zibun-no   tegami-o   suteta.

Taro-NOM   self-GEN   letter-ACC   discarded

'*Lit*. Taro discarded self's letter.'

b. Hanako-mo   *e*   suteta.

Hanako-also   discarded

'*Lit*. Hanako also discarded *e*.'

The missing object in (6b) can be interpreted as either Taro's mother (the strict reading) or Hanako's mother (the sloppy reading). The sloppy reading in (6b) arises due to LF Copy. According to this analysis, the LF representation for the example in (6b) is as in (7).

(7) LF: Hanako-mo [$_{NP}$ **zibun-no   tegami-o**]   suteta.

In this representation, the NP *zibun-no tegami-o* 'self's letter' is copied in the object position of the elliptic sentence in (6b) from the object position of the preceding clause in (6a). The sloppy reading obtains when the object is first copied without its reference being fixed and then being bound to the subject *Hanako* in the subsequent clause after the copying operation. The same analysis also derives the quantificational reading available for empty arguments in Japanese. Example (8b) illustrates a case in point:

(8) a. Taroo-wa   sannin-no   sensei-o   sonkeisiteiru.

Taro-TOP   three-GEN   teacher-ACC   respect

'Taro respects three teachers.'

    b.   Hanako-mo   *e*   sonkeisiteiru.

         Hanako-also   respect

         '*Lit*. Hanako respects *e*, too.'

                        ((8a, b) from Şener and Takahashi (2010, pp. 81-82))

(8b) allows both the E-type and quantificational readings. Under the LF Copy analysis, (8b) has the LF representation in (9).

(9)   LF: Hanako-mo   [$_{NP}$ **sannin-no**   **sensei-o**]   sonkeisiteiru

In this representation, the quantified expression *sannin-no sensei-o* 'three teachers' is copied in the missing object position from the corresponding object position in the antecedent clause. As a result, it is not surprising that the understood object quantifier in (9) behaves independently of its antecedent in the preceding clause, yielding the quantificational reading, as desired. The same analysis also applies to yield the sloppy/quantificational reading for null subjects in Japanese.

    As stated above, Şener and Takahashi (2010) provide evidence that Turkish behaves differently from Japanese in that only null objects exhibit the sloppy/quantificational readings. They draw on the agreement-based theory of argument ellipsis put forth by Saito (2007) and suggest that the LF Copy process is blocked for the null subject in Turkish due to subject agreement: see Saito (2007) for the technical reason why the presence of syntactic agreement blocks LF Copy. Examples (10a, b) illustrate that in Turkish, the form of the agreement suffix changes according to the subject in person and number.

(10) a.   (Ben) bu   makale-yi   yavaşyavaş   oku-yacağ-**ım**.

　　　　(I)　this　article-ACC　slowly　　　read-FUT-1SG

　　　　'I will read this article slowly.'

　　b.　(Biz) her   hafta sinema-ya   gid-er-**iz**.

　　　　(we)　every week movie-DAT　go-AOR-1PL.

　　　　'We go to the movies every week.'

<div align="right">(Şener and Takahashi (2010, p. 86))</div>

Şener and Takahashi (2010) also present crucial evidence that the missing subject *can* exhibit the sloppy reading in certain syntactic constructions (i.e., adjunct clauses and complements of the so-called Exceptional Case-Marking verbs) where subject agreement marking is missing or not obligatory. These observations suggest that syntactic agreement plays a key role in controlling the application of LF Copy in the comparative syntax of argument ellipsis in Japanese and Turkish.

3.3.　*The Preference for Definite Subjects and Sinitic Substratal Influences on CSE*

In the previous section, we have reviewed the LF Copy analysis of the sloppy/quantificational reading developed by Oku (1998), Takahashi (2008a b) and Şener and Takahashi (2010) and have reviewed Şener and Takahashi's hypothesis that this process is blocked by the presence of syntactic agreement. However, in this section, I show that this agreement-based analysis cannot capture the subject-object asymmetry in CSE summarized in Table 1.

It is a matter of considerable controversies whether CSE exhibits syntactic agreement as its lexifier (English) does. Consider a typical discourse in CSE shown in (11). In this conversation, speakers A and B are discussing Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*.

(11)　B:　　And how the benefactor **appear** in the first and last part …

　　　B:　　He **was** confused already. He **was** like part of the upper class but …

　　　A:　　Mmm…

　　　B:　　At the brink of it.

　　　A:　　Ya.

　　　B:　　Just, ya, it***'s*** very sad.

(Wee and Ansaldo (2004, p. 65))

In this discourse, Speaker B's first utterance does not exhibit syntactic agreement (*appear* instead of *appears*). The later utterances by the same speaker, however, do show copula agreement. Given this, it seems safe to say at the current point of the development of the CSE grammar that the apparent free variation of the agreement marker *-s* seems to be a natural outcome of ongoing grammatical competitions between the substrate languages (Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Mandarin, and/or Malay with no agreement) and the suprastrate language (English with forced impoverished agreement). Thus, Wee and Ansaldo (2004, p. 66) observe that verb-subject agreement in CSE is essentially sporadic rather than rule-governed and that it has not yet been stablized to the extent that we can tell with certainty whether its manifestation is clearly diagnosed as due to sociolinguistic and/or strictly grammatical factors. The important point here, however, is that the subject-object asymmetry remains, irrespective of whether the verb exhibits third person singular present agreement with its local subject. Consider examples in (12-14). These examples are minimally different from those in (2-4) in that the verbs in (12-14) register the standard subject-verb agreement marker.

(12)   a.   David like his school.

         b.   John also like*s* *e*.

(13)   a.   David like three students in the class.

         b.   John also like*s* *e*.

(14)   a.   David say [his mother speak Teochew].

         b.   John say [*e* speak*s* Hokkien].

The empty object in (12b) allows both the strict and sloppy interpretations. Similarly, the empty object in (13b) permits both the E-type and quantificational interpretations. This ambiguity is not observed in the missing subject in (14b), however, which only allows the strict interpretation.[2] These observations suggest that the presence vs. absence of syntactic agreement does not play a crucial role in explaining the subject-object asymmetry in CSE, as it does in Japanese vs. Turkish. Clearly, we are in need of a different factor which blocks the application of the LF Copy process to the subject position but not to the object position in this English variety.

3.4.   *The Definiteness Restriction on the Subject Position in CSE and the Sinitic Substrates*

In this section, I propose that the LF copy process is blocked in the subject position in CSE by the definiteness preference on this position, a grammatical property which I argue CSE has appropriated from its Sinitic substrate languages (i.e., Hokkien, Cantonese and Mandarin).

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[2] Note that testing the quantificational reading for the null subject requires it to be plural. Hence, we cannot test the relevance of syntactic agreement in this case. However, I believe that the persistence of the robust interpretive contrast between null subjects and objects in (12-14) suffices to make my case.

It is well known in the literature on the Chinese languages (Chao 1968; Tsao 1977; Li and Thompson 1981; Huang 1987; Cheng and Sybesma 1999, 2005) that the preverbal subject position must host a definite NP. Thus, in Mandarin Chinese, an indefinite NP such as *yi-ge ren* 'one man' cannot occur in the pre-verbal subject position (15a) while its definite counterpart, i.e., *na-ge ren* 'that man', can (15b). The grammaticality of the example in (15c) shows that both definite and indefinite NPs may occur in object position.

(15)   a.   * Yi-ge   ren   lai   le.

                    one-CL   man   come   ASP

                    'A man came.'

       b.   Na-ge   ren   lai   le.

                    that-CL   man   come   ASP

                    'That man came.'

       c.   Wo   xi huan   {na-ge/yi-ge}   ren.

                    I   like   that-CL/one-CL   man

                    'I like {that man/a man}.'

A similar grammatical pattern holds for Cantonese and Hokkien, two primary substrate languages of CSE. The indefinite interpretation of the bare noun is impermissible in the preverbal subject position in these languages, as shown in (16a) and (17a). Both languages use an existential construction to introduce an indefinite NP subject, as illustrated in (16b) and (17b). The object position, by contrast, is free from this requirement, as shown in (16c) and (17c).

(16) a.   Jek   màau   jáu-jó   yahp-làih.

      CL   cat   walk-PFV   enter-come

      'The cat came in.' *Not*: 'A cat came in.'

   b.   Tàuhsīn   yáuh   (yāt)   go   yāhn   yahp-jó   làih.

      Just-now   have   one   CL   person   enter-PFV   come

      'Someone came in just now.'

   c.   Ngo   soeng maai bun   syu   le   taai.

      I   want   buy   CL   book   come   read

      'I want to buy a book to read.'

                (Cantonese: (16a, b) adopted from Matthews and Yip (1994, pp. 76-77)

(17) a.   Lang   lai   liao.

      guest   come   ASP

      'The guest came.' *Not*: 'A guest came.'

   b.   Wu   lang   lai.

      got   guest   come

      'A guest came.'

   c.   Wa   zhor   li   tuck   {zi eh/he eh}   cei   liao.

      I   yesterday   read   a/the   book   already

      'I read {a book/the book} yesterday.'

                                                                   (Hokkien)

Now, it happens that CSE exhibits a similar restriction on the subject position, just like Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien. It is well known that CSE exhibits signature properties of the so-called topic-prominent languages (LI and Thompson 1976). Firstly, CSE lacks expletive elements such as *there* in Standard English. This is illustrated by the existential construction in CSE shown in (18a). Compare this example with the expletive construction in Standard English shown in (18b).

(18) a. *Got* people in the classroom.

  b. *There* are people in the classroom.

Secondly, CSE allows topic chain constructions as illustrated in (19B).

(19) A: So, you can cycle now, can you?

  B: Yeah, $[\varnothing]_{\text{Top}}$ $\varnothing$ can cycle, not very well, $[\varnothing]_{\text{Top}}$ but $\varnothing$ can cycle, ah.

  $[\varnothing]_{\text{Top}}$ $\varnothing$ knocked myself against the pillar, $[\varnothing]_{\text{Top}}$ but then $\varnothing$ managed to pick up cycling.

  (NIECSSE, F13-c: 02)

In this discourse, Speaker B is introduced as the topic of the discourse initiated by Speaker A. Once this is established, each of the clauses in (19B) has Speaker B as the topic to be commented about. Thus, all the subsequenty clauses have null subjects, making a topic chain linked to the original topic. Thirdly, CSE makes extensive use of topic-markers such as *as for, wise, right* and other discourse-functional particles, as shown in (20a, b).

(20) a.   *As for* filters *wise*, get a UV filter.

    b.   Your homework *ha/hor/la*, you better do $\varnothing$.

<div align="right">(Tan (2009, p. 26))</div>

Finally, CSE possesses the Chinese-style/hanging topic construction (Xu and Langendoen 1985; Bao 2001), as illustrated in (21a, b).

(21) a.   <u>Australia</u>, I've been to Perth.

    b.   <u>Local food</u>, you must try chicken rice.

<div align="right">(Tan (2009, pp. 26-27))</div>

Thus, there is no denying that CSE is a topic-prominent language. This result is hardly surprising given the systematic grammatical influences on the grammar of CSE from topic-prominent Sinitic languages such as Hokkien, Cantonese, and Mandarin. For topic-prominent languages, Yip (1995: 87) suggests that "if no other element is topicalized in a main clause, a subject is topicalized in a 'vacuous' sense invisible on the surface." As a result, a subject that is topicalized, albeit vacuously, is constrained by the definiteness effect because the topic is definite by definition. Given the Sinitic substratist view introduced in section 2, CSE should show a similar strong tendency for the subject NP to be definite in the default context. This is indeed a robust tendency in CSE. To see this point, consider examples in (22-23):

(22) a.   **People** come already. Come greet them!

           'The people have already come.' *Not*: "People have already come.'

      b.   **Clothes** dry already.

           'The clothes have dried already.' *Not*: "Clothes have dried already.'

(23) a.   I like **guitar**.

      b.   I like **this guitar**.

The examples in (22a, b) were provided by a native speaker of CSE as naturally occurring sentences in a dialogue in the Singapore community; see C. Kim et al. (2009) for the detailed description of the syntax and semantics of bare nominals in CSE. The sentence in (22a) was uttered in the context where a mother of a child was expecting her relatives to come for the Chinese New Year celebration and prompted the child to come out of his room to greet them. The subject NP in this example must be interpreted as definite in the sense that the mother can only say (22a) if she knows the identity of the people who are coming to her house. It cannot be used indefinitely in a context where she does not know who is coming to her house. Thus, the first clause in (22a) cannot be followed by "… but I don't know who they are." A similar characterization applies for the subject NP in (22b). This example can be used in a context where a person was waiting for his certain clothes to dry and later was notified by someone else that the clothes whose identity he already knew just dried. The NP cannot be interpreted as an indefinite NP. This definiteness restriction, however, does not hold for the object position in CSE. The bare noun in (23a) can be interpreted as an indefinite NP. The acceptability of the example in (23b) shows that the object position can also be occupied by a definite NP as well.

Table 2 summarizes the subject-object asymmetry in CSE and the three substrate Sinitic languages (Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien) with respect to the definiteness subject requirement.

		Mandarin	Cantonese	Hokkien	CSE
Subject	Definite?	OK	OK	OK	OK
	Indefinite?	OUT	OUT	OUT	OUT
Object	Definite?	OK	OK	OK	OK
	Indefinite?	OK	OK	OK	OK

Table 2:   The Definiteness Subject Restriction in CSE and its Sinitic Substrates

Table 2 makes it clear that there is a robust interpretive subject-object asymmetry among CSE and its Sinitic substrates alike. In the next subsection, I propose that it is the definiteness restriction on subjects that explains the interpretive discrepancy between empty subjects and objects in CSE with respect to the sloppy/quantificational readings.

3.5.   *Why is the LF Copy Process Blocked for Empty Subjects in CSE?*

Now, it is important to note that for the sloppy/quantificational reading to obtain in an empty argument position, it is crucial that the full-fledged NP is copied onto the empty argument position in *its indefinite use*. Examples from Japanese and Spanish below make this point clearer.

(24) a. Seerusuman-ga   Mary-no   uchi-ni   kita.

          salesman-NOM   Mary-POSS   house-to   came

          'A salesman came to Mary's house.'

      b. *e*   John-no   uchi-ni-mo   kita.

          John-POSS   house-to-also   came

          '*Lit*. *e* came to John's house, too.'

   (Japanese: Oku (1998, p. 166))

(25) a. Un   vendedor   fue   a   la   casa   de   María.

          a   salesman   went   to   the   house   of   Maria

          'A salesman went to Maria's house.'

      b. También   *pro*   fue   a   la   casa   de   Juan.

          also   *pro*   went   to   the   house   of   Juan

          '*Lit*. Also *pro* went to Juan's house.'

                                                      (Spanish: Oku (1998, p. 166))

In (24a), the salesman who visited John's house may be a different salesman from the one who visited Mary's house. This reading can be called the indefinite reading. As is well-known (see

Kuroda 1992: ch1, Fukui 1995, and Hoji 1998 for extensive discussion), a bare nominal in Japanese such as *seerusuman* 'car' can be variously interpreted as 'a salesman', 'the salesman', 'salesmen', 'the salesmen' and probably more. For our present purposes, it suffices to say that the "different-salesman" reading in (24a) obtains precisely because the LF Copy process can copy the NP into the empty subject position in its indefinite use. In (25b), however, the salesman who visited Juan's house must be the same person who visited Maria's house. This pattern comes as no surprise because *pro* as the covert counterpart of a definite pronoun must refer back to the entity established in the previous discourse (i.e., the salesman who went to Maria's house).

I propose that the LF Copy process is prevented from applying to the subject position in CSE because it must be occupied by a definite NP. My analysis is illustrated below:

(26)   a.   …   NP   …

   b. $[_{subj \ [+definite]}$ _____ $]$ verb $[_{object \ [\pm definite]}$ _____ $]$
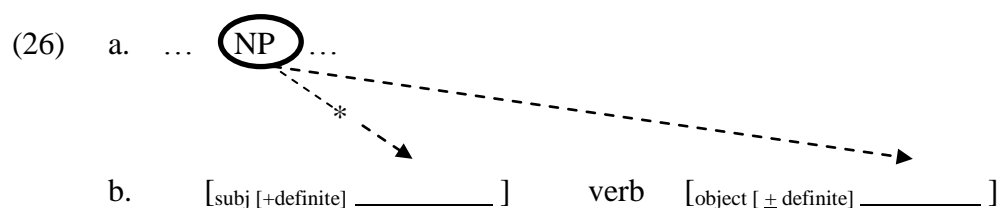
The object position in CSE does not exhibit the definiteness restriction. Thus, an NP can be copied from an overt argument in the preceding discourse into the empty object slot in the following elliptical clause. This copy process then yields the sloppy/quantificational readings for the null object. The strict/E-type readings obtain when the empty pronouns fill the object position. The subject position in CSE, on the other hand, must be definite, as shown above. As stated above, for the subject to receive sloppy/quantificational readings, the LF Copy process must target an indefinite use of the overt NP in the preceding discourse for copying into the elliptic subject. However, this copy process is blocked, as schematically illustrated in (26b),

because the definiteness subject preference requires the definite subject to occupy this position. As a result, the empty pronoun is the only strategy available in (26b) which is compatible with the preference. Consequently, this silent pronoun yields the strict/E-type readings, as desired.

Our results in this section, therefore, strongly suggest a deep systemic substratal effect from the Sinitic languages on the genesis/development of the grammar of CSE.

4.   Conclusions

In this paper, I have presented new empirical evidence based on the subject-object asymmetry with regards to the interpretation of null arguments in CSE in favor of the Sinitic substratist explanation on the genesis/development of this English-lexified variety. I have provided new data showing that CSE imposes the definiteness requirement on the subject position, a restriction which has its origins in the discourse grammar of its Sinitic substrates (Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien). More specifically, the sloppy/quantificational readings arise from the LF Copy of an overt linguistic antecedent onto the corresponding argument slot in an elliptical clause but this process is blocked by the afore-mentioned grammaticalized discourse restriction. The results obtained here thus lend further empirical support for the Sinitic substratist hypothesis on CSE.

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