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Abstract

My dissertation focuses on the off-stage mechanism of the aspectual system formation in Singapore Colloquial English. The aspectual system in Singapore Colloquial English contains unique features that distinguish itself from Standard English. It is argued in this thesis that such uniqueness is caused by the constant and tense contact and competition between the superstrate language English and the major substrate language Chinese (including three major Chinese languages) in the unique linguistic ecology in Singapore. I propose that due to the differences between new English variety SCE and creole, Lefebvre’s Relexification Theory fails to account for the mechanism of SCE aspectual system since it neglects the fact that the superstrate English ranks higher than the substrate Chinese, and this hierarchy exerts fundamental influence on the process of the formation of SCE aspectual system.

Keywords: SCE, aspectual system, language contact, relexification theory, superstrate/substrate, new English, creole
1. Background of Singapore Colloquial English

Regarded as a new English variety, Singapore English is unique in several ways. To begin with, Singapore English emerges from a unique multi-linguistic environment in which genetically unrelated languages contact and compete with each other consistently; Secondly, according to Bao (citing Platt 1977), Singapore English is ‘a case of polyglossia with multilingualism’ (2006: 105) which is composed by the vernacular sub-variety Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) and the formal variety called Standard Singapore English (SSE). While SSE is almost identical to Standard English, SCE shows quite a few distinctive features that attract substantial research interest. Within the multilingual ecology, Chinese languages are well-recognized as exerting vital influence on the formation of SCE (Platt and Weber, 1980; Ho and Platt, 1993; Bao, 2006). This paper focuses on the uniqueness of SCE aspectual system, which is formed under the influence of both English and Chinese languages, in the hope of describing the offstage mechanism of the formation of SCE aspectual system and providing a theoretical justification for such uniqueness. This paper first presents a descriptive and comparative analysis of English and Chinese languages in terms of their distinctive aspectual systems; secondly the paper describes the features of SCE aspectual system aiming to provide evidence for the English and Chinese influence respectively. The final chapter explores the mechanism of SCE aspectual system and explains its unique features by introducing Relexification theory and Bao (2005)’s system transfer and lexifier filter theory.

The multiracial society in Singapore determines the multilingual ecology in which English remains the superior language of political, social and economic significance, and serves as the principal language used in the education system. Inferior to English, Chinese languages including Mandarin, various Min dialects and Cantonese, Tamil and Malay serve as substrates and are widely used on informal occasions. Such
linguistic ecology determines that SCE is considered as the fruit of the interaction and competition between English and other languages spoken in Singapore, among which Chinese languages inevitably impose significant impact on SCE due to demographic reason. Platt and Weber (1980) record that Chinese immigrants settled in Singapore as early as 15th century and since then has remained the biggest community in the multiracial society in Singapore. The demographic distribution in 1911 census provided in Platt and Weber (1980: 9) sheds light on this point:

Table 1: Population Figures for the Straits Settlements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Europeans</th>
<th>Eurasians</th>
<th>Malays</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7,368</td>
<td>8,072</td>
<td>240,206</td>
<td>369,843</td>
<td>82,055</td>
<td>6,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>1.03%</td>
<td>1.13%</td>
<td>22.64%</td>
<td>51.79%</td>
<td>11.49%</td>
<td>0.91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Chinese population in Singapore is composed by the descendants of the early southern Chinese immigrants as well as the continuous immigrants from coastal areas in southern China. The large population speaks southern Chinese dialects including Hokkien, Cantonese and other Min dialects. Furthermore, regardless of fact that there is only 1% of the population are native Mandarin speakers, the government’s campaign of popularizing Mandarin has made it increasingly influential since 1970s (Platt, Weber and Ho, 1983). The dominant percentage of Chinese population indisputably makes Chinese languages one of the most prominent languages spoken in the area and paths the way for the significant influence on SCE.

Although unique features has made SCE distinct from Standard English, Bao (2006) distinguishes SCE from low-proficiency Standard English for within the Singaporean linguistic diaglossia, SCE is widely used across different social classes on informal occasions. In line with DeCamp (1971), Standard Singapore English, which resembles Standard English to a significant degree, serves as the acrolect most speakers learned via education, while SCE serves as the mesolectal/ basilectal language and is usually
learned by speakers via daily communication. Therefore, SCE is used by people from all classes regardless of their educational level. Meanwhile, as a widely recognized new variety of English, SCE distinguishes itself from creoles for several reasons. Firstly it does not have a pidgin origin. Pidgin by definition means ‘languages that arise from situations of semi-communication among a population of potential interlocutors who have no single language in common…in a limited set of interaction contexts…for this reason, pidgins do not have native speakers’ (Matras, 2009: 277), and creole is the native language of the decedent generations who consider pidgin as the ‘principal input language’ (Matras, 2009: 278) from birth. Therefore the linguistic contact involved in creole genesis has initiated before its existence and is settled after its formation, while the language contact of SCE is ongoing in a linguistic pool with its superstrate language English and substrate languages consistently and intensely compete with each other. Secondly within the dual linguistic diaglossia the speakers of SCE are mostly multilinguals who speak SCE and at least one of the substrate languages although SCE is not necessarily their first language, whereas creole speakers are generally monolinguals.

However, despite the different origins and other features, SCE and creole do share a lot of similarities, especially within the mechanisms of their formations. Therefore Platt (1975) defines SCE as ‘creoloid’, which refers to ‘a creole-like variety which has not developed from a pidgin’ (Gupta, 1991: 324). Lefebvre (1986) further argues that ‘there should be no assumption of a universal pre-creole pidgin phrase’ (282) therefore attempts to explore the possible mechanism which forms ‘a creole without a pre-creole stage’ (282), which refers to new varieties of English like SCE. On this basis, this paper introduces Lefebvre’s Relexification theory on creole formation and attempts to explain the mechanism of the unique aspectual system in SCE following some of her ideas.

The aspectual system of SCE is targeted in this paper because English and Chinese have aspectual systems that are of two different kinds: ‘the competing Chinese and
English aspectual system are incongruent in interpretation and in morphosyntax’ (Bao, 2005: 257). However, emerged under the joint influence of both languages, SCE seems to display ‘split loyalty’ (Bao, 2005: 257) and reserves characteristics from both languages. Nevertheless it is necessary to note that SCE does not pick features in the ‘linguistic pool’ (Bao, 2005: 238) randomly, instead it follows certain mechanism which has constraints of the feature selection.

2. The Aspectual System of English and Chinese Languages: a Comparative Account

Human language is significant in a way that it provides speakers with information about the relative episode, describing different situations and their temporal orderings. This function is conveyed by the tense and aspectual system in languages. Tense concerns the location of a situation on the timeline from the speaker’s perspective; it indicates ‘whether the event happens prior to, contemporaneous with, or after the time of speaking’ (Michaelis, 1998: 1), while aspect concentrates on the internal structure of the relative situation without concerning its location on the timeline. Aspectual meaning tells about the interaction between situation and reference interval in that the involved situation could either cover the whole or a part of the interval span, begins at or concludes within the time interval. This section offers a cross-linguistic comparison between the aspectual systems in English and Chinese languages, paving the way for the further analysis on the unique aspectual system in Singapore Colloquial English under the superstrate/substrate influence. The aspectual systems of English and Chinese languages will be illustrated respectively to demonstrate the distinction between English and Chinese language, and to show the overwhelming similarities among Chinese languages therefore make it possible to see different Chinese languages as a consistent whole in the cross-linguistic comparison regarding their aspectual systems.
2.1 English Aspect

(1) a. She ate an apple.
   b. She was eating an apple.

There is a difference between the two sentences in (1), even though both sentences denote past tense. And the difference has to do with the temporal meaning. Considering these two sentences, (1a) sees the event of [eat an apple] as a completed whole, while (1b) provides an inner perspective by which we see the event as ongoing and in progress. The difference between these two sentences comes from aspect, which refers to different viewpoints we take in uttering a situation in a sentence.

English aspect has two viewpoints, namely the perfective and imperfective viewpoint. The perfective viewpoint presents the situation entirely, without considering any internal structure inside the situation; the totality denoted by perfective viewpoint is not bounded to any time reference; therefore the situation could combine any point/interval at the timeline. On the other hand, the imperfective viewpoint sees the situation internally, focuses on the internal phrases while setting the situation as a continuing one. Similarly, imperfective viewpoint does not locate the event to any point on the timeline. The reflections of these two viewpoints in English language are sentences with progressive and perfect auxiliary have, which Huddleston and Pullum (2002) refer as progressive and non-progressive:

(2) a. She is planning to go to London.
   b. They have booked the tickets.

The Progressive is ‘a special case of imperfectivity where a dynamic situation is presented as ongoing, in progress’ (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 124) and ‘since it is the basic function of the be+ gerund-participle construction to express it, this construction is called progressive aspect’ (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 124). The progressive is firstly featured as presenting a situation in progress at a particular point or throughout a period:

(3) a. I was writing my essay when the light went out.
b. I was writing my essay when others were all out playing.

(3a) specifies that the event [write essay] is ongoing at the moment when the light go out, while (3b) denotes that the event [write essay] continues and cover the interval in which others are out playing.

Secondly, since the progressive is a special case of imperfectivity, progressive sentence inevitably denotes imperfective meaning:

(4a) When I completed my essay she fell asleep. (perfective)

b. When I completed my essay she was sleeping. (imperfective)

(4a) does not denote ongoing event since [complete essay] and [fall asleep] are not in progress, therefore it could only be interpreted as perfective sentence, in which the two involved events are presented successively. (4b), on the other hand, is imperfective because the event [she sleeps] is durative, ongoing, and is inferred to begin ahead of the event of [finish essay] as well as continuing indefinitely after [finish essay].

Thirdly, the event denoted in a progressive sentence must involve and emphasize duration:

(5)  a. She knocked on the door.

b. She was knocking on the door.

c. The train arrived.

d. The train is arriving.

In progressive sentence, the relative verb is denoted as durative, either as a single action covering the whole time interval, or a series of repeated action, as in (5b). Additionally, progressive aspect could extend the time span of an event, as in (5d).

Moreover, progressive aspect differs from other imperfective aspect in that progressive sentence only takes dynamic predicates. Huddleston and Pullum provide a perfect example for illustration:

(6) When I left, Jill had her head buried in a book but Ed was watching TV. (2002:
[Have her head buried in a book] means [she is reading], however, such expression refers to a state rather than a dynamic event; therefore it is not progressive as [watching TV] is. However, when referring to subjective temporal action/state, some stative verbs are allowed in progressive sentences:

(7) a. He is being rude. (agentive activity)
    b. He is rude. (fact/characteristics)

These two sentences do not equal for (7a) does not describe enduring characteristics as (7b) does, instead it denotes a temporal agentive action/state that will end at some time.

Besides the previous features, progressive aspect also has two strong implicatures. The first is ‘the mid-interval implicature’ (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 164) which implies a hidden initial point of the ongoing event as well as an uncertain period of continuity afterwards.

(8) I was writing my essay.

The progressive aspect view the event [write essay] as ongoing, therefore it induces that the event begins at a moment ahead of the reference time, and it is presumably continuing into the future before ends at some unknown point. However, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) also point out that such implicature is not contained in the sentence meaning; therefore by adding time adverbials, we can assign an initial/end point:

(9) a. Between 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., I was working hard in the library.
    b. I was working hard in the library till 12 pm.
    c. From 11 am I was working hard in the library.

However, the time adverbial in (9a) might not bound the event in that the sentence still stands if the event [work hard in the library] covers the time span from 9a.m. to 12 p.m..

Another implicature of progressive sentences is the implicature of short duration for the state. Evidence could be found in many previous examples:
(10)a. He is rude.
   b. He is being rude.
   c. She reads the Economist.
   d. She was reading the Economist.
Comparing (10a) and (10b), while the event [be rude] in (10a) is durative for it denotes a personal feature which could sustain a long time, the agentive event [be rude] in (10b) is temporary for it only denotes current behavior. It is similar with (10c) and (10d), when (10c) denotes habitual reading, (10d) merely denotes a temporary ongoing action.

In English, non-progressive aspect diverges according to the time adverbial it takes:

(11)a. He played poker with his brother last Saturday. (perfective)
   b. He played poker with his brother every Saturday. (imperfective)
   iii. He plays poker well. (imperfective)
(11a) is perfective in that the event [play poker] is completed before speech time, while (11b) involves a serial event which might still holds at speech time regardless of the past tense, therefore it is imperfective. The only difference between (11b) and (11c) is that the event [play poker well] is stative.

In English, perfective aspect is frequently expressed in the perfect construction have+ past participle. However, perfect differs from past tense in that it is non-deictic, therefore the event involved is presented as a whole but not related with any time reference. There are in total three perfect forms:

(12) a. present perfect: I have finished my essay.
   b. past perfect: I had finished my essay.
   c. future perfect: I will have finished my essay.

Kearns generalizes that present perfect features a combination of both ‘pastness and presentness’ (2000: 158) and ‘describes a past event from a present point of view’ (158), furthermore, present perfect locates a past event indefinitely in the timeline
prior to speech time/present time. Due to these features, present perfect is incompatible with time adverbials that denote past time because they are not related to present.

(13)a. I have written 3000 words since yesterday.

#b. I have written 3000 words last week.

(13a) is acceptable because the time interval extends from the past to present, while in (13b) the time interval ends prior to present time, therefore is incompatible with present perfect.

Kearns also concludes that ‘perfect states a relationship between two times: the time of utterance is in the ‘aftertime’ of the reported event, the aftertime being simply the ongoing time after the event concludes’ (2000: 160), therefore in present perfect, the speech time must be placed in the ‘aftertime’ of the past event. Thus the time adverbial in present perfect must cover the past event and the ‘aftertime’ which extends to the speech/present time, and the past event usually set a result which holds till present, as in (27a), [write] happens within the time interval of [since yesterday] and holds a result of [write 3000 words] till present.

Kearns (2000) argues that the past and future perfect are together called the tense perfect. They are semantically a simple past tense, but they occur due to syntactic reason when model verbs take over the syntactic slot of verb inflection, and the sentence has to resort to auxiliary tense have (Kearns, 2000: 167) to express the past tense meaning. In another situation, when a sentence contains two different semantic tenses, tense have appears to express ‘a past-in-the-past’ or ‘a past-in-the-future’ (167).

(14)a. Mary rang at noon. She had got packed and set off to the airport in the morning, but she is still waiting for her flight.

Tense Have: had got packed= past tense + have+ get packed

b. Mary’s flight is at 6. She will have come home at midnight.

Tense Have: will have come= future tense + have + come
If auxiliary *have* used here denotes perfect instead of tense, it wouldn’t be compatible with adverbials such as ‘in the morning’ and ‘at midnight’.

Although above discussion shows that perfective sentences only takes completed events, predicates of states provide a different reading:

(15)a. I have worked in the library since 11 am. (I am still working in the library now)
   b. The light has been on since 8 pm. (the light is still on now)

Such reading denotes an event that initiates in the past and continues till the present, it is called ‘continuing state reading’ (Kearns, 2000: 161), this reading features an indispensable time adverbial. It can be deduced that when present perfect takes a stative predicate, the state covers every single unit (if it exists) of the time span denoted by the time adverbial; when it takes a dynamic predicate, it denotes that the event is contained in the denoted time span at a/some particular points at the timeline. Kearns describes the difference is like the difference between mass and count NPS.

The final point worth mentioning is the relationship between English aspect system and verbs’ aspectual characteristics. In English, simple tense, perfect and progressive are all sensitive to the relative verb’s aspectual characteristics concerning (non-)stativeness. For example, as has been mentioned above, only dynamic verbs could occur in progressive sentences:

(16) a. I am listening.
   #b. I am loving my mother.

On the other hand, dynamic verbs are not allowed in simple present deictic sentence:

(17) I run.

Therefore (17) is interpreted as having a habitual reading at the speech time instead of denoting the speaker is running at speech time.

To sum up, English aspect is composed by progressive (*be*+*gerund-participle*) and non-progressive imperfectives and perfectives which is mainly represented by the aspectual perfect (*have*+*-en*) and tense perfects. English aspectual system firstly is
non-deictic, secondly it is sensitive to the (non-)stativeness of predicate, and what’s more, thanks to the compulsory tense marking system, lacking time adverbials would not lead to ambiguity in most cases in English aspectual system.

2.2 Aspect in Chinese languages

The Chinese aspectual system is more complex than its English counterpart for it contains more aspectual categories, and is used not only used to provide viewpoint but also to locate event on the timeline. Besides, considering the three Chinese languages dealt with in this section, it is necessary to explore whether these three languages share a similar aspectual system. In fact, the major Chinese substrates of SCE (Mandarin, Cantonese and Min dialects) share significant common features in their aspectual systems. Chappell (1992) and Sharma (2009) both provide detailed and convincing observation on the aspectual systems of these Chinese languages, and observations show that their similarities are obvious. This section first illustrates the aspectual categories and their characteristics of Mandarin, and then provides a detailed comparison among the aspectual systems of Mandarin, Cantonese and Min dialects.

The Mandarin aspectual system prefers to mark aspect by means of morpheme. However, the categorization of this verbal aspectual system varies according to different scholars. Li and Thompson (1982) classify four verbal aspects:

(18)a. perfective: -le and perfectivizing expressions
   b. imperfective (durative): zài, -zhe
   c. experiential: -guò
   d. deliminative: reduplication of verb

(18a) marks an ended event which is not necessarily completed. (18b) marks an ongoing event, similar to the English counterpart. (18c) expresses an event which ‘happened at least once in the past’ (Chao, 1968:251). (18d) highlights that the event have a short duration.
Chappell (1992) includes inchoative aspect, which is marked by ‘qîláí’ and focuses on the change from one state to another. Bao (2005) provides the most completed list. Beyond the previous generation, he introduces the inceptive aspect, which is marked by sentence-final le and denotes that a situation is about to happen. The emphatic perspective marked by yǒu/-wán is also included and this aspect underlines the completion of an event. Examples of these verbal aspects are provided as follow:

(19) perfective: wǒ zài nàlǐ zhù-le sān nián.
    I at there live-PFV three years.
    I lived there for three years.

Imperfective: i. tā zài shūjiāo.
    He DUR sleep.
    He is sleeping.
ii. mén suǒ-zhe.
    Door lock DUR.
    The door is locked.
iii. tā xiào-zhe dàobié.
    S/he smile DUR say goodbye.
    She/he said goodbye smiling.

Experiential: wǒ qù guò xiānggǎng.
    I go EXP Hong Kong.
    I have been to Hong Kong.

Deliminative: Wǒ lái shì shì.
    I come try try.
    Let me try a bit.

Inchoative: nǐ diàn cōngmíng le.
    You change smart INCH.
    You have become smarter.

Inceptive: bǐshài kāishǐ le.
    Game begin INCE
The game just started/ is about to start.

Emphatic: i. wǒ xǐ wán wán le.
I wash finish dishes sentence particle.
I have already finished washing dishes.

ii. wǒ yǒu xǐ shǒu.
I have wash hand.
I did wash my hands.

As is shown, Chinese Aspectual system includes many meanings that its English counterpart expresses lexically instead of via aspect system. However, similar to its English counterpart, Chinese aspect is also sensitive to stative/dynamic predicates in sentences. Evidence can be found in the usage of –zhe and zài in imperfective aspect:

(20)a. tāmén zài tǎolùn.
They IMPF discuss.
They are discussing.
b. tā ài-zhe nǐ.
S/he love-IMPF you.
She/he loves you.
c. tā zài lù zhōngjiān zhàn-zhe.
S/he at road middle stand-IMPF.
She/he stands/ is standing in the middle of the road.

Bao (2005) concludes that preverbal zài ‘like English progressive, is dynamic’ (249), as is shown in (20a) with the dynamic main verb ‘tǎolùn/discuss’. Smith (1991) argues that postverbal –zhe ‘has a static focus on states’ (356) and takes stative predicates, as is shown in (20b). (20c) reveals that –zhe could also take ‘verbs of posture’ (Bao, 2005: 250). Bao (2005) generalizes Chinese imperfective as containing a dynamic imperfective (zài) and a stative imperfective (-zhe). Similar to English progressive, dynamic imperfective in Chinese languages only takes dynamic predicates that denote durative events.

(21) a. Tā zài xiězì.
S/he zài write
‘S/he is writing.’

b. Tā zài késhòu.
S/he zài cough
‘S/he is coughing.’

c. #Tā zài ài nǐ.
S/he zài love you
‘She is loving you.’

As shown, the event involved in Chinese dynamic imperfective either lasts for a period of time or denotes a series of repeated events.

However, the stative imperfective does not find equivalent category in English:

(22) a. Tā cūlǔ -zhe ne.
S/he rude -zhe PARTICLE
‘S/he is (very) rude.’

Comparing the stative imperfective with English progressive which takes a stative predicate and denotes an agentive event describing temporal behavior:

(23) She is being rude.

It is obvious that the stative imperfective denotes a long-standing feature, which is different from the temporal behavior denoted by English progressive with stative predicates.

Li and Thompson (1981) hold that Chinese Perfective aspect is also under the constraint of predicate (non-) stativeness. The completive marker V–le is not compatible with verbs denoting unbounded events since the perfective marker indicates ‘an event …viewed in its entirety or as a whole’ (Li and Thompson, 1981: 185), which requires the event to be bounded ‘temporally, spatially, or conceptually’ (185). Apparently a stative predicate does not meet this requirement:

(23) a. #wǒ ài le nǐ.
I love le you.
‘I have loved you.’
In (23), the stative predicate [love] shows incongruence with completive aspect because the event it denotes is not bounded to a particular time interval.

Delimitative aspect also requires a non-stative predicate since it denotes the meaning of *do something a little bit*:

(24) #Qǐng àiài wò.
    Please love love me.
    ‘Please (try to) love me for a bit.’

Sentence-final *le* serves as the mutual aspectual marker of inchoative and inceptive aspect. However, inchoative aspect only takes stative predicate and denotes the change of state, while inceptive aspect takes dynamic predicate and denotes the initiation of dynamic events. Nevertheless, the following discussion shows that when a dynamic predicate is regarded as denoting a habitual state, it can also appear in inchoative sentences.

It is notable that experiential aspect is free from such constraint:

(25)a. wǒ ài guò nǐ.
    I love EXP you.
    I loved you (but I do not love you anymore).

b. wǒ qù guò xiānggāng.
    I go EXP Hong Kong.
    I have been to Hong Kong (but I have left Hong Kong now).

The examples show that experiential marker *guò* takes both stative and non-stative predicates and emphasizes on the past reference time of the event. This emphasis distinguishes experiential aspect from completive aspect in that the completive aspect could be ambiguous in whether the involved event is still in progress or not:

(26)a. tā qùnían dào xiānggāng qù le.
    S/he last year toward Hong Kong go PFV.
    She/he went to Hong Kong last year (and she might have come back, or is still in
Chinese aspect heavily relies on time adverbials/context to avoid ambiguity, which is quite different from its English counterpart. There are two reasons for this. Firstly Chinese languages have long been recognized as tenseless (Chappell, 1992; Li and Thompson, 1981; Chao, 1965), as a result, speakers resort to aspect to locate event on the timeline. However, the following discussion shows that aspect alone is not sufficient to clarify the temporal location of events at the timeline, in which case the relative context cooperates with aspect and fulfill the mission.

Chinese aspect is more complex not just because of the larger number of aspectual categories comparing with English aspect, but also because the unclear boundary among categories and between aspectual markers and sentence particles. Soh (2009) holds that the sentence-final le as sentence particle denotes two functional meanings: the ‘change of state’ meaning and the ‘contrary to expectation’ meaning (623):

(27) Change of state:

\[ tā xiāngjiā le. \]

‘S/he becomes homesick. (and s/he wasn’t homesick before).’

Contrary to expectation:

\[ àidīngbǎo tài měi le, wǒ zhēn gāi duō liú jītiān. \]

‘Edinburgh is so beautiful that I really should stay here longer (and I didn’t expect Edinburgh to be so beautiful before).’

The following examples show how sentence-final le serves both sentence particle and aspectual marker at the same time:
(28) nǐ zhēnde zhǎngdà le.

you really grow big le

‘You really have grown up (and you were a child before).’

In many cases, sentence-final le functions as the sentence particle and the inchoative marker denoted the change of state at the same time. Since inchoative and inceptive aspect both denote the meaning of changing the existed state, the ambiguity is also significant. In fact, there could be a functional overlapping between le as sentence particle and as inchoative/inceptive markers.

(29) zhǎng jià le.

Rise price INCH/INCEP

The price became higher now.

The price starts/ is about to rise.

The price has risen (the rising is unexpected).

In (29) the involving event could have a dynamic interpretation as [rise the price] or a stative one as [becomes higher], therefore an inchoative reading is possible. In this case, in order to eliminate the three-way ambiguity, it is not sufficient for Chinese aspect to rely merely on aspectual markers for the temporal location of events, so speakers have to resort to context to fulfill the work. These ambiguities do not occur in Standard English, therefore are unique features embedded in Chinese languages.

The following table briefly generalizes the divergence of the aspectual system between English and Mandarin:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspectual categories</th>
<th>Relationship with predicate (non-)stativeness</th>
<th>The role of context Constructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Perfective +imperfective</td>
<td>Optional in most cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sensitive (non-)stativeness to Be+Ving</td>
<td>Have+past-participle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Comparison of English and Chinese Aspectual System**
Mandarin & Perfective & Sensitive to & Different verbal & Crucial 

+imperfective & (non-)stativeness & aspectual & when 

+others* & (Expect markers* experiential aspect) & aspectual meaning is ambiguous 

*as discussed above.

To argue that Chinese languages share a similar aspectual system, Chappell (1992) generalizes the aspectual system in Mandarin, Cantonese and Min dialects, which are presented as follows:

**Table 3: Comparison of the Aspectual Markers in Mandarin, Cantonese and Min Dialect**

**Mandarin:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOUNDED</th>
<th>UNBOUNDED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>le (perfective)</td>
<td>Zài +V (progressive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guò (experiential)</td>
<td>-zhe (continuous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qilai (inchoative)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cantonese:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOUNDED</th>
<th>UNBOUNDED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tso (perfective)</td>
<td>-kan (progressive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kwo (experiential)</td>
<td>-tsy (continuous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heilai (inchoative)</td>
<td>-hoi (habitual)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Min:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOUNDED</th>
<th>BOUNDED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wu (perfect)</td>
<td>(ti)-te (progressive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liao (perfective) (loan from Mandarin)</td>
<td>V-.te (continuous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bat (experiential)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observing the aspectual systems in these Chinese languages, it can be perceived that apart from the minor differences, they contain similar aspectual categories, namely perfective, experiential, inchoative, progressive and continuous aspects. Despite the fact that many aspectual markers in these languages only differ in terms of pronunciation, many aspectual categories are exactly the same. For example, Mandarin and Cantonese share the same suffix 过 (guò/kwo) to denote experiential aspect, with the minor difference in the pronunciation of the suffix. The experiential aspect marker in Min dialect bat derives from the character 曾, which means ‘to have experienced something once in the past’ (Chappell, 1992: 89) and acts as the synonym of 过 in Mandarin and Cantonese. Inchoative aspect in these three languages refer to the same phrase 起来 (qǐlái) with different pronunciations. As for perfective aspect, Mandarin and Min dialect use the same suffix marker 了 (le/liǎo), whilst their Cantonese counterpart uses a different suffix 左 (tso²), which shares the same grammatical characteristics with 了:

(30) a. tā zuǒ le. wǒ chī le fàn.
    S/he leave le          I eat le meal
    ‘S/he has gone.’      ‘I have had my meal.’

b. K“oe⁵ lai⁴ tso². Ngo⁵ sik⁶ tso² fan⁶.
    S/he come tso²                               I eat tso² meal
    ‘S/he has come.’      ‘I have had my meal.’

As shown, both le and tso² can be used sentence-finally or post-verbally; therefore they share the same grammatical features. Cantonese differs from the other two languages in progressive aspect in that it is marked by the post-verbal suffix –kan² instead of preverbal suffix zài- in Mandarin and te- in Min dialect. Again Mandarin and Cantonese share the same suffix 着 (-zhe/tsy) with different pronunciations. Min dialect does not have a typical continuous aspect, but it does contain a post-verbal -te construction to express the meaning, which is quite similar to Mandarin and
Cantonese.

Overall, the discussion above presented that the convergence among the aspectual systems in Mandarin, Cantonese and Min dialect clearly outweigh the divergences, therefore the cross-linguistic comparison between English and Mandarin also holds when considering the various Chinese languages involved in the linguistic ecology in Singapore.

3 The aspectual system in Singapore Colloquial English

The aspectual system in SCE presents unique features that emerge out of the language contact between English and Chinese languages. Furthermore, these features reveal the fact that SCE is not ‘a random collection of English and Chinese aspectual categories available from the linguistic pool in its contact ecology’ (Bao, 2005: 238). Due to the fact that SCE only optionally marks tense on the verb, SCE has the tendency to rely on aspectual markers to present the viewpoint and temporal meaning of a sentence, this phenomenon underlines the importance of aspectual markers in SCE aspectual system.

Similar to English and Chinese aspectual systems, SCE contains perfective and imperfective viewpoints. However, due to the unique linguistic ecology in Singapore, the aspectual category of SCE is more complicated. Firstly, in SCE the perfective viewpoint is marked by four perfective markers, namely already, ever, got and finish, and together these perfective markers represent different aspectual meanings which are far richer than English perfective viewpoint:

(31)a. I eat the apple already.
   ‘I ate the apple.’

   b. I ever learn this song.
     ‘I have learnt this song.’
c. I got call the professor.
   ‘I did call the professor.’

d. I drink finish the tea, and then I read the newspaper.
   ‘I drank the tea, and then read the newspaper.’

In (31a), *already* presents the event of [eat the cake] as complete before the speech time on the timeline while in (31b), *ever* underlines that the speaker has experienced the event of [learn this song] in the past and the completion of the event exerts a result which continues to the speech time. *Got* and *finish* in (31c) and (31d) emphasizes the completion of [call the professor]/[drink tea]. Therefore, Bao (2005) defines *already* as completive marker, *ever* as experiential marker, *got* and *finish* as emphatic marker.

Bao (2005) argues that experiential aspects marked by *V-ever* can be interpreted as corresponding to English perfect construction, but ‘the correspondence is not complete’ (2005: 243). The reason lies in that SCE experiential marker *ever* not only underlines the experience in the past but also indicates that the relative event no longer holds at reference time:

(32)a. He ever trust him.
   ‘He trusted him (and he no longer does).’

b. The sky was ever red.
   ‘The sky was once red (and it no longer is).’

However, English perfective viewpoint does not imply that the relative event no longer holds at reference time:

(33) a. I lived in Edinburgh.
   ‘I lived in Edinburgh and I still live there now.’

   ‘I used to live in Edinburgh but I no longer live there now.’

b. We have loved each other for years/since 1978.
   ‘We still love each other now.’

The difference between SCE experiential *ever* and English past and perfect is generalized as below:
Since English past/perfect do not contain the interpretation experiential ever represents, this aspectual meaning must originate from other languages in the multi-lingual ecology. Chinese languages mark experiential aspect by suffix 过 (-guò), which Chao (1968) defines as ‘mark[ing] the indefinite past aspect with the meaning “happened at least once in the past” (251). Chao’s definition of 过 clearly parallels that of SCE ever:

(35) a.  ㄆㄛ ㄑㄨ ㄍㄨㄛ ㄒㄧㄢ ㄍㄤ ㄕ．
    ‘I have been to Hong Kong.’

b.  ㄊㄜ ㄖㄟ ㄍㄨㄛ ㄋㄧ．
    ‘He once loved you.’

Therefore we can deduce that SCE experiential aspect and its marker ever are originated from Chinese experiential aspect marked by suffix guò. Bao (2005) points out that the collocation of ever/guò and the temporal adverbial further support this point. While the experiential marker ever in SCE usually goes with adverbial before, its Chinese counterpart guò has a high chance to go with adverbial ㄭㄔㄧㄢ, which means ‘before’:

(36) ㄭㄧㄔㄧㄢ ㄉㄢ ㄍㄨㄛ ㄌㄠ ㄕ．
    ‘He before be EXP teacher.
    ‘He was a teacher before.’

Evidence also comes from the parallel requirements of event type in SCE and Chinese experiential sentences. Both SCE and Chinese experiential aspect emphasize on the experience of a past event, therefore they require the relative event to be ‘repeatable or otherwise follow the natural order of time’ (Bao, 2005: 245). By this reason, events like [die], [old] are not acceptable in experiential sentences:

(37) a.  ㄕㄧㄢ ㄕ ㄍㄨㄛ．
    ‘He before die EXP
"He once died before."

b. #He ever old before.

#"He was once old before (and he is no longer old now)."

*Finish* and *got* together are defined as emphatic markers:

(38) a. I clean finish my room (already).
   
   b. I got clean my room (already).

Post-verbal *Finish* and preverbal *got* in these sentences emphasize the completion of the relative event. This emphatic meaning is not included in the English aspectual system whereas Chinese emphatic markers *wán* and *yǒu* have identical constructions and meanings:

(39) a. wǒ chī wán zāofān le.
   
   I eat finish breakfast already.
   
   ‘I have already had breakfast.’

b. wǒ yǒu chī zāofān.
   
   I got eat breakfast
   
   ‘I did have had breakfast.’

SCE parallels Chinese in that usually it is fine for *le/already* to follow sentences with *wán/finish*, but *le/already* is usually left out by sentences with *yǒu /got*. Therefore Bao(2005) holds that ‘in Singapore English, the Chinese *yǒu* and *wán* have their reflexes in *got* and *finish*, respectively’ (2005: 249).

In English, adverbial *already* merely marks perfective meaning in the construction of *have Ved*, however, due to the Chinese influence, SCE aspectual marker *already* is not confined with completive interpretation. Besides expressing completive meaning, SCE *already* also serves as the inchoative/inceptive marker:

(40) a. He cry already.
   
   ‘He starts to cry.’ (inceptive)

b. The bottle empty already.
   
   ‘The bottle becomes empty now.’ (inchoative)
Same as in Chinese inceptive aspect, SCE inceptive aspect marks the beginning of an action while inchoative aspect marks ‘a transition to the new state described by the predicate’ (Bao, 2005: 240), and these two meanings are both expressed lexically instead of grammatically in Standard English. Perceived from the definition of inchoative aspect, we can conclude that SCE aspectual marker *already* is sensitive to the predicate (non-) stativeness, therefore when *already* goes with stative predicate, it conveys an inchoative meaning, otherwise it conveys completive/inceptive meaning that determined by the context.

SCE inceptive and inchoative aspect are genetically related to Chinese inceptive/inchoative aspect since firstly English aspect does not contain these two meanings and secondly the inceptive/inchoative marker *already* resembles its Chinese counterpart sentence-final *le* in that they appear in the same position in a sentence. With three different aspectual meanings, Chinese aspectual marker *le* appears post-verbally in completive aspect and sentence-finally in inceptive/inchoative aspect. However, in Standard English, *already* usually appears in the middle of a sentence and precedes the main verb, although there in a small number of cases *already* also occurs sentence-finally in Standard English. SCE in this case shows ‘split loyalty’ (Bao, 2005: 257) by containing considerable sentences with both medium-positioned and final-positioned *already*. In my previous paper submitted for the course Global English, the corpus investigation on SCE aspectual marker *already* observed 50 spoken extracts collected from ICE-SIN, which focuses on the sentential position of *already* and provides the distributional property regarding this issue in the following table (Luo, 2011: 2):

| Table 4: The Distribution of Syntactic Position of Aspectual Marker *already* in SCE |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Initial positioned              | Medium        | Final positioned | Unclear     |

24
already positioned already already positioned
already(subject deletion)

|   | 2 | 36 | 102 | 3 |

This table clearly displays the English and Chinese influence on SCE aspectual marker *already*. In 36 cases, SCE follows Standard English norm and places *already* in the medium position, but more often it resembles Chinese inchoative/inceptive marker *le* and positions *already* sentence-finally, and these 102 cases are composed of inchoative, inceptive and a few completive aspectual sentences. The overwhelming tendency for SCE *already* to appear sentence-finally demonstrates the overwhelming Chinese influence on SCE aspectual system.

One point worth mentioning is that due to the triple aspectual meanings SCE *already* contains, sentences with aspectual marker *already* are potentially three-way ambiguous without context:

(41) Maybe she increase the price already. <ICE-SIN: S1A-006#62:1:A>
    ‘Maybe she has increased the price.’ (completive)
    ‘Maybe she is about to/just started to increase the price.’ (inceptive)
    ‘Maybe she increase the price now (and she never increase the price before).’ (inchoative)

It is worth mentioning that in the inchoative reading, dynamic verb [increase] denotes a habitual reading, therefore acquires a stative characteristic. Such ambiguity echoes the Chinese completive/inchoative/inceptive ambiguity and serves as another firm evidence for the Chinese influence on SCE aspectual system:

(42) tā hē niúnǎi le
    S/he drink milk le
    ‘S/he starts/ is about to drink the milk.’ (inceptive)
    ‘S/he drank the milk.’ (completive)
    ‘S/he drinks milk now (and s/he never drink milk before)’ (inchoative)
The previous examples in SCE and Chinese regarding aspectual marker already/le indicate that SCE resembles Chinese in relying heavily on context to provide supplementary illustration besides aspect in order to locate events on the timeline and avoid potential ambiguity.

Generally, SCE perfective aspect has several remarkable features that distinguish it from Standard English. To begin with, the perfective viewpoint of SCE is marked by aspectual markers *already, ever, got and finish*. These aspectual markers are reflexes of Chinese aspectual markers *le, guò, yǒu and wán*. Secondly, within these markers, experiential marker *ever* marks the completion of an event at reference time following its Chinese counterpart, and therefore avoids the potential ambiguity of Standard English past tense and perfect. Meanwhile because completive marker *already* also represents inchoative and inceptive categories, SCE shows a remarkable tendency to present *already* sentence-finally just like Chinese sentence-final *le* and inherits the potential ambiguities related to sentence-final *le* in Chinese aspect. Lastly, besides aspectual marking SCE follows Chinese and resort to context to avoid potential ambiguities.

Unlike perfective aspect which is profoundly influenced by Chinese perfective aspect, SCE imperfective aspect is ‘unremarkable’ (Bao, 2005: 249) for basically it is identical to English progressive apart from the optional copula deletion before verb present participle:

(43) If they planning to come down, tell me.

I’m just typing some you know some work and things like that. (Bao, 2005: 249)

As has been discussed, Chinese imperfective aspect has two viewpoints, namely the dynamic imperfective marked by *zài* and stative imperfective marked by *–zhe*. Bao (2005) further points out that the dynamic imperfective viewpoint in Chinese languages resembles English progressive in that it only takes dynamic verbs. However, the stative imperfective is unique in Chinese and represents ‘on-going character of the
state’ and ‘background state for the main verb’ (Bao, 2005: 250):

(44) a. wǒ shēngqì-zhe ne.
       I   angry -zhe PARTICLE
       ‘I am angry.’

b. tā xiào -zhe lìulèi.
       S/he smile -zhe flow tear
       ‘S/he wept smiling.’

Since SCE imperfective resembles English progressive, SCE imperfective should not take stative verbs in its (be)+Ving imperfective construction. To verify the theoretical assumption, stative verbs ‘loving’ and ‘knowing’ are searched in the 50 spoken extracts in ICE-SIN, and the result supports the assumption for no data of ‘loving’ and ‘knowing’ could be found in the corpus. Furthermore, Bao(2005) points out that the background state reading is also not available in SCE. Therefore the Chinese stative imperfective marked by –zhe does not have reflex in SCE imperfective aspect like perfective marker le, -guò, -wán and yǒu do.

The selection of aspectual categories under certain standard is also revealed in the fact that the Chinese tentative aspect (V-V) which denotes ‘the short duration of an event’ (Bao, 2005:251) is missing in SCE aspectual system:

(45) ràng wǒ shìshí.
       Let  me try try.
       ‘Let me have a try.’

This tentative meaning in English is expressed lexically as ‘do something for a while’ and ‘try to do something’. Although examples of verb duplication can occasionally be found in SCE, such examples are regarded as ‘fossilized reduplicatives’ (Bao, 2005: 252) and not productive, therefore tentative aspect is not transferred into SCE aspectual system.

To better present the SCE aspectual system under English and Chinese influence, Bao (2005:252) provides the following table:
| Table 5: The Aspectual System of Chinese, English and Singapore English |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                 | Chinese languages | Singapore English | English |
| **Perfective**  |                 |                 |         |
| i. Completive   | V-le            | S already        | V-ed; V-en |
| ii. Experiential| V guò           | ever V           | ≈ever V-en |
| iii. Emphatic   | you V           | got V            | V finish  |
|                 | V-wán           | V finish         |         |
| **Inchoative**  | S-le            | S already        |         |
| **Inceptive**   | S-le            | S already        |         |
| **Imperfective**|                 |                 |         |
| i. Dynamic      | zài V           | V-ing            | V-ing    |
| ii. Stative     | V-zhe...(ne)    | ≈V-ing           | ≈V-ing   |
| iii. Stative    | V-zhe V         |                 |         |
| **Tentative**   | V-V             |                 |         |

Apart from the category difference, SCE’s inchoative/inceptive distinction and its choice of selecting dynamic imperfective aspect together reveal the fact that SCE aspectual system is also sensitive to predicate (non-)stativeness; secondly, resembles to Chinese aspectual system, context is crucial in avoiding the potential ambiguities among perfective, inchoative and inceptive aspect.

The illustration and comparison of aspectual systems in English, Chinese languages and SCE above together demonstrate one point: emerging from a unique linguistic ecology which contains English and Chinese languages, SCE owns some unique features: SCE marks tense occasionally and adapts some unique Chinese aspectual categories while rules out some others. Moreover, SCE aspectual system follows the Chinese counterpart norm as firstly it is sensitive to (non-)stativeness of predicate. Thirdly, it needs context to eliminate potential ambiguities in some cases. However,
going beyond SCE’s surface convergences and divergences with English and Chinese languages, these SCE aspectual features in SCE are not randomly picked from the multi-linguistic pool, and the next section aims to illustrate the hidden standards for such selection and the mechanism behind these SCE features.

4 Systemic Comparison and Observation of English, Chinese and SCE Aspects

The comparison between SCE aspectual system and its English and Chinese counterpart seems to reveal that SCE aspectual system selects its aspectual categories among Chinese aspectual categories, for every SCE aspectual category can be regarded as the reflex of a certain Chinese aspectual category. However, the formation of SCE aspectual system goes beyond the surface correspondence between SCE and Chinese aspectual system and involves intricate mechanism which holds several constraints. This section aims to compare the Chinese, English and SCE aspectual systems by focusing on their semantic and syntactic features in the aim to reveal the constraints SCE complies with during the feature selection.

It seems that SCE is holding a double standard when selecting aspectual categories in the ‘feature pool’ (Mufwene, 2001: 30), which contains all the English and Chinese aspectual categories. Of all the aspectual categories in English and Chinese languages, those aspectual categories that exist both in English and Chinese aspectual systems are transferred smoothly, such as the imperfective viewpoint in SCE aspect, which is in congruence with English progressive and Chinese dynamic imperfective, as has been discussed above. However, unique aspectual categories which only exist in one language still have chance to enter SCE aspectual system. Although the unique tentative aspect and stative imperfective aspect in Chinese aspectual system are indeed excluded from SCE aspectual system, inchoative and inceptive aspects in
Chinese aspectual system are peculiarly accepted.

Further observation reveals some interesting patterns in SCE aspectual system. The previous introduction shows that Chinese aspectual categories are marked by morphemes whereas the English aspectual categories are featured by different constructions (have +V-en; be+ Ving etc). However, when we observe the SCE aspectual system, it is noticed that SCE follows the Chinese aspectual system and marks aspectual categories by lexical entries that it borrows from correspondent English aspectual constructions without replicating the whole constructions:

**Table 6: the aspectual markers in SCE and its English, Chinese counterparts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completive</th>
<th>Experiential</th>
<th>Emphatic</th>
<th>Inchoative</th>
<th>inchoative</th>
<th>Imperfective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Have ALREADY</td>
<td>Have EVER</td>
<td>Have GOT</td>
<td>Have ALREADY</td>
<td>Have ALREADY</td>
<td>Be + VING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V-ed</td>
<td>V-ed/S</td>
<td>V-ed/S</td>
<td>ALREADY</td>
<td>ALREADY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>V-le</td>
<td>Guò</td>
<td>Yǒu</td>
<td>S-le</td>
<td>S-le</td>
<td>Zài</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCE</td>
<td>Already</td>
<td>Ever</td>
<td>Got</td>
<td>already</td>
<td>Already</td>
<td>Ving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Take the completive aspectual marker *already* as an example. It inherits its aspectual meaning from the Chinese completive aspect and borrows the English lexical entry *already* as representation. This choice is interesting considering the semantic meanings represented by Chinese aspectual *le* and English adverbial *already* respectively. Chinese perfective/completive marker *V-le* is long regarded as a completion marker (Chao, 1968), and the completive aspect it marks is partly compared with English past tense (Bao, 2005); meanwhile OED records the meaning of English adverbial *already* as ‘Beforehand, in anticipation; previously to some specified time; by this time, thus early’ (OED, already, adv, 2-a-(a)), apparently adverbial *already* also contains past meaning, which corresponds to what *V-le* denotes.
Soh (2009) holds that English adverbial *already* and Chinese sentence-final *le* are both associated with the meaning of ‘change of state’ and the “contrary to expectation” (623) and this claim serves as another forceful evidence of the semantic overlap between Chinese *le* and *already*. Besides, the semantic overlap between Chinese emphatic marker *yǒu* and English *got* is also apparent. Bao (2005) argues that Chinese character *yǒu* contains an existential/possessive meaning. Besides, *yǒu* is used in many southern dialects involving the Cantonese and Min dialects as a perfective marker. Therefore Bao generalizes two functional structures of *yǒu* as ‘*yǒu* V marks the perfective, *yǒu* N the existential’ (2005: 255).

(46) *yǒu* V marks the perfective:

- wǒ *yǒu* fù fānqián.
  I *yǒu* pay meal money
  ‘I have paid for the meal.’
- *yǒu* N the existential
  a. nàlǐ *yǒu* yīgè rén.
     There *yǒu* one person
     ‘There is a man over there.’
  b. wǒ *yǒu* yīgè píngguǒ.
     I *yǒu* one apple.
     ‘I have an apple.’

On the other hand, Bao (2005) argues that English *get/got* expresses only the possessive meaning but not the existential meaning. However, as the corpus research in the COCA (Corpus of contemporary American English) shows, in colloquial usages *got* could also have an existential meaning.

(47) a. Here we got three guys, three guys.

  b. Here we got a bunch of individuals whom you disagree with, and probably rightly so, who have decided to have their country club. (Davids, 2008-, COCA)

COCA also reveals that this colloquial existential use of *got* is quite unproductive and are restricted in certain constructions such as ‘here we/ you/got’, which makes a
striking contrast with the abundant use of Chinese existential yòu. Therefore Chinese yòu and English get/got are partially overlapped in semantic meaning since they both express possessive meaning. Similarly, the other three lexical pairs, namely wán-finish, guò-ever and zài-Ving, all more or less show semantic overlaps. As for the pair of ever and guò, the usage of ever as the experiential marker is recorded in OED: ‘Qualifying a superlative (usu. an adjective) ever known, experienced, etc.; ‘on record”. (OED, ever, II-7-f), which is coincident with the Chinese experiential marker guò. Last but not the least, besides ever-guò there are two extreme cases regarding the semantic overlap: finish-wán shows a direct semantic correspondence since wán and finish are synonymous; Chinese imperfective marker –zhe and English verb present participle form also share the same meaning.

In contrast, for the abandoned Chinese aspectual categories tentative aspect (V-V) and stative imperfective aspect (V-zhe; V-zhe V), their aspectual markers fail to find counterpart expression in English which contains the (partial) aspectual meaning they bear, therefore are excluded from the SCE aspectual system. Tentative aspect denotes a short duration of a dynamic event; this meaning in English is expressed by phrases such as Ving for a while and try to V instead of by verbal reduplication. Although Wee (2004) provides a descriptive analysis on verbal reduplication in SCE, it is nevertheless unproductive and low in frequency. Leimgruber (2009) launches a quantitative research on SCE and concludes that verbal reduplication does exist, but is quite restricted and unproductive. Out of the mere 13 tokens in his research, many are ambiguous and hard to define, and only one token can be regarded as unambiguous example of verbal tentative reduplication in SCE:

(48) No that means she talks is like an old lady, like that, read read and talk. (iii.I.rm). (Leimgruber 2009: 177).

Stative imperfective aspect marked by V-zhe takes stative predicates and describes certain characteristics of the subject, which meaning in English is expressed by descriptive/declarative sentences; moreover, English does not allow stative predicates
in progressive construction:

(49) a. zhè hái zi táo qì zhe ne.
   This child naughty zhe PARTICLE
   ‘This child is (very) naughty.’

b. tā ài zhe nǐ.
   S/he love zhe you.
   ‘S/he loves you.’

The English translations of the previous Chinese sentences show that English does not resort to imperfective aspect to express on-going characteristics or conditions:

(50) a. This child is naughty.
   This child is being naughty.

b. S/he loves you.
   #S/he is loving you.

As in (50), when adjective predicates go with imperfective aspect in English, the sentence automatically describes an agentive temporary condition of the subject instead of denoting a durative characteristic. The second example shows that English does not allow stative verbs in imperfective sentences.

V-zhe V marks the stative imperfective which describes the background state of the main verb. However, this meaning also fails to be expressed by particular forms in English:

(51) tāmén xiào zhe wòshòu.
   They smile zhe shake hand
   ‘They shook their hands smiling/ They smiled while shaking their hands.’

As shown, although English does express such meaning in constructions like do something V-ing and V. while doing something, English imperfective aspect and its construction do not account for the ‘background state of the main verb’ meaning.

The consistent phenomena of semantic overlap demonstrate that these SCE aspectual markers are transferred due to the (partial) semantic overlap between relative Chinese
and English lexical items. Contrarily when one aspectual category expresses unique aspectual meaning which finds no verbal counterpart in English, SCE refuses it to enter its aspectual system. Therefore it is possible to deduce that emerged from the contact between English and Chinese languages, SCE selects aspectual categories following a semantic constraint which requires the relative lexical items from superstrate language English and substrate language Chinese to have at least a partial semantic overlap.

Now that we have identified the semantic overlap between the superstrate and substrate lexical entries, the five SCE aspectual markers, namely *already, got, finish, ever and Ving*, need further investigation. Due to the fact that Chinese languages and English are typologically distant, passing the semantic selection does not mean the qualified Chinese lexical items representing Chinese aspectual categories could mark SCE aspect without question. Their syntactic and morphosyntactic features have a high chance to conflict with their English reflex. This urges SCE to resort to another principle in order to reconcile the controversy. To begin with, the previous section of SCE aspectual system demonstrates that SCE speakers have a strong tendency to place *already* sentence-finally, which inevitably follows the main verb as well. This statistical evidence supports the point that SCE inchoative and inceptive aspects, both of which marked by sentence-final *already* and show accordance with the Chinese counterparts, are the result of Chinese influence. However, it is worth noticing that Chinese completive aspect is marked in the form of *V-le* instead of *S-le*, but its reflex *already* in SCE aspectual system marks completive sentence-finally just as marking inchoative and inceptive aspects. This pattern is inconsistent with the Chinese completive aspect and requires further interpretation. Bao (2005) argues that SCE allows those lexical items and the grammatical systems represented by them provided that common syntactic features exist. In the case of *le-already*, SCE’s criterion is met since both items can appear sentence-finally:

(52)In English: a. I have already graduated from university. (preverbal)
    b. I have had my lunch already. (sentence-final)
In Chinese, inchoative and inceptive aspects are marked by sentence-final *le*. What’s more, although completive aspect is marked by post-verbal *le*, in many cases the completive marker *le* also appears at the end of the sentence:

(53) A: chīfān le mā?
   Eat meal le PARTICLE
   ‘Have you eaten?’
B: chīle.
   Eat le
   ‘Yes, I have eaten.’

As the example shows, although Chinese completive aspect is marked by *V-le*, this marker frequently coincides in position with *S-le*. Therefore, the completive aspect is ushered into the SCE aspecual system and the common feature of appearing sentence-finally is reserved in SCE, which results in the sentence-final *already’s* functioning as completive aspecual marker. As for the experiential marker *ever*, Ho and Wong (2001) base their research of *ever* on the observation of 300 spoken examples taken from transcribed interviews and recording conversations involving speakers from different ethnic, educational, age and career backgrounds and generalizes the pattern of SCE *ever*. They conclude that SCE *ever* can be used 1) as an ‘affirmative response’ (2001: 80) of experiential questions; 2) in declarative sentences ‘signifying the occurrence of a specific event at any time in one’s life up to the present’ (2001: 81).

(54) Affirmative response:
   Q: You (ever) eat this fruit before?
   A: (Yes,) ever.

   In declarative sentences:
   This share ever hit forty dollars!     (Ho and Wong, 2001: 79)

In Ho and Wong (2001)’s the spoken data, SCE *ever* tends to precede the main verb in most cases, which is in line with its English counterpart and contrasts with its Chinese reflex *V-guò*. Ho and Wong further illustrate that it is possible for SCE *ever* to derive from the Standard English usage of *never*, its negative form, which has a strong
tendency to appear before the main verb. This claim further supports the point that SCE *ever* follows its English counterpart’s syntactic features.

In the case of two SCE emphatic markers, *got*-V presents an example which is in accordance with both Chinese and English. Its Chinese reflex *yòu* appears before the main verb. Although English word *got* does not serve as aspectual marker, nor does it have a similar construction, *get/got* in different constructions and phrases involving verbs such as *get Ved* and *get to V* tend to appear pre-verbally (Bao, 2005). *V-finish* emphatic marker is a peculiar case in which the English word *finish* does not provide any corresponding uses that could make it the reflex of Chinese *wán*, but *V-finish* still finds its way into the SCE aspectual system. However, as Bao (2005) argues, the *V-finish* emphatic marker is not extensively used in SCE for it only takes action verbs that ‘the lexical meaning of *finish* is felicitous’ (2005: 249). The case of SCE imperfective marker *Ving* that resembles dynamic imperfective aspect in Chinese again shows compliance with the English form and abandons the Chinese form of *zài V*. The following table clearly shows SCE’s choice confronting syntactic conflict between Chinese and English:

**Table 7: SCE’s Choice Confronting Syntactic Conflict Between Chinese and English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Have</th>
<th>Have EVER</th>
<th>Have</th>
<th>GOT</th>
<th>Be VING</th>
<th>Finish*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALREADY</td>
<td>Ved</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ved;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALREADY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese languages</td>
<td>V le;</td>
<td>V-guò</td>
<td><em>yòu</em> V</td>
<td><em>zài</em> V</td>
<td>V <em>wán</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCE</td>
<td>S already</td>
<td>Ever V</td>
<td>Got V</td>
<td>Ving</td>
<td>V finish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Therefore it can be generalized that when the syntactic feature of English and Chinese is in conflict, SCE, the contact language, has the tendency to agree with the English feature in terms of syntactic position. However, as is shown above, SCE selection contains some strange phenomena that this explanation does not cover, such as the case of allowing *finish* as the emphatic marker. This phenomenon will be discussed later.

It can be generalized from the previous observation that SCE basically follows two constraints in the formation of its aspectual system: the semantic constraint functions on the selecting process and requires a (partial) semantic overlap between the relative lexical items in both languages in contact; the syntactic constraint functions on the formation process and requires SCE to follow superstrate (English) when confronting conflicting syntactic features between Chinese and English. Meanwhile, it must be reminded that SCE aspectual system still shows accordance with Chinese aspectual system in its sensitivity to predicate (non-)stativeness and its need to avoid potential ambiguity by using context, as is shown in the previous comparative analysis section.

5 Theoretical explanation of the unique SCE aspectual system

5.1 The convergence and divergence between relexification and formation of SCE aspect

Because of the analysis of the similarities between Singapore English and creole languages, the creole genesis theories are considered as the theoretical candidates of the Singapore English formation. The previous investigation echoes Lefebvre’s Relexification theory (1993 and others), which exerts fundamental influence on the interpretation of creole and other contact languages. Lefebvre holds that ‘creole languages (L3) reflect the properties of their source languages (substrate, L1, and
This theory is applicable to the situation in SCE aspectual system for, as discussed above, SCE is similar to creole in many ways. To begin with, the emergence of creole and SCE are both due to language contact which involves a multilingual ecology; Secondly, both of them are regarded as ‘the result of contact-induced change’ (Lefebvre, 2009: 278); Moreover, both SCE and creole serve as the basilect in their linguistic diglossia; Finally, SCE and creole both have a ‘hierarchy of morpheme borrowing’ (Matras, 2009: 281) in the sense that they rely heavily on the lexemes borrowed from superstrate language. Gupta once defines SCE that ‘to refer to this contact variety as a creoloïd is appropriate, or as a semi-creole, but semi-pidgin is misleading’ (1992: 324). However, as we will see, although the relexification theory contributes to the understanding of the offstage mechanism in the formation of SCE aspectual system, it failed to depict the whole picture of SCE aspect formation.

Lefebvre’s relexification approach argues that creole languages emerge out of language contact in which relexification ‘plays a central role’ (1998: 40) in the process. Lefebvre bases her theory on the definition Muysken (1981) first gives of Relexification:

“Given the concept of lexical entry, relexification can be defined as the process of vocabulary substitution in which the only information adopted from the target language in the lexical entry is the phonological representation.” (61)

Lefebvre argues that, by this definition, relexification is ‘a mental process that builds new lexical entries by copying the lexical entries of an already established lexicon and replacing their phonological representations with representations derived from another language’ (1998: 16). The description of the relexification process is shown as follows:
From this diagram, she distinguishes two steps involved in the process of relexification: copying substrate lexical entries and relabeling it with superstrate phonetic strings. Lefebvre argues that it is ‘phonetic strings’ instead of ‘phonological representation’ in Muysken’ words that go through the relabeling process. She explains that in many creole examples, expressions, rather than lexical entries, in superstrate languages serve as the relabeling candidates (Lefebvre, 1998). The following diagram is provided to present a better illustration of the essential concept of relabeling:

(56) a. /phonology/\textsubscript{i}
   \[
   [\text{semantic}] \textsubscript{i},
   [\text{syntactic}] \textsubscript{i},
   \]

b. /phonology/\textsubscript{i} /phonology/\textsubscript{j}
   \[
   [\text{semantic}] \textsubscript{j},
   [\text{syntactic}] \textsubscript{j},
   \]

c. /phonology/\textsubscript{j}
   \[
   [\text{semantic}] \textsubscript{j},
   [\text{syntactic}] \textsubscript{j},
   \]

(Lefebvre, 2009: 280)

In this diagram, L1, the substrate language, provides a lexical entry which has its own phonological, semantic and syntactic feature as (43a), and this lexical entry is assigned with another phonological label from L2, the superstrate language, which
result in (43b) before the original phonological feature in L1 is abandoned, and finally complete the process of relabeling in (43c). It can be perceived from the process that the counterpart superstrate phonetic string is deprived of its original semantic and syntactic features during the process of relabeling and thus becomes a mere phonological label. Firstly this is in line with Muysken’s claim which is quoted in Lefebvre (1998) that ‘the lexifier language lexical entry is deprived of features’ (17), secondly it is supported by the fact in the formation of many creole languages as well as in SCE, such as in the case of English word got when it is used to relabel the emphatic aspectual marker yǒu in Chinese, its original syntactic and semantic features are both eliminated, as a result the SCE aspectual marker got functions exactly like its Chinese counterpart.

However, this diagram alone is not sufficient to describe the mechanism of relabeling. Lefebvre compares the Haitian creole with its superstrate language French and substrate languages Fon and points out that the superstrate and substrate language have some common semantic meanings, which indicates a semantic prerequisite for relexification/relabeling process to initiate. This indication is supported by Muysken: ‘the semantics of the two lexical entries that are associated in relabeling must at least partially overlap’ (1981: 62). Therefore it is appropriate to further interpret that relexification is about relabeling the copied L1 lexical entry with a counterpart form available in L2 which has at least a partial semantic overlap with the L1 lexical entry. So far, Lefebvre’s finding is in correspondence with the previous observation and data analysis of SCE aspectual system at least on the surface.

However, divergence between the formation of SCE aspectual system and relexification begins to emerge during the process of relabeling, in which the superstrate phonetic string is deprived of its semantic, pragmatic and syntactic features and is reduced to a mere phonological representation of the new creole lexical item. Therefore in the process, the substrate lexical item’s semantic and syntactic features are retained while the superstrate language’s mere contribution is a
phonological label. The Haitian creole supports Lefebvre’s argument since there is an ‘extreme similarity between the semantic and syntactic properties of the creole lexical entries and those of the corresponding entries in the creole’s substrate languages’ (2009: 288). However, relabeling does not account for the SCE aspectual system. As observed above, when the syntactic features of the copied substrate lexical entry and superstrate candidate are in conflict, the copied lexical entry has a tendency to abandon its own syntactic properties and follows that of the superstrate lexical entry’s properties.

Besides illustrating the mechanism of relexification in the formation of creoles, Lefebvre takes it that all categories, including functional categories can undergo relexification provided that they have some semantic meaning. Although it is questioned whether functional categories have semantic content or not (Muysken 1988; Lumsden 1999), Lefebvre quotes Larsson and Segal (1995) to defend that many functional categories do have semantic content, therefore she argues that ‘Functional categories that have semantic content, such as determiners, pronouns, tense, mood, and aspect markers, may be relabeled provided that an ‘appropriate form’ is found in the superstrate language’ (2009:286) while ‘case markers and operators, that do not have semantic content, cannot be relabeled’ (2009: 282). This claim is fully supported by the SCE aspectual system for the Chinese lexical aspectual markers, which belong to functional categories, serve as L1 lexical entries and participate in the process of relexification. Therefore, when meaningful functional category lexical items are involved in relexification, to comply with the semantic constraint, the superstrate phonetic string must share some semantic meaning with the copied substrate lexical entry involved in the relexification process; Moreover, the syntactic property of this relabeling candidate must be similar to that of the copied substrate lexical entry. Lefebvre recognizes that Haitian creole indefinite determiner is not formed by going through relabeling because of the ‘discrepancy’ (2009: 288) between the substrate post-nominal indefinite determiner and Haitian creole pre-nominal indefinite determiner. This is due to the reason that the superstrate language French ‘did not
have an ‘appropriate form’ to relabel the substrate entry [since] there is no form in French bearing major syntactic features, sharing some semantics with the original lexical entry, and occurring in a similar surface position as the original lexical entry, in this case postnominally, to relabel the substrate postnominal indefinite determiner’ (2009: 288). In a word, an appropriate form refers to a phonetic string in the superstrate language that firstly contains at least partial semantic overlap with the copied lexical entry, and secondly appears in a (surface) syntactic position that is similar to the copied lexical entry.

On the surface, it seems that relexification theory explains the formation process of SCE aspectual system since in the formation of SCE aspectual system, the superstrate language English does provides phonological representation while substrate Chinese languages provide relevant aspectual categories, and the superstrate and substrate languages provide lexical entries that semantically overlap with each other. However, it is worth noting that relexification theory focuses on creole languages, but not new English varieties like SCE. The differences between creole and SCE as a new English variety mean that relexification is incapable of depicting the entire scenario of the SCE aspectual system. To begin with, although it is recognized that SCE shares quite a few features with creole languages, SCE differs from creole in that the language contact in its case is consistent and active, and English and Chinese languages in the multilingual ecology enjoy a constant and intense contact. Bao (2005) records that the sociolinguistic ecology in Singapore is ‘stable’ (257), and ‘the creator and developer of Singapore English have enjoyed ready access to the same grammatical resources’ (257); besides, due to the typologically sharp contrast between superstrate language English and substrate language Chinese (including various Chinese dialects), SCE aspectual system emerges from a tense competition in the linguistic ecology, and therefore shows ‘split loyalty’ (257) to both English and Chinese; furthermore, although Gupta (1992) has recorded an increasing number of children who come to school with English (in most cases SCE) as their home language, it cannot be denied that many people in Singapore are fluent but not native speakers of SCE. By contrast,
creole is defined as ‘nativized pidgin’ (Matras, 2009: 278) and are spoken by people for who ‘pidgin served as the principle input language in infancy’ (Matras, 2009: 278). And differs from SCE, the superstrate language (acrolect) of the creole in many cases is not actively used in the linguistic ecology after the creole genesis. In this case the substrate language gets the upper hand in the competition with superstrate language. This point is also proved by Lefebvre’s investigation of Haitian creole. Lefebvre describes Haitian creole as a ‘radical creole’ that has ‘little access to the superstrate language’ (2009: 290) and in many cases ‘creole genesis is a function of second language acquisition in the specific context where substratum speakers have reduced access to the superstratum language’ (1998: 36). She also notices the phenomenon for creole to relabel a copied functional-category lexical item with a major-category lexical item from superstrate language, and provides explanation that ‘the creators of a radical creole cannot identify the functional categories of the superstratum language because they do not have enough exposure to the language’ (Lefebvre, 1998: 37).

Besides the different linguistic ecologies that creole and SCE emerges from, in observation the divergence between creole and SCE can be generalized into two points. In the first place, as mentioned above, the SCE aspectual system has the tendency to retain the syntactic and morphosyntactic features of the superstrate lexical items while in the relexification of a creole, the superstrate language offers nothing but a phonological representation and its semantic/syntactic features are both unavailable. Secondly, it is also worth noting that in the formation of many creole languages, the functional lexical entries are relabeled not by the counterpart functional lexical entries in superstrate languages, but by a lexical entry from main categories, such as nouns, verbs, adjective, adverbials and prepositions etc. This phenomenon is interpreted by Lefebvre as due to lexifiers’ limited knowledge of the superstrate language: ‘the lexifier language is deprived of features…this is because, as we will see below, relexifiers either do not have access to this information or, if they do, they do not use it in creating the new lexical entry’ (1998: 17). However, this claim does not explain the similar situation in the forming SCE aspectual system. In sharp
contrast to creole creators, due to the sociolinguistic characteristics in Singapore, English education has exerted significant influence in the linguistic ecology. Since English is now replacing other substrate languages including Chinese, and becoming the major education language (Platt and Weber, 1980), most Singaporean people enjoy sufficient access to the superstrate language English as well as grasping enough knowledge of the language. However, some of the aspectual markers in SCE are still relabeled by English main category lexical entries instead of functional ones, and Lefebvre’s ‘imperfect learning’ (Thomason, 2001: 180) explanation fails to account for it.

To sum up, the relexification approach is congruent with the formation of SCE aspectual system in that they both hold a semantic constraint on the relative superstrate and substrate lexical entries, and on the surface SCE and creole both show considerable respect to the substrate features. However, relexification theory does not account for SCE’s choice of following superstrate syntactic features when divergences between English and Chinese lexical entries syntactic features. Therefore it is possible to say that the formation of SCE aspectual system only shows congruence with relexification at the first stage of ‘copying’, and after that the different characteristics of new English variety and creole determine that SCE aspectual system does not follow the path of ‘relabeling’, which serves as the second part of relexification. Besides, this section also argues that the congruence and divergence between relexification and the formation of SCE aspectual system is due to the fundamental characteristics of creole and new English SCE, which share a few common properties while differ greatly in the ecology which they emerge.

5.2 The proper explanation accounting SCE aspectual system

The discrepancies described above prove that relexification does not account for what happened in the formation of SCE aspectual system. Bao (2005) points out that
regardless of the above discrepancies, Lefebvre’s relexification theory also fails to cover the systemic level in the contact languages formation since it mainly focuses on ‘individual lexical items’ (2005: 257), therefore is not capable to account for the formation SCE aspectual system. Bao argues that ‘surface innovation is but a reflection of underlying change in the grammatical subsystem’ (2005: 257), and the formation of SCE aspectual system is actually resulting from systemic restructuring that has taken place under pressure of languages contact’ (2005: 257), this is especially important in the case of SCE since the languages contact is constant and active all the time. Therefore contrasting relexification theory, Bao first holds that in the formation of SCE aspectual system, the substrate language Chinese offers the whole aspectual system while the superstrate language English acts as a filter and excludes those ‘inexpressible’ (2005: 257) features; secondly he resorts to Chomsky’s principle and parametric approach in the aim to interpret the process; last but not the least, Bao argues for ‘clustering effect’ (2005:257) which allows the subsystems to be transferred into SCE aspectual system following the relative lexical items.

Generally, Bao’s argument of the mechanism involved in the formation of SCE aspectual system is described as such (2005: 258):

(57) a. System transfer

Substratum transfer involves an entire grammatical subsystem.

b. Lexifier filter

Morphosyntatic exponence of the transferred system conforms to the (surface) structural requirements of the lexical-source language.

Bao describes these two processes as being ‘violable’ and ‘ranked’ (2005: 258) in that both of them endeavor to achieve optimal effect and lexifier filter ranks higher than system transfer.

In the first stage, system transfer requires the whole Chinese aspectual system to be transferred. This systemic transfer is initiated due to the clustering effect which generates the parametric properties of the aspectual system in Chinese languages. The
The notion of parametric property comes from Chomsky’s Principle and Parameter theory, in which Chomsky proposes that languages are composed of Universal Grammar (UG) and unsettled idiosyncratic features, which he refers to as parameter (Tsimpli and Roussou, 1991). Lefebvre regards parameter as the ‘constitute options’ (1998: 349) of UG. Therefore it can be perceived that both Chinese and English aspectual systems contain certain parametric properties which distinguish them from each other, and during the process of system transfer, the parametric properties of Chinese aspectual system cluster the entire system and are transferred into the new English variety, this transfer endeavors to achieve maximum congruence between the transferred substrate aspectual system and the new one.

Without the second part of the mechanism, SCE aspectual system would be its Chinese counterpart relabeled by English phonological representation; however, the lexifier filter exerts significant influence during the process and determines that SCE aspectual system conforms to the syntactic and morphosyntactic feature of its superstrate language English. Bao (2005) argues that ‘since the lexical-source language contributes morphosyntactic exponence, its (surface) grammatical properties naturally carry over to the new language, where the lexical items acquire additional functionality as the exponence of substrate-derived grammatical features’ (259). This claim is in contrast with Lefebvre’s theory in which the substrate lexical items retain their syntactic and semantic features in creole genesis. However, as the observation above argues favor of Bao’s claim, it is obvious that on lexical and morphological level, the eligible lexical items already, got, ever, Ving all show compliance with English considering their surface syntactic positions after acquiring new functions as aspectual markers. One thing worth mentioning is that lexifier filter does not require the superstrate reflex of the substrate aspectual marker to share the same ‘structural pattern’ (Bao, 2005: 260), therefore it allows the cloning of Chinese multifunctional aspectual marker in SCE aspectual system, as in the case of sentence-final le to represent completive, inchoative and inceptive aspect.
However, unlike the relexification of creoles in which substrate lexical items either retain their syntactic/semantic features in the creole or acquire a phonological null form when failed to be relabeled, SCE aspectual system presents a new situation in which those Chinese aspectual categories that failed to find adequate form in English will be excluded from SCE aspectual system altogether. Also differs from relexification in which the syntactic and semantic feature of the substrate lexical item are deprived of before it rebels the substrate lexical entry, in the case of SCE aspectual system, Chinese and English both provide their relative morphosyntactic and syntactic features for the SCE selection. The ‘missing aspectual categories’ (Bao, 2005: 250) stative imperfective aspect and tentative aspect are abandoned because English contains no adequate expression for them. Stative imperfective denotes a background action of the main verb:

(58) a. tāmen zhān-zhe chīzāofàn.
   They stand-zhe eat breakfast
   ‘They stand while having breakfast/ They stand and have breakfast.’
   b. *They standing have breakfast.

The examples show that in English the similar meaning is only expressed by sentence construction such as ‘V and V’ or ‘V while V’.

The tentative aspect denotes a short duration of an action and is expressed by verbs reduplication in Chinese aspectual system; however, English does not contain such expression/construction. Although Bao quotes Greenbaum (1996), Ho (1999) and Lim & Wee (2001) to demonstrate that there are indeed a few reduplication compounds in both Standard English and SCE, these reduplicative compounds are informal and restricted in use:

(59) a. Standard English:
   Teeny-weeny (intensity)
   b. Singapore English:
   Boy-boy ‘boyfriend/son’ (affection)
Sweet-sweet ‘very sweet’ (intensity)

Cry-cry ‘cry a little’ (attenuation) (Bao, 2005: 262)

The attenuation reduplicative expression conforms to Chinese tentative aspect while the other two expressions apparently are in accordance with English unproductive reduplicative compounds. The attenuation reduplication in SE violates the process of lexifier filter during which unexpressive meanings and strings that find no reflexes in superstrate language should be filtered out. Therefore Bao (2005) defines it as an ‘unexpected’ (2005: 262) ‘leak’ (2005: 263) of lexifier filter process.

However, besides the ‘unexpected leak’, generally SCE is still in line with the mechanism of system transfer and lexifier filter in selecting reduplication expressions. Chinese reduplication expression does not confine to verbs because adjectives, nouns and even classifiers are also adequate candidates in this construction. However, during SCE’s selection, only those constructions that are identical to English reduplication compounds are retained, Bao (2005: 263)’s table illustrates this:

Table 8: A Comparison of Reduplication Patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Singapore English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun, affection</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective, intensification</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb, tentative</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun, quantification</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chinese noun reduplication denoting affection derives from what Li and Thompson declare as ‘involv[ing] mainly kinship terms’ and therefore develops the meaning of

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that Bao’s generalization ignores the unproductive verbal reduplication in SCE that we discussed above.
affection and intimacy (1981: 35), this meaning finds counterpart in English reduplicative compounds; Chinese adjective reduplication ‘express[es] vividness, that is, the original meaning of the adjective becomes more intense through reduplication’ (Tsao, 2001: 291), this reduplication is semantically correspondent with the English reduplicative compound which denotes intensity, therefore is allowed into SCE as well. On the other hand, Chinese nominal reduplication denoting quantification is abandoned for this reduplication has a collective/iterative reading (Steindl, 2011), examples can be seen in ‘hù-hù’ (every family) and ‘rén-rén’ (every person) which finds no counterpart in English; the verbal reduplication denoting tentative meaning yields very few unproductive examples as discussed in the previous section. Therefore SCE follows the lexifier filtering path in this case.

Bao (2005) regards the unproductive emphatic marker V-finish in SCE as the result of the Chinese resultative V-V compound V-wán’s successfully finding its semantic reflex finish in English and escaping the lexifier filter. Thompson (1973) defines Chinese resultative VV compounds as ‘a compound verb made up of two parts, the first indicating an action and the second the result of that action’ (361). As we can see English contains no such resultative compound, therefore in SCE aspectual marker –finish is quite unproductive and is restricted in context just like in the case of verbal reduplication denoting tentative aspect in SCE.

In conclusion, Bao’s system transfer and lexifier filter theory has its theoretical basis in relexification theory, and further refines relexification theory in order to provide a more precise description and explanation of the mechanism that SCE goes through in forming its unique aspectual system under the dual influence of English and Chinese (including three major Chinese languages). Compared with Lefebvre’s relexification theory, Bao’s theory firstly emphasizes system transfer instead of individual lexical entry copying; secondly it exerts constraints on the transferred system from substrate language rather than on the lexifier language; thirdly it ranks lexifier languages higher than substrate languages on syntactic and morphosyntactic level, finally it excludes
those inexpressible subsystems from the new SCE aspe
tual system completely. The following table better
illustrates the differences:

**Table 9: Comparison between Relexification and System Transfer and Lexifier Filter**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relexification</th>
<th>System transfer and lexifier filter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On lexical level</td>
<td>On systemic level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping+ relabeling</td>
<td>System transfer + lexifier filter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constraints on superstrate language</td>
<td>Constraints on substrate language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphosyntactic/syntactic hierarchy:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; superstrate</td>
<td>Superstrate &gt; substrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigns phonological null form for irrelevant functional categories</td>
<td>Excludes irrelevant functional categories completely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Last point worth remarking is that although Bao (2005)’s theory perfectly explains the mechanism in the formation of SCE aspe
tual system, it does not clearly reveal the indication of the previous comparative analysis on English, Chinese and SCE
aspectual system. In this indication SCE still shows coherence with Chinese
languages in being sensitive to predicate (non-) stativeness and using context to provide supplementary information of sentences’ temporal meaning when confronting ambiguity. However, this is not inconsistent with Bao’s theory since when SCE selects the Chinese aspe
tual categories from the feature pool, it is inevitably under the same constraints that hold for these aspe
tual categories. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that SCE aspe
tual system follows Chinese counterpart’s constraint on predicate (non-)stativeness and necessary contextual information in some cases on systemic level, and is compiled to follow superstrate syntactic features on lexical level; the former constraint comes from the stage of system transfer, while the latter one comes from the stage of lexifier filter.
6 Conclusion

This paper argues that the uniqueness of the aspectual system in SCE is the result of the language contact between the superstrate language English and substrate languages Chinese languages. However, the selection of aspectual features in SCE aspectual system is not a random one. By theoretical and corpus observation, the aspectual systems in English, Chinese languages and SCE are compared, and it can be perceived that SCE confines to certain constraints in selecting the aspectual categories in the linguistic pool consisting of both English and Chinese aspectual categories. Lefebvre’s relexification theory sheds light on the mechanism during which unique features emerge in SCE aspectual system, but due to the significant differences between creole, the target of Lefebvre’s relexification theory, and new English SCE, relexification theory fails to account for the genesis of SCE aspectual system nor to explain the peculiar standard SCE conforms to during the selection. Bao bases his theory on relexification and the parametric approach and tailors a two-stage mechanism which includes both system transfer and lexifier filter. He argues that the creators of SCE aspectual system use the parametric properties of their L1, in most cases Chinese, in creating the SCE aspectual system, and by clustering effect, these parametric properties bring with them the grammatical systems they represent and therefore initiate system transfer of the entire Chinese aspectual system; however, lexifier filter ranks higher than system transfer and filters out those inexpressive sub-systems according to the superstrate grammar. The uniqueness of SCE aspectual system not only lies in its mechanism, but is also due to the sociolinguistic background in which it emerges. The constant and intense contact between English and Chinese also exerts fundamental influence during the mechanism and makes SCE distinct from creole. Therefore under these factors, SCE aspectual system displays unique features that distinguish it from both English and Chinese.
Reference:


