Tone in Singlish: Substrate Features from Sinitic and Malay[1]

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Abstract

This paper focuses on aspects of tone in Singlish, the (mesolectal/basilectal) variety of English spoken in Singapore, which take up the claim of tone being a marked feature in contact varieties. While the source of tonal properties may well be the dominant Sinitic substrates, the actual patterning, at both word and phrase level, would appear to actually be a consequence of prosodic patterns found in another, non-tone language substrate, Bazaar/Baba Malay. Such observations support the notion of the founder population in the ecology paradigm: This paper suggests that, as the early English speakers in Singapore, the Peranakans, with Baba Malay as their vernacular, may well have been the community of speakers whose influence on Singlish has been most significant and persistent.

Keywords

Singlish, Singapore English, Bazaar Malay, Baba Malay, Hokkien, Cantonese, tone

1. Ecology and scholarship of Singlish

Singlish[2] is the mesolectal/basilectal variety of Singapore English (SgE); it is widely spoken by Singapore's population, which comprises approximately 4 million people made up of 76.8% Chinese, 13.9% Malay, 7.9% Indian and 1.4% persons of other races.

English formally entered the ecology during colonial rule of the trade/exploitation colony of Singapore, which may be dated to 1819 when Sir Stamford Raffles acquired the island as a British trading post for the British East India Company. Singapore consequently became part of the Straits Settlements, which at that time consisted of Penang and Malacca. From a few hundred people, largely indigenous fishing communities, the population grew to some 10,000 in the first years, the majority (some 60% in 1824) being "Malays," which included peoples from the Riau islands, Malacca, Sumatra, and Java. The Chinese population very soon started growing swiftly, coming to form the largest ethnic proportion of the population within two decades of British colonisation (45.9% by 1836), reaching its current proportion of three-quarters of the population by 1921. The vast majority of Chinese immigrants were from southern China, mainly Chaozhou in eastern Guangdong (the Teochews), Xiamen in southern Fujian (the Hokkiens), and Guangdong (the Cantonese), as well as sizeable numbers of Hakkas and Hainanese.

While the school system of the Malays was established before Raffles' arrival, and traditional Chinese schools were set up by the communities themselves (through clans, voluntary associations and philanthropic individuals), the first English-medium school was established by the British in 1834. In the beginning, the few English-medium schools were for the purpose of educating and cultivating a minority of English-speaking elites in the local population; by the end of the nineteenth century, though, with the increasing recognition of the advantages that the English language afforded, enrolment in such schools increased

rapidly. By the 1950s, education was effectively universal and English-medium education increasingly the norm, with 43% of school enrolment being in English-medium schools by 1952. Leading up to independence in 1965, the 1956 White Paper on Education advocated a bilingual system of education, in which English became a compulsory language in schools, either as a first language or, in the vernacular (Chinese-, Malay- or Tamil-medium) schools, as a second language. Just two decades later, in 1987, English was institutionalised as the medium of instruction in all schools, resulting in new generations of Singaporeans who have been described as English-knowing bilinguals. Also instituted as the primary working language in Singapore, English has spread in use in all domains, beyond those of education (as above), government and administration, to become an interethnic lingua franca (taking on a role held by Bazaar Malay pre-1970s), especially amongst younger and more educated people. Such a widespread usage of English, not just in education, but also in informal domains, by a multilingual community of speakers, has resulted in the development of a nativised variety of Singapore English. (For a comprehensive overview of the sociohistorical and political details of English in Singapore, see L. Lim 2007a, 2009b, forthcoming; L. Lim & Foley 2004.)

In the evolution of English in Singapore, then, we must recognise influences from a number of languages in a highly multilingual contact situation, within which three substrates have been identified as particularly influential (L. Lim 2007a, forthcoming): (1) Hokkien, the southern Sinitic variety of the most prestigious and powerful group of Chinese traders in the early days of the colony, which was the intra-ethnic lingua franca for the Chinese; (2) Bazaar Malay, the de facto lingua franca of the region from precolonial times to the middle of the twentieth century; and (3) Cantonese, another southern Sinitic variety which has become more dominant in more recent years. (See L. Lim 2007a, forthcoming, for an extensive account of the linguistic ages of Singapore's ecology.)

Curiously, in a manner seemingly counter-intuitive to the multilingual ecology of Singapore, much of the research on Singlish has been from the perspective of English. The majority of early research in the 1970s emphasised error analysis and how SgE deviated from Standard British English (StdBrE)—which was, in any case, the exonormative standard in Singapore's language and education policies. At the same time, even while the view arose (launched by Tongue's 1974 classic study) that there were forms of English spoken in Singapore (and Malaysia) that might be considered standard in their own right—this "standard variety" being that of English-educated Singaporeans, who at that point were still not a majority—there was also the recognition of a "sub-standard variety" used by Singaporeans from all language media in informal situations with their peers or as a lingua franca within the community. This would have been Singlish, though the name would not have been widely used then. It should also be noted that the English developing at that time could be viewed as an L2 variety, since the majority of Singaporeans had some other language(s) as dominant home language(s) and mostly acquired English in school. Later scholarship in the 1980s (starting with Tay and Gupta's 1983 work) recognised SgE as a variety in its own right—but this was still couched in terms of deviations from StdE, with little reference to features' being the result of contact with the other languages in the ecology.

The exceptions to the English-focused pattern in previous scholarship deserve mention here. Recognition that Singlish could in fact be viewed as a creole dates back to the 1970s, when Platt (1977) and Platt and Weber (1980) described the development of English in Singapore (and Malaysia) in terms of a lectal continuum within a post-creole continuum, with a basilect showing many features of creoles.[3] There is then a lull, when SgE research seemed uninterested in contact dynamics, as mentioned above. It is only in the new century that scholars—notably with non-English linguistics and/or contact linguistics influences— have highlighted the contribution of the substrates: Work has addressed substrate influence

on the sound system (e.g., L. Lim 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2009a; Tan 2003), and focused on Singlish as the outcome of relexification of Chinese grammar (e.g., Bao 2001, 2005; Bao & Lye 2005), and as the result of typological congruence between Hokkien and Malay (e.g., Ansaldo 2004, 2009a, 2009b).

The majority of scholarship from the contact linguistics perspective has focused on areas such as tense and aspect, passivisation, topic-comment structure, and reduplication (Ansaldo 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Bao 2001, 2005; Bao & Lye 2005; Bao & Wee 1999; Wee 2004), as well as stress and intonation (L. Lim 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2009a; Tan 2003). In this paper, I examine the feature of tone in Singlish, which is significant and intriguing for both theory and practice for a number of reasons. In the first place, to investigate the presence of tone in a grammar that derives from languages in contact is to look deeper into claims that tonal features are complex or marked, as suggested by McWhorter (2005), for example. Second, in spite of the recognition of tone languages in Singapore's ecology, tone in Singlish is a topic that has not been addressed—a phenomenon barely recognised, in fact—until very recently (L. Lim 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009c).[4] Finally, what is particularly curious is that, while the obvious source for tone must be the Sinitic languages—that is, the tone languages—in the ecology (L. Lim 2008b), the actual patterns manifested in Singlish seem to derive from another substrate, (Bazaar/Baba) Malay.

2. Tone in Singlish

This section presents a summary overview of the evidence derived from a number of fronts: discourse particles, words and utterances. The apparent brevity of the literature addressed is due to the fact that, as outlined above, little work has been done to date in the area.

2.1 Discourse particles

The most obvious presence of tone in Singlish is that found in discourse particles. These Singlish particles have long been acknowledged in most scholarship as coming from the (southern) Chinese languages (e.g., Gupta 1992; Platt 1987; and see L. Lim 2007a for a comprehensive overview of their origins), though no specific language(s) tended to be identified or acknowledged as the source(s) of the particles. Since the Chinese languages are tone languages, it is not surprising that in early scholarship on the particles the question of whether the particles themselves carry (lexical) tone was posed (Platt 1987); what is surprising is that this question was not investigated further. It is only in very recent work that these two issues have been seriously addressed (L. Lim 2007a, 2007b, 2008b, 2009a). It has been argued that, compared to the earlier particles *lah, ah* and *what,* the larger set of Singlish particles, namely *hor, leh, lor, ma* and *meh*, have their origins in Cantonese, and were acquired in Singlish in a later era. In contrast to the earlier set, which either (1) came by route of Bazaar/Baba Malay and thus were transferred without Sinitic tone, or (2) have lost their tonal qualities over time, since they appeared in Singlish earlier (L. Lim 2007a, 2009b), the particles of the later, larger set (for convenience, referred to as the "Cantonese set") have carried their original Sinitic tone into Singlish (L. Lim 2007a, 2009a, 2009c), and are thus of more direct interest to this paper.

We therefore focus here on this Cantonese set, examples of which are provided below in (1a) to (1e), from the Grammar of Spoken Singapore English Corpus (GSSEC). Note that, in contrast to most other scholarship on SgE, which does not represent the particles with tone, here the particles are transcribed together with their tones, represented as pitch level numbers, a practice proposed in L. Lim (2007a).[5] These examples are accompanied in each case by an

example of the corresponding particle in Cantonese from which each one derives (from Matthews & Yip 1994: 347, 348, 352).[6] A comparison of the SgE and Cantonese particles in the (a) and (b) pairs (the relevant particles are in boldface) reveals striking parallels in segmental form, tone and meaning. In (1), for example, the SgE particle *hɔ24*, which always occurs with a rising tone, and which asserts a proposition, making it clear that a positive response from the addressee is expected (L. Lim 2007a; Wee 2004: 124), is matched by the Cantonese *hó* particle, which has the same rising tone and also indicates an expectation of the addressee's confirmation (Matthews & Yip 1994: 347). The SgE particle *lɔ33* in (3a), which occurs with mid level tone, and which indicates obviousness, and in negative contexts inevitability or resignation (L. Lim 2007a; Wee 2004: 123), is similarly matched by the Cantonese particle *lo* in (3b) with mid level tone and suggesting resignation (Matthews & Yip 1994: 352).

(1) a. A: But it's beautiful in that… how… I mean, Finn got a chance to
             realise himself, right?   Sɢᴇ
         B: He's quite innocent *la21* ***hɔ24***? Innocent.
             'He's quite innocent, don't you agree?' [asserting proposition,
             expecting agreement]

     b. A: *Géi leng a **hó**?*   Cᴀɴᴛᴏɴᴇsᴇ
             quite nice PRT PRT
             'Pretty nice, huh?' [expecting confirmation]
         B: *Haih a.*
             is   PRT
             'Yes, it is.'

(2) a. A: My parents will disown me *a22* if I marry someone Caucasian
             or Indian. My parents very what.   Sɢᴇ
             'My parents will disown me if I marry someone Caucasian or
             Indian. My parents are really impossible.'
         B: *** very old-fashion *a21*.
         A: My parents very old-fashion *a21*? Then your parents ***le55***?
             'Are you saying that my parents are old-fashioned? Then what
             about your parents?' [indicating comparison, 'what about?']

     b. A: *D ī g ā s ī   maaih saai béi yàhn la.*   Cᴀɴᴛᴏɴᴇsᴇ
             CL furniture sell   all to people PRT

'The furniture has all been sold.'

B: *Ga chē **lē**?*
   CL car PRT
   'What about the car?' [meaning 'what about'?]

(3) a. A: But um I might stop working for a while if I need to, if I need   SGE
   to *la21*, especially for looking after kids.

   B: But for me, I won't stop working ***lɔ33***. The most I won't give birth to kids ***lɔ33***. For the most I don't marry ***lɔ33***.
   'In my case, (even if I have children to look after) I won't stop working. In the worst of cases, I won't have children. In the worst of cases, I won't get married.' [indicating obviousness, resignation]

  b. *Ngóh mjī   dím syun **lo***   CANTONESE
   I   not-know how act PRT
   'I really don't know what to do' [indicating resignation]

(4) a. A: How come you call me?   SGE
   'Why did you call me?'

   B: You page for me ***ma22***.
   'You paged for me, after all (as you know) (so naturally I'm returning your call)' [indicating obviousness]

  b. A: *Bī ngo lèihga?*   CANTONESE
   who   PRT
   'Who's that?'

   B: *Ngóhdeih sān lóuhbáan **ā ma**.*
   our   new boss   PRT
   'Our new boss, of course.' [indicating obviousness]

(5) a. A: No *la21*! He's using Pirelli, you don't know ***mɛ55***?   SGE
   'No, he has Pirelli tyres; didn't you know that?' [indicating surprise, scepticism]
   B: Really? Don't bluff.

  b. *sīnsāang wah mh dāk ge **mē**?*   CANTONESE
   teacher   say not okay PRT PRT
   'What, did the teacher say it wasn't okay?' [expressing surprise]

As evidence for the claim that the particles occur in SgE with their original

(Cantonese) tones, Figure 1 provides an illustration of the pitch contour of one SgE particle,

from the utterance *maybe it like what you say lɔ33*, with the particle *lɔ33* visualised clearly

as being realised with level tone; instrumental analysis confirms that the particle lies in the

middle of speakers' pitch range, and hence can be categorised as mid-level.

@@ INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

2.2 Word level

At the level of the word, some very recent work has suggested that SgE has tone in addition

to stress, with tone being predictable from stress (Ng 2008), and with a high level tone

assigned to the final syllable (Ng 2008; Wee 2008a), as can be seen in the words in example

(6) (from Ng 2008; Wee 2008a, 2008b).[7]

(6)	*cat, see*	55 / H
	`manage, `teacher	33-55 / MH
	in`tend, a`round	11-55 / LH
	`Singapore, `managing	33-33-55 / MMH
	`origin, bi`lingual	11-33-55 / LMH
	o`riginal, se`curity	11-33-33-55 / LMMH
	o`riginally	11-33-33-33-55 / LMMMH

This word-level tonal pattern has been shown to be independent of sentence position (Ng

2009), as illustrated in Figure 2.

@@ INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

2.3 Phrase/Utterance

Finally, let us consider SgE prosody at the phrase level, where, echoing the observation in L.

Lim (2004: 42ff), a characteristic pattern in the intonation contour may be analysed as

comprising sequences of sustained level steps or level tones which step up or down to each other, rather than glide more gradually from one pitch level to another. An illustration of such a pattern is provided in Figure 3, which depicts the intonation of the utterance *I think happier*, where it is evident that the pitch steps up abruptly to a high level pitch for *think*, and then steps down again for *happier*. Similarly, in Figure 4, the utterance *You told me* moves in a series of sustained level tones, each of which is at a slightly higher pitch than the previous one.

@@ INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

@@ INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

3. Tone *me55*?

Some may be sceptical that what is observed in Singlish is tone[8] – the SgE particle *mɛ55* in the section heading indicates (often mock-) surprise or incredulity concerning the proposition it is attached to, as illustrated in example (5a); thus, the translation of the section heading would be 'Is there/it really tone?!'

The presence of tone, or some kind of mixed prosodic system, in creole languages is in fact not an especially difficult idea to accept. We know, of course, that suprasegmental features, including tone, are susceptible to being acquired in contact situations (Curnow 2001). Tone is often acquired in a non-tonal language by borrowing or imitation due to the presence of tone in the broader linguistic environment (Gussenhoven 2004: 42ff); consequently, tone has been noted to be an areal feature, occurring in genetically unrelated languages spoken by geographically contiguous speech communities, as in Africa and

Southeast Asia (Nettle 1998; Svantesson 2001). A number of well-known creoles whose substrates involve tone languages—in particular languages arising from contact situations involving European accent languages and African tone languages—have been documented as possessing tone. One oft-cited example is Saramaccan, which is English- and Portuguese-based, with Gbe and Kikongo as substrates; it has been shown to have a split lexicon, with the majority of its words marked for pitch accent, and a significant minority marked for true tone (Good 2004a, 2004b, 2006). Just as widely acknowledged is Portuguese-lexified Papiamentu, which shows the use of both contrastive stress and contrastive tonal features that operate independently from stress (Kouwenberg 2004; Remijsen & van Heuven 2005; Rivera-Castillo & Pickering 2004). The Austronesian language Ma'ya has also been documented as a hybrid system involving both contrastive stress and tone, the result of contact with tonal Papuan languages (Remijsen 2001: 43).

What is interesting is that such findings have been widely accepted for "creoles" for a while now;[9] but because Singlish is always considered to be a variety of English (as opposed to an "English-based creole"), there tends to be resistance in English linguistics circles to the idea that tone exists in Singlish (but see L. Lim 2009a). Nonetheless, "non-creole" languages have also been observed with similar manifestations of tone: Roermond Dutch has been found to have a Germanic-style stress system but also a lexical tonal contrast, in that words may have no tones or a single H tone (Yip 2002: 257); and the prosody of Nigerian English is suggested to be a mixed system that stands "between" an intonation/stress language and a tone language (Gut 2005), with its pitch inventory reduced compared to StdBrE, and the domain of pitch being the word, with high pitch triggered by stress, thus resembling a pitch accent language.

The linguistic feature of tone is certainly present in the ecology of Singapore. The languages which are recognised as dominant in Singapore's ecology are Bazaar Malay and

Hokkien in the earliest era, which were interethnic and intra-ethnic lingua francas respectively; later, Mandarin and Cantonese came to dominate (Ansaldo 2009a, 2009b; L. Lim 2007a, forthcoming). As the latter three languages are Sinitic varieties, tone languages are clearly in the majority. Tone is thus a salient typological aspect of the feature pool; in other words, it is high in type- and token-frequency in the internal ecology. Other work has shown that dominant traits do influence the output (Thomason & Kaufman 1988). For example, considering the word order of the adstrates in Sri Lankan Malay, while Pidgin-Derived Malay is SVO, Sinhala and Tamil are both SOV, and the resulting Sri Lankan Malay is also SOV. Similarly, agglutinative morphology emerged in Sri Lankan Malay because it is salient in two of the three adstrates, Sinhala and Tamil (Ansaldo 2008, 2009a, 2009c). Moreover, if we consider external ecology, in Singapore it is the Chinese who form the largest ethnic group, accounting for 78% of the population, and they have been a majority since the early twentieth century (L. Lim 2007a, forthcoming). On both counts, then, namely the proportion of tone languages and the proportion of speakers of these languages, tone dominates in the ecology. Moreover, tone is high in markedness, in the sense that the feature bears a heavy functional load; in other words, put in terms of Matras's (2000) model of categorial fusion, it is pragmatically dominant, which also makes it a more likely target for acquisition (Matras 2000: 577). Overall, it is very likely for tone to be acquired in SgE, given the feature's dominant presence in the ecology, both internal and external.

When we consider the particles, the data presented above clearly show that the later Singlish particles were acquired in the Singlish system in their entirety, including the tone they have in Cantonese; further, they must be used in that form, and not with any other pitch pattern, for the meaning required, regardless of the intonation pattern of the utterance in which they are found. These tonal items are situated within what is possibly a different prosodic system—one that may be more of a stress/intonation language, in which pitch

functions in a system of intonation relatively comparable to the forms and functions identified in other "standard" varieties of English such as StdBrE (L. Lim 2004a: 39-42; Zhu 2003; Zhu & Lim 2002). Such a phenomenon is noted by Gussenhoven (2004: 46) as one of three typologically special cases where tone languages are concerned, namely when there is lexically specified tone in intonation-only languages.[10] The observation of tone at the Singlish word level, which specifies an H-tone on the final syllable of each word, corresponds to the second of the typologically special cases identified by Gussenhoven (2004: 45-46) in which languages have non-distinctive word-based tone.[11]

Some clarification is perhaps necessary here. The observation above and elsewhere that Singlish has prosodic patterns that generally resemble an intonation language may in fact need elaboration: Alongside such patterns, which resemble other StdEs, one also notes a number of "characteristic CSE [Colloquial Singapore English] forms" (L. Lim 2004a: 42ff), such as the sustained level steps and tone patterns at word level, as illustrated above. This is not a contradiction, but instead can be understood on two levels: First, Singlish is capable of displaying a continuum of possibilities in prosodic phonology, of more mesolectal and more basilectal features; and second, in line with Singapore's extremely dynamic ecology (L. Lim 2007a, 2008a, forthcoming), Singlish may in fact be viewed as changing, in the more Sinitic-dominant ecology of the recent era, to display more Sinitic features, including tone.

4. Tone from Sinitic?

An automatic assumption would indeed be that the tone observed in Singlish originates in the Sinitic substrates, as opposed to the other substrates—notably Malay—which are not tone languages. A slightly more complex and intriguing situation emerges, however, when we dig

a little deeper. In this endeavour, we shall set aside the particles (discussed in section 2.1), which, at least in the case of the later Cantonese set, are clearly of Sinitic origin, and turn to the tone patterns at word and phrase level (presented in sections 2.2 and 2.3).

In investigations of the Englishes of Hong Kong and China, which have ecologies in which Sinitic varieties are dominant, the influence of tone on the emergent contact English variety is clearly noted and, at least superficially, is comparable to the presence of tone in Singlish; the phonological patterning, however, is distinct (L. Lim 2009a). In Hong Kong English (HKE), for example, H tones are located on stressed syllables and L tones on unstressed ones (Chen & Au 2004; Luke 2000, 2008; Wee 2008a), illustrated in example (7); this contrasts with the pattern for word-level tone in Singlish, described in example (6), where H tones are located on the final syllable.

(7)   *in`tend*   11-55 / LH
       `origin, `photograph   55-11-11 / HLL
       o`riginal   11-55-11-11 / LHLL

(8)   *I saw the manager this morning*   LHHHHHHHL!

Similarly, at phrase level, while HKE would have a pattern involving a sequence of tones as in (8), based on the basic LHL! template and subsequent computation (Luke 2008),[12] Singlish tends to prefer prominence on the phrase-final syllable such that the pitch is perceived as relatively high: No significant decrease in fundamental frequency is measured compared to the initial syllable of the phrase-final word (Low 2000); such a maintenance of pitch or movement to high(er) tone phrase-finally is also observable in Figure 4.[13]

One approach to accounting for this apparent disparity is to examine the ecology for other languages that may be influencing the prosody of Singlish. Languages that are or have been dominant in the ecology are the obvious candidates, one of which is clearly (Bazaar) Malay, the main interethnic lingua franca in Singapore from the earliest era until as recently

as the 1970s (L. Lim 2007a, forthcoming). While no comprehensive study of the prosody of (Bazaar) Malay in Singapore is available,[14] there has been much research on other Malay/Indonesian varieties (e.g., see various chapters in Gensler & Gil to appear).[15] Findings concerning word stress are diverse, but a number of studies do point to prominence on the penultimate and/or final syllable; at phrase level, there is a general consensus that prominence is located phrase-finally (with acceptability increasing closer to the right edge of phrase-final word) (e.g., Goedemans & van Zanten to appear). Closer to home, such a pattern of phrase-final prominence—in the form of an utterance-final rise-fall (in declaratives and wh-interrogatives), often manifested as "step-up progressions" across the final syllables of the utterance—has also been documented in Singapore's Baba Malay (Wee 2000). It would appear then that, as suggested in L. Lim (2009a), the word- and phrase-final prominence noted in Singlish is due to influence from (Bazaar) Malay.

At first glance, it may indeed seem curious that Malay should have exerted this influence on Singlish, for three reasons. First, Malay-speaking Malays have comprised a minority of the population (no more than 15%) since the second decade of the populating of Singapore under British colonial rule, starting in the early 1800s; thus, numerically, and consequently socially, they have not been dominant in Singapore's ecology. (This is not to downplay the significant presence of the early Malay royalty as well as numerous influential and wealthy Malays and Arabs, such as the late-nineteenth-century community leaders; L. Lim forthcoming.) Second, even if Bazaar Malay was the interethnic lingua franca, it was dominant only until around the 1970s, when English started assuming this role, especially in the new generations of native English speakers. Malay is no longer widely spoken by Singaporeans outside of the Malay community, although in that community the language is still very vital, being the most frequently spoken home language in 91.5% of Malay homes in 2000 (L. Lim 2007a, forthcoming). And finally, even if we assume that Malay did influence

Singlish through the first and second points, that is, in the earlier era when Bazaar Malay was a dominant language in the ecology, how is it that this earlier Malay influence appears to be maintained in spite of more recent Sinitic dominance?

Quite feasible answers can be found if we consider the ecology of Singapore, as well as the founder principle in the ecology paradigm (Mufwene 2001), which suggests that the founder population in an ecology exerts a strong influence on features, an influence which persists in the emergent variety. A feasible reconstruction is thus as follows. Another community of peoples in Singapore who were also Malay speakers—and crucially also comprised the early English speakers—are the Peranakans.[16] Descendants of southern Chinese traders who settled in Southeast Asia and local Malay/Indonesian women, they comprised one of the earliest and largest groups of the influential class of Chinese capitalists in the region. By the time of European exploitation colonisation in the nineteenth century, they had accumulated much wealth and become a prestigious subgroup. Baba Malay was their vernacular. A detailed discussion of the distinction between Baba Malay and Bazaar Malay is beyond the scope of this paper, but for purposes of the argument here, suffice it to say that Baba Malay can be considered a more focused variety than Bazaar Malay (see S. Lim 1988 and Ansaldo 2009a for good discussions of this issue). However, they were one of the earliest groups in Singapore to have held a high regard for English-medium education, and who sent their children to English-medium schools; their ability in the language further strengthened their prominent socioeconomic position within other local communities in relation to the British, and their knowledge of Malay and local ways allowed them to assume a significant role as intermediaries. (See Ansaldo et al. 2007 and L. Lim in press for more details on the Peranakan community and their languages Baba Malay and Peranakan English.[17])

Taking into consideration their status, which would mean dominance in the external and consequently internal ecology, plus the fact that their features, which were influenced by their vernacular Malay, would have been the early features influencing the emerging variety Singlish, we find this a plausible explanation for the prosodic patterns observed in Singlish. In fact, this is not mere speculation: Investigations into structural features of naturally occurring Peranakan English speech have noted, amongst other features such as topic-comment structure, that the variety exhibits word- and utterance-final prominence in the form of pitch peak on the final syllable, which can be traced to the Baba Malay influence (L. Lim in press).[18]

5. Final reflections

To conclude, this investigation of tone in Singlish demonstrates two main phenomena concerning substrate influence.

First, the presence of tone, or the evolution of a tone-language prosody, is perfectly possible in a contact variety, if the feature pool of its ecology allows for it; such mixed prosodic systems have been documented in a number of other creoles, though they have been far less acknowledged in varieties considered to be New Englishes. In other words, in an ecology where tone is an unmarked or dominant feature, then tonal features can indeed spread into a contact language, despite McWhorter's (2005) characterisation of tone as a marked feature in contact situations.

Second, even when the *feature* of tone may be ascribed to the tone language substrates, the actual *realisation* in terms of prosodic patterns—for instance, in the case of Singlish, the location of the H tone at word or phrase level—can be influenced by the

prosody of a non-tone language; in the case of Singlish, this is Malay. What is also significant is that this is the language of a population—the Peranakans—that is recognised as having been an earlier or founder population in the ecology, which therefore exerts a significant influence on the structure of the emergent contact language.

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Abbreviations

CL   classifier

GSSEC   Grammar of Spoken Singapore English Corpus

H   high

HKE   Hong Kong English

L   low

M   mid

PRT   particle

SgE   Singapore English

StdBrE   Standard British English

StdE   Standard English
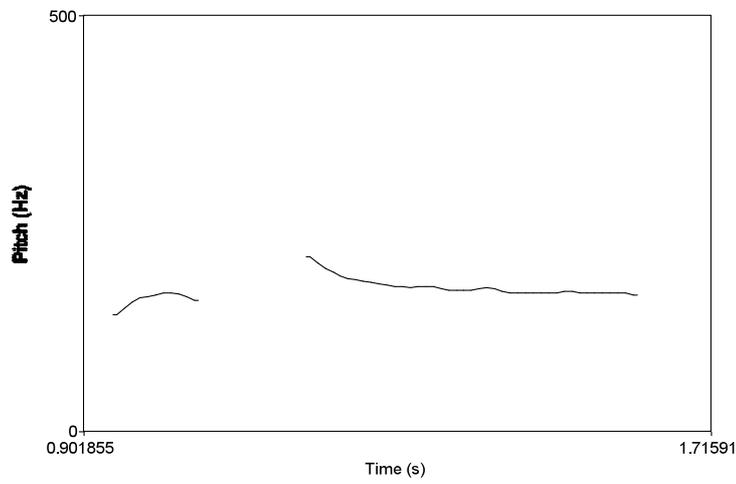
Figure 1: *Mid-level tone of SgE particle* lɔ33
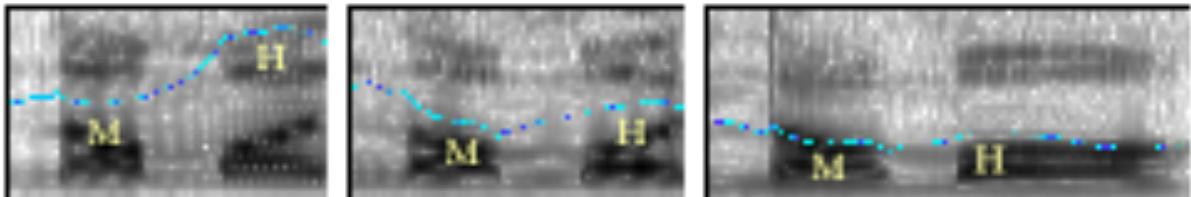
Figure 2: *MH tones in SgE word* `normal, *in sentence-initial, -medial and -final position*

(from Ng 2008b)

| ai | tiŋ | hæpiə
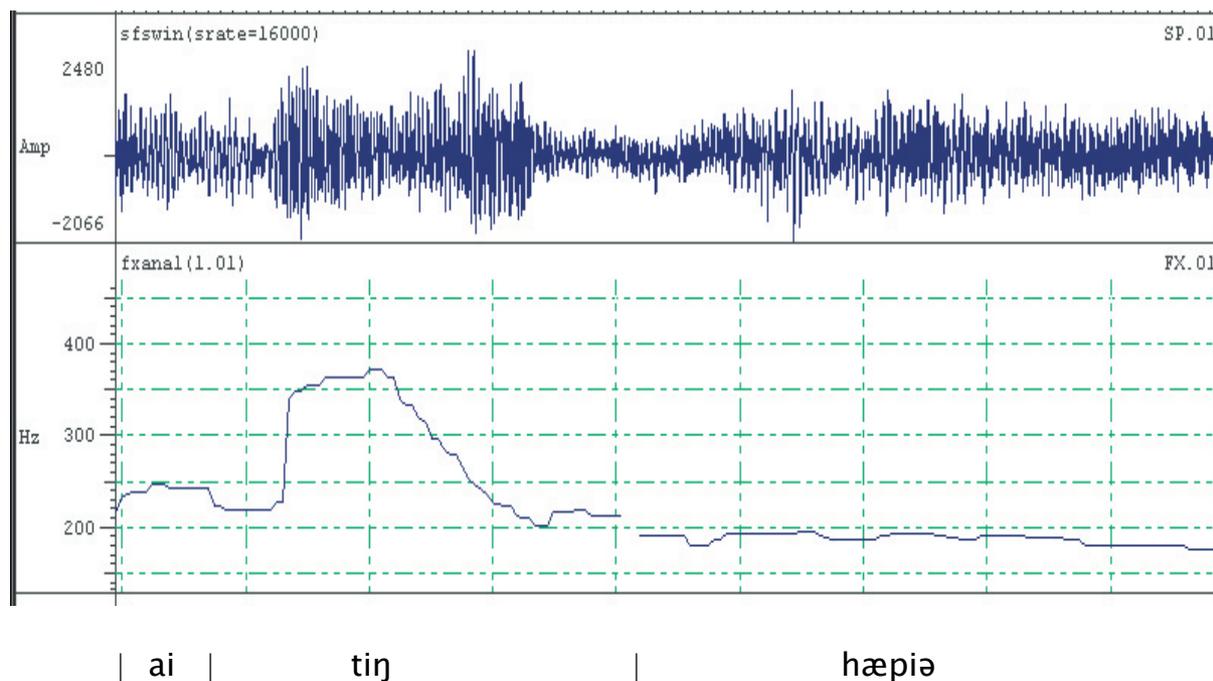
Figure 3: *Sustained level step pattern in SgE utterance* I think happier *(from L. Lim 2004a)*

| ju | tol | mi |
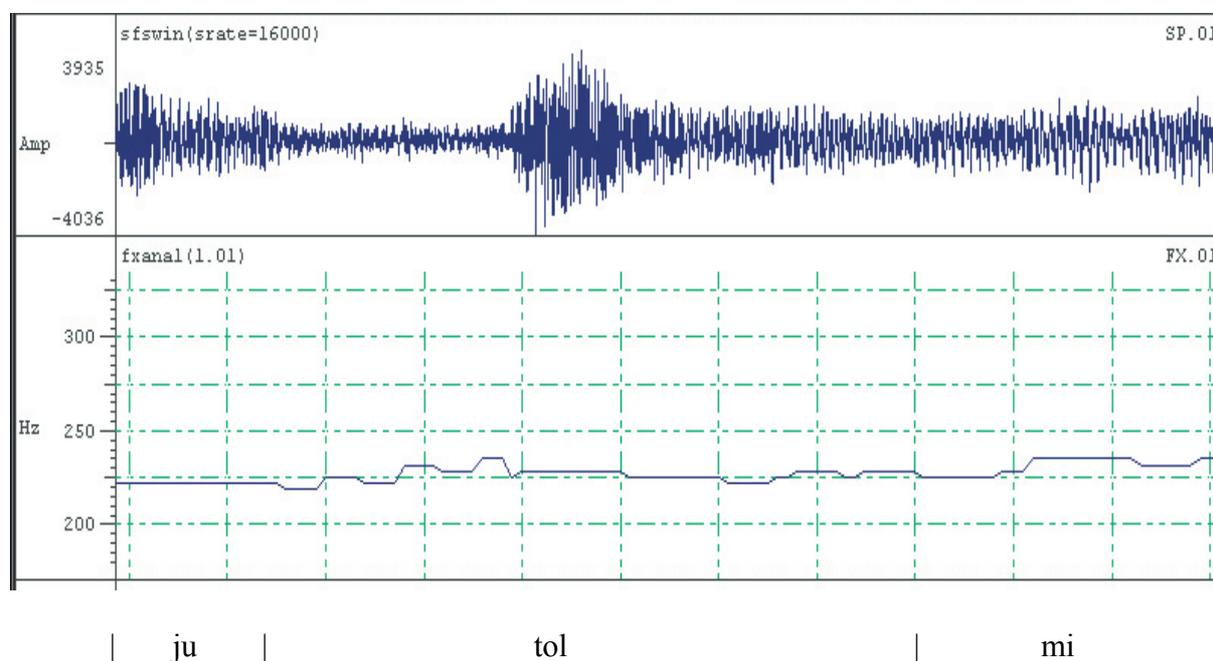
Figure 4: *Sustained level step pattern in SgE utterance* You told me *(from L. Lim 2004a)*

Notes

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[1] An earlier version of these ideas is found in L. Lim (2009a); this paper extends the idea of the contribution of a non-tone language, Malay, in influencing the tonal patterning in Singlish. I thank the anonymous reviewer for comments on this paper and Umberto Ansaldo for comments and discussions, in particular on creole languages and contact dynamics.

[2] While the majority of scholarship refers to the variety of English spoken in Singapore as *Singapore English (SgE)*, and the term *Singlish,* which tends to have more layman's circulation, is avoided for its negative connotations, it is used here for the mesolectal/basilectal variety of SgE to underline the fact that extensive divergence from standard English is found in this variety, and that much of its grammar can be explained by the features of the non-English languages.

[3] Platt (1975) labelled it a "creoloid."

[4] To my knowledge, the idea that SgE, as a New English, can be considered a tone language was seriously postulated for the first time in L. Lim (2007a: 468-469), and then more explicitly proposed in L. Lim (2007b, 2008a, 2008b). (Note though that Killingey 1968 suggests that SgE word stress should not be discussed on the grounds that Malayan [Singapore + Malaysia] English is "a tone language" but later (Killingey 1972) withdraws the statement; cited in Bloom 1986: 428. Note also that the "Malayan English" of four decades ago is a different animal from SgE today.) Later, other similar statements have been independently proposed or assumed (Ng 2008, 2009; Siraj 2008; Wee 2008a, 2008b).

[5] Singlish data for particles and utterances derive from the naturally occurring data in the Grammar of Spoken Singapore English Corpus (GSSEC; L. Lim & Foley 2004), except (4a), which is from Wong (1994). The tones of the particles are represented as pitch level numbers

1 to 5 where, in the Asianist tradition, the larger the number the higher the pitch; thus *55* represents a high level tone, *24* represents a rising tone, and so on.

[6] The transcription of examples (1b) to (5b) is as in the source (Matthews & Yip 1994), which uses the Yale system. Rising and falling tones are shown by rising and falling accents; high level tone is indicated by a level accent; no tonal indication is given for the mid level tone, and <h> is inserted after the vowel to indicate all low-register tones (low rising, low level and low falling).

[7] The tones on each syllable in example (6) are represented in pitch level numbers as well as in the phonological tradition where L = Low tone, M = Mid tone, and H = High tone.

[8] As is increasingly recognised, distinguishing between so-called stress languages, accent(ual) languages and tone languages is in fact not clear-cut, and many scholars have become more amenable to regarding these categories as being more loosely or broadly defined. For instance, most now agree that the category of accent languages does not group languages of a typologically coherent class (Gussenhoven 2004; Hyman 2001a), and take the position that the so-called accentual languages are just a subclass of tone languages (Yip 2002: 4). And tone languages are most recently defined much more broadly than before: following Hyman (2001b: 1368), "a language with tone is one in which an indication of pitch enters into the lexical realisation of at least some morphemes," regardless of the density of lexically contrastive tones on words; lexical tonal marking, after all, has been noted to be of gradient nature (e.g. van der Hulst and Smith 1988).

[9] Creoles exceptionalism, i.e., the view that creole languages might follow unusual developmental paths, has been seriously questioned on theoretical and empirical grounds (see especially the work by DeGraff 2001, 2003, 2005), and recent trends such as studies in language evolution show that creole exceptionalism is indeed flawed (e.g., Ansaldo 2009a; Ansaldo et al. 2007; Mufwene 2001, 2008).

[10] An example of this situation is when there are tonal specifications in the "segmental" lexicon for particles that invariably appear with a particular intonation contour, such as Dutch sentence-final [hɛ], which expresses an appeal for agreement and always appears with H after the pitch accent H*L on the preceding word (Kirsner & van Heuven 1996). Similarly, Bengali has focus-governing particles which come with their own pitch accent (Lahiri & Fitzpatrick-Cole 1999), i.e., they must be lexically specified for tones, which crucially constitute morphemes in their own right and do not form part of the representation of the segmentally represented morphemes, unlike lexical tone (Gussenhoven 2004: 46).

[11] An example of this is Noon, a language of Senegal, which predictably has an H-tone on the penultimate syllable of every word (Soukka 2000).

[12] Different boundary tones of H% or L% would then apply depending on the context (Luke 2008).

[13] Experiments investigating emphatic and contrastive stress in SgE also demonstrate that speakers do not place prominence on the contrastive element as in "standard" Englishes but systematically locate pitch prominence utterance-finally (L. Lim 2004b; L. Lim & Tan 1999).

[14] Though Ng (2009) is now doing instrumental work on Singapore Malay word prosodic patterns.

[15] What is represented in this paragraph is necessarily an extremely summarised account of the Malay/Indonesian prosodic patterns documented in the literature.

[16] They are also known as Peranakan Chinese, Babas or Straits(-born) Chinese.

[17] I thank Salikoko Mufwene for first pointing out to me the likelihood that the Peranakans were the founder population for Singlish.

[18] Similar patterns of utterance-final rise-fall and level-fall pitch movements in both read and conversational speech have also been documented (Wee 2000).