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# **Aspects of the morphosyntactic typology of Hong Kong English.<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

English and Cantonese are the main two languages in contact in Hong Kong, together with some other minority Sinitic languages and a variety of Austronesian languages spoken by domestic helpers. Cantonese and English are typologically dissimilar in terms of word order; tense, mood and aspect marking; noun phrase structure; relative clause formation; the formation of interrogatives; and argument structure. Yet there is no work which systematically explores how these morphosyntactic typological differences are revealed in Hong Kong English (HKE). This paper explores how a typological perspective facilitates an analysis of the expression of finiteness in Hong Kong English, a significant feature because it subsumes a number of other typological facts. The analysis claims that HKE is a new English variety where the typology of the substrate is more directly responsible for the morphosyntactic features under analysis than the typology of the lexifier.

Keywords: Hong Kong English, finiteness, typology, ecology, feature pool.

## **1. Introduction**

Although English has been spoken in Hong Kong since the British took possession of Hong Kong Island in 1841, the variety of English known as “Hong Kong English” is really a postwar phenomenon, one of the new varieties of English Kachru (1985) describes as an “outer circle” variety. The sociolinguistic context giving rise to Hong Kong English (HKE) is complex. Between 1945 and 1997, Hong Kong was a British Crown Colony with administrative structures—especially those of education—run by British colonial administrators. At the same time, in the postwar period, there was significant population growth due to large scale migration from Mainland China. Hong Kong was never a settler colony: the British administrators, businessmen, lawyers and teachers who worked there were expected to return “home”. And so, although English was the language of administration, business, law and education in the colonial period, it was not really in contact with the languages of the indigenous populations in domestic environments.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Edgar Schneider, Lisa Lim, Umberto Ansaldo, Caroline Wiltshire and two reviewers for comments on an earlier version of this paper, and Anna Siewierska, Willem Hollmann and Paul Kerswill for comments on an oral presentation.

In the main, most of Hong Kong's ethnic Chinese population acquired their English through their experience of education. For this reason, it is fair to say that English is primarily transmitted in the classroom, although (perhaps) as there are local norms it is not fair to state that HKE is a simple L2 variety which is acquired afresh with every generation. There is also, arguably, transmission of a local variety from one generation of HKE speakers to another, although this involves explicit instruction rather than a classic language acquisition context. These contextual facts raise a number of questions about how to study this emerging variety. Given the context, it makes sense to explore HKE as a contact variety which has emerged in a unique environment and which needs to be understood in terms of the composition of that environment.

It is important to understand the typological dimensions of the languages in contact, in order to understand the linguistic environment where the new variety emerges. The two main languages which come into contact in Hong Kong are English and Cantonese—but there are additionally some other Sinitic languages spoken such as Mandarin, Hokkien and Chui Chow, and a substantial population of Filipina domestic helpers who bring different Austronesian languages to the territory. In line with other papers in this volume, I am claiming that the properties of the emerging New English can be understood in terms of the selection of a number of grammatical features from a feature pool in the ecology (Mufwene 2001; Ansaldo, 2009, this volume).

The ecological approach I am adopting is presented in Mufwene (2001). Croft (2000) presents a similar treatment of language change in terms of population genetics, where speciation consists of the selection of features from an available body of features in the linguistic environment. In Mufwene's (2001) approach, feature selection is discussed in terms of the external and the internal ecology. The external ecology is the sociolinguistic context of language contact; the internal ecology is the pool of linguistic features which the languages in contact contribute to, and from which the features of the restructured lexifier are drawn. The approach I am adopting here has results which show that that the grammatical features under investigation cannot best be analysed in terms of "angloversals" (Kortmann and Szmrecsany 2004).

So why a typological perspective? What would you understand differently or predict? My answer is in line with the other papers in this volume, and agrees with the line trenchantly argued for by both Ansaldo and Lim in their papers. If we look at language contact in terms of the ecological approach pioneered by Mufwene (2001), we can see the innovations in the creation of the new English, as being a kind of selection from a feature pool. It is necessary to

see how similar the varieties are, what kinds of selections speakers make, and what their choices are if the process of new language formation is supposed to be understood. Not least, this approach affords us the opportunity of exploring New Englishes in terms of close and careful grammatical description with a keen eye on the linguistic and sociolinguistic environment, which is a useful corrective to over-enthusiastic arguments in favour of angloversals or the so-called exceptional properties of contact varieties.

Because of the history of English in Hong Kong, and because of its status, studies of HKE have primarily focused on the sociology of the variety; attitudes of the population of Hong Kong to English; codeswitching; learner errors; and the Hong Kong accent. See, for example, several of the papers in Bolton (2000). There is some work on the structure of the variety. Gisborne (2000), which looks at relative clauses, is one case study, and Hung (2000) explores the phonology of HKE as a system *in toto*. But there is very little work on the morphosyntax of the variety, and there are not really any useful paradigms for exploring its morphosyntax.

In this paper I am specifically interested in a core area of morphosyntax. I look at the distribution of finiteness in HKE in order to establish whether it can be argued that there is a lack of finiteness in the variety which reflects the lack of finiteness in Sinitic languages. The argument has two parts: first I justify the claim that Sinitic languages do not have a finiteness contrast, and then I look at relevant data from HKE subordinate clauses to establish whether there is a suspension of the finiteness contrast in this variety.

As the papers in Nikolaeva (2005) show, finiteness is a central element in theorising about morphosyntax. However, there are good reasons for claiming that it is not a well defined category cross linguistically, and Hu et al (2001) argue that despite a number of claims to the contrary Chinese does not have finiteness. If HKE has structures like those in Chinese which are associated with the absence of finiteness, then this will argue for substrate transfer in the morphosyntax. Another point concerns the status of finiteness as a typological feature. Given its absence from the World Atlas of Language Structures (Haspelmath, et al, 2008), there is a question about whether finiteness works as a feature of areal typology, in the same way as tone, for example (see Lim, this volume).

The rest of this paper has the following structure: §2 looks in greater detail at the sociolinguist contexts of HKE, and describes the immediate background of the variety; §3 describes the relevant structures in Cantonese—in this section we argue for the position that Cantonese does not have a finiteness contrast; §4 explores the relevant data from HKE; §5

discusses the facts in the context of recent work on the ecology of the language contact environment and presents the conclusions.

## **2. The sociolinguistic contexts of HKE**

According to Tsui and Bunton (2002: 57), approximately 96% of the population of Hong Kong is Chinese. Tsui and Bunton show that not all of the Chinese population in Hong Kong speak Cantonese, although the vast majority do. They cite the 1996 By-Census where 88.7% of the population “indicated that Cantonese is their usual spoken language, and 3.1% indicated English”. As Table 1 below shows, there has been some change since 1997.<sup>2</sup>

*Table 1 about here.*

More of the population speaks Cantonese as its home language than in 1996, less of the population speaks English, and interestingly, the numbers speaking Mandarin (i.e. Putonghua in the table) have also diminished. Kwok (2004) and Lai (2005) have both found in language attitudes research that most Hong Kong residents have an emotional attachment to Cantonese and perceive English and Mandarin to be languages which have instrumental value, but which they are not particularly attached to.

These facts are suggestive of several reasons why English does not have an “equivalent of the mesolectal or basilectal speech styles found, for example, in Singapore ... since there is no equivalent range of English speech varieties in regular use by Hong Kong Chinese” (Luke and Richards, 1982: 55-6, cited in Tsui and Bunton 2002: 58). After all, if local Cantonese speaking Chinese residents of Hong Kong have no reason to use English within their community, then there are few situations of use where a local variety will develop. The broad facts about the sociology of use of English in Hong Kong also raise the question “whose norms?”—what English is used, by whom and where?

One answer is given by the education system: according to Bolton (2003: 96) in 1994 “over 90 per cent of all secondary schools were at least nominally English-medium (Johnson 1994)”. In March 1997, all but 100 schools were obliged to teach through the medium of Cantonese; Bolton (2003: 96-7) says, “[t]he figure of 100 was amended to 114 after predictable protests from schools and parents, but at present the policy remains on of

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<sup>2</sup> Table 1 is Table 140 of the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department’s Statistical Tables and Charts, published at [http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong\\_kong\\_statistics/statistics\\_by\\_subject/index.jsp?subjectID=1&charsetID=1&displayMode=T](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistics_by_subject/index.jsp?subjectID=1&charsetID=1&displayMode=T) and downloaded on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

providing ‘firm guidance’ for secondary schools, and of encouraging the use of Cantonese as a teaching medium”. English is also the medium of instruction in the University of Kong, the oldest and most prestigious university in the territory, as it is at the University of Science and Technology . . . . while the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the second oldest university, is officially bilingual as is the City University of Hong Kong. This means that in order to receive a higher education, Hong Kong secondary school students need to become sufficiently proficient in English in order to follow a university course of instruction. Universities set admission standards for English by requiring an appropriate grade in the Use of English ‘A’ level.

From this brief survey, it appears uncontentious to suggest that English in Hong Kong is a colonial legacy, and its presence is an artefact of the education system, and its prestige an artefact of colonial government—leaving English as the language of law and government—as well as the practices of international business.

But the situations of use of English in Hong Kong are not entirely simple: in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, Tsui and Bunton (2002) go on to cite Bacon-Shone and Bolton (1998: 76) who identify several reasons for claiming that English is a language which is used by home speakers of Cantonese in certain socially conditioned contexts. There is a large number of Filipina domestic helpers in Hong Kong, who speak English with their employers, which makes it necessary to use English in the home; English is used in written communications such as email and business memos; and “the percentage of the population who reported that they knew English quite well, well and very well, rose from 6.6% in 1983 to 33.7% in 1993 and to 38.1% in 1996”. The 2006 by-census shows that more of the population of Hong Kong speak English as a home language than any single Sinitic variety other than Cantonese;<sup>3</sup> it also shows that the percentage of the population claiming to speak English as either their usual language or as an additional language rose from 38.1% in 1996, to 43% in 2001, to 44.7% in 2006.<sup>4</sup>

Bolton (2002) and (2003) has claimed that Hong Kong English is a variety with its own norms and its own local creative activity. It seems true enough to say that there is a local Hong Kong accent, but it is not obvious that, in terms of the morphosyntax, Hong Kong English is anything other than an L2 variety. Of course, stable contact varieties show substrate

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<sup>3</sup> Table A 118 of the 2006 by-census, “Hong Kong Resident Population by Duration of Residence in HK, Nationality and Usual Language, 2006”, available at [http://www.bycensus2006.gov.hk/data/data3/statistical\\_tables/index.htm#D1](http://www.bycensus2006.gov.hk/data/data3/statistical_tables/index.htm#D1) and downloaded 25<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

<sup>4</sup> In connection with these facts, it is worth noting that the percentage of the population claiming to speak Putonghua (i.e. Mandarin) was 25.3% in 1996; 34.1% in 2001; and 40.2% in 2006.

morphosyntactic features, so showing that Hong Kong English reveals aspects of the morphosyntax of Chinese is not a knock-down argument that it is an L2 variety. But making the argument that there are features of Cantonese in the morphosyntax of Hong Kong English makes it far more possible to establish the dimensions of “autonomy” (Bolton, 2002) in Hong Kong English, and to become clearer about the extent to which it typologically similar to the native language of the local Chinese population.

In the next section, we review the arguments for claiming that Cantonese, like other Chinese varieties, does not have finiteness and we look at the structure of the Cantonese NP, with a view to establishing the typological facts which will allow us to explore some of the relevant features of Hong Kong English.

### **3. Finiteness as a typological category; in English; and in Chinese**

In §3.1 below, I discuss finiteness in standard native varieties of English; and in §3.2 I argue (following Hu et al) that there is no finiteness in the Sinitic languages, and therefore Cantonese does not have finiteness.

First, through, let us think about finiteness as a typological category. Nikolaeva (2005a) discusses finiteness as a property of clauses: in the western European tradition, it is associated with tense marking and verbal inflection, verb-subject agreement and the requirement of clauses to have a subject. Nikolaeva also points out that finiteness is associated with mood and other semantic notions, so it is not a category with clearly defined boundaries. In her survey, she observes, “there seem to be some cross-linguistically valid correlations between subject requirement, subject agreement, tense, syntactic opacity, and independent clausehood” Nikolaeva (2005a: 10). Many of the papers in Nikolaeva (2005b) are given over to the question of how finiteness might be defined theoretically so that it can have cross linguistic validity as an analytical notion.

Tense, then, is one of a several properties which are possible reflexes of finiteness. The World Atlas of Language Structures does not recognise finiteness as a typological feature. It shows, for example, the distribution of languages with no past/present tense contrast; those that make a past/present tense contrast; and those that have a three-way past/present/future contrast. Sinitic languages are among those that show no past/present tense contrast, whereas English is listed among those languages which distinguish between past and present, but which does not have a morphologically realized future. But WALs’ discussion of these tense distinctions does not consider them in terms of a supercategory; indeed, it does not treat the more abstract category finiteness as a discrete category at all.

So why say that Sinitic languages lack finiteness rather than tense alone? The specific arguments are made below, but we can consider some general observations here. Just as there are properties which converge under the rubric of finiteness, so (I hypothesize) there are properties which converge in languages that arguably do not show a finiteness contrast. For example, lack of finiteness in Sinitic languages is not only responsible for the lack of tense distinctions, but is also related to other known typological phenomena. As Ansaldo (this volume) points out, Sinitic languages are topic prominent rather than subject prominent. Sinitic languages have copula omission, which is also related to the lack of finiteness: in a language where there is no finiteness, there is no need to have a copular verb as a carrier of morphosyntactic information. And finally, it is hard to establish the lexical categories of certain elements in Sinitic languages, especially those related to predication. The categorial distinction between adjectives and verbs is especially hard to establish. Again, if a language does not have a finiteness distinction, then it is hard to make the distinction between these lexical categories, because it is the distribution under finiteness which establishes the verbal nature of a verb. Although I do not pursue these claims in a substantial way in this paper, it is likely that if HKE lacks finiteness, it will also show the Sinitic typological properties listed here.

Therefore, a number of well known typological properties of Sinitic languages can be subsumed under a single parameter—which means that these same properties can be explored in Hong Kong English as a way of establishing how HKE speakers have selected from the feature pool. On the other hand, as the quotation from Nikolaeva (2005a) above shows, there are good reasons for treating tense as a reflex of finiteness, as well as the subject requirement, alongside other properties which English demonstrably has. It seems sensible therefore to assume that finiteness is the relevant morphosyntactic contrast to explore here.

### 3.1 Finiteness in standard varieties of English

There are four main areas where English grammar shows the finiteness distinction.

- Finite clauses must have overt subjects; non-finite clauses need not.
- Finite clauses can be independent predications; non-finite clauses cannot.
- Finite clauses encode a speech act function; non-finite clauses do not.
- Matrix predicates select for either finite or non-finite complements.



Let us take the first two points.

- (1) a. She ran home.  
b. \*\_\_\_ ran home.  
c. I expected [her to run home].  
d. I expected [\_\_\_ to run home].

Note that the finite clauses in (1a) and (1b) must have overt subjects, whereas the bracketed non-finite clauses in (1c,d) do not need overt subjects. In (1d), the “missing” subject of the infinitive clause is shared with the subject of the matrix clause.) Note too that it is not possible to use a non-finite clauses outside of a subordinate context. \**Her to run home* is not a possible independent sentence of English.

The third point is a little more complex: the syntax of the finite clauses in (2) shows that they are in turn imperative, declarative, and interrogative.

- (2) a. Be aware!  
b. He is aware.  
c. Are you aware?

Non-finite clauses do not encode these speech act functions syntactically although they can be embedded under heads which indicate that their non-finite clausal complements denote instructions, assertions, or questions.

- (3) a. He told [her to be aware].  
b. He considered [her to be aware].  
c. He wondered whether [\_\_\_ to be aware].

In (3), TELL is a verb which selects a complement that reports the giving of an instruction; CONSIDER is a verb which selects a complement that expresses a statement-like proposition; and WONDER WHETHER together select a clause that expresses a reported question. In none of the instances in (3) is the semantics of the complement encoded in their syntax. It is true that embedded non-finite questions are slightly more difficult to show because WHETHER does not select for non-finite clauses with overt subjects.

Finally we can show that clause selection depends on the finite/non-finite contrast. This observation in turn shows that tense is a reflex of finiteness: when an English verb selects for a subordinate clause, as in (4), it selects for that subordinate clause on the basis of whether it is finite or not, not on the basis of whether it is past or present. Therefore tense is not the same as finiteness.<sup>5</sup>

- (4) a. I guessed (that) he went.  
b. \*I guessed him to go.  
c. \*I want that he goes.  
d. I want him to go.

The examples in (4) show that GUESS and WANT make different selections for subordinate clauses on the basis of a finiteness contrast: SUGGEST has to have a finite complement, whereas WANT has to have a non-finite complement clause. Rules about sequence of tense are orthogonal to the selection of clause type.

Of these diagnostics, the most straightforward one to search for in a corpus is the last: if there is a perfect correlation between the complementation of matrix verbs in standard varieties of English and their correlates in HKE, then HKE maintains a finiteness contrast. On the other hand, if the finiteness contrast is levelled under verbs such as SUGGEST, then there is robust evidence that for (some) speakers of HKE, the morphosyntax feature system of the verb is that of Cantonese, rather than that of the lexifier.

### 3.2 Tense and finiteness in Chinese.

The argument that Chinese does not have a finiteness contrast begins with the observation that there is no tense contrast in Chinese. In this section, I follow Hu et al (2001), whose arguments are developed for Mandarin, but which follow through for the other Sinitic languages, including Cantone. Sinitic languages share the same relevant typological features in that they are all isolating and they all lack tense.

The debate about whether Chinese has a finiteness contrast or not is largely concerned with the question of whether the mood and aspect distinctions that Chinese has are realizations of finiteness or not. In the generative literature, Huang (1998, 1984, 1987, 1989) and Li (1985, 1990) have both argued that there is a finiteness contrast, taking mood and

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, the lack of tense contrasts with imperatives such as (2a) above also shows that finiteness in English is not correlated with tense.

aspect as the key elements in the Chinese clause. On the other hand, Hu et al (2001) have argued systematically against the claims made by Huang and Li, to present the position that Chinese does not have finiteness at all.

In this section, I present Hu et al's (2001) arguments that the Chinese languages do not have a finiteness contrast. I have already observed that Chinese does not have tense. Hu et al (2001: 1118) start by putting this claim on a systematic footing. They follow Stassen's (1997: 350-351) arguments that there is "a typological distinction between tensed and nontensed languages". Hu et al's definition of the tensedness parameter is given in (5).

- (5) a. If a language has a grammatical category of tense, which
- (i) is morphologically bound on verbs, and
  - (ii) minimally involves a distinction between past and nonpast time reference,
- then that language is tensed.
- b. In all other cases, a language is nontensed.

Hu et al (2001: 1119) also observe, "Stassen (1997) further argues that in a tensed language, the obligatory tense marking must be realized not by means of auxiliaries or particles, but by means of bound morphology on verbs, and tensed languages must meet the PAST CONDITION , which stipulates that a tensed language should have a verbal form exclusively referring to past time". It follows from Stassen's arguments that Chinese is non-tensed.

However, as we have seen, tense alone does not determine whether a language expresses a finiteness contrast, and so showing that a language does not have tense is not the same as showing that it does not have finiteness. As Hu et al point out (2001: 1120), "it is still argued in the literature that there is an implicit distinction between finiteness and nonfiniteness in Chinese"; the major point of their paper is to argue against the claims that there is such a contrast in Chinese.

In several works, Huang (1998, 1984, 1987, 1989) argues that the occurrence of a modal or aspectual element argues for finiteness. He claims that certain verbs select finite complement clauses, whereas others select non-finite clauses. That is, Huang claims that the finiteness distinction in Chinese has at least one realization which is equivalent to the finiteness distinction in English: clausal selection by verbal heads. As a consequence of Huang's assumptions, in his theory non-finite clauses cannot have lexical subjects; nonfinite clauses cannot take modal predicates like *hui* 'will'; and they cannot take aspectual markers

like *you*<sup>6</sup> either. That is, Huang claims that there is a conspiracy of facts that argue together for a finiteness distinction in Chinese.

Hu et al (2001) take Huang's arguments apart. They demonstrate that both modals and aspectual auxiliaries can occur in the non-finite clauses where they are predicted not to occur, so Huang's claims do not have empirical support. Furthermore, they demonstrate that the restrictions on the occurrence of modals that Huang observes can be accommodated in a semantic story which does not need to have any recourse to a theory of finiteness.

Y-H A Li (1985, 1990) argues that the finiteness distinction in Chinese "does not lie in the potential occurrence of modals in general, but in the possible occurrence of only those modals that have become tense markers," (Hu et al 2001: 1123). Hu et al make two arguments against this claim: (i) they argue that Li's arguments about tense do not fit Stassen's theory-neutral typology of tense; and (ii) that Li has failed to capture the relevant generalization because the modals she discusses, *hui* and *yao*, affect the semantics of the subordinate clause, such that they make it incompatible with the semantics of the matrix verb. In this case, then, the claim that Chinese does make a finiteness contrast can also be accommodated under a semantic story, so there is no need to exploit a morphosyntactic theory of finiteness.

I refer the reader to Hu *et al* for a full set of arguments. I concur with Hu *et al* (2001) that the claim that there is a finiteness contrast in Chinese is unmotivated. Note that the specifics of the claim are important: in the next section I look at the selection of subordinate clauses to see whether finiteness is observable, which is the strategy that both Huang and Li adopt for Chinese.

#### **4. Analysing the HKE data**

In this section, I look at some data which show that there is morphosyntactic transfer from Cantonese to HKE, including transfer at the relatively abstract level of finiteness. To get to finiteness, we can start by looking at the kinds of levelling of morphosyntactic distinctions that are common in HKE. Take the example in (6), from Gisborne (2000).

- (6) a. She like to go there.  
b. Have you try?

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<sup>6</sup> Hu et al (2001: 1122) gloss *you* as "ASP" because of its status as an aspectual marker; literally it means 'have'.

These examples do not reveal the form of the verb that its syntactic distribution would normally require. In (6a), the third person singular form *likes* is required, but instead we have *like*. In (6b), the perfect participle *tried* should be the complement of *have*, but instead the base form of the verb is used. There is a simple explanation of (6a) from the point of view of the language contact situation in Hong Kong: Cantonese does not have syllable-final consonant clusters (Matthews and Yip 1994: 19) and so there is often a simplification of these consonant clusters in HKE. But this explanation does not go through for (6b). The contrast between *try* and *tried*, on the other hand, is not one that involves a syllable cluster.

The examples in (6) show some differences from each other. The example in (6a) involves a failure of person marking: *like* is a present tense form of the verb, just not in the third person. And the contrast in (6b) is one where the base form of the verb is being used instead of a participle. As the base form can realise both present tense and the infinitive, we might assume that in an example like (6b), it is an infinitive form which is being used with the infinitive is substituted for the participle. As a result, we can only assert that the example in (6b) shows some kind of levelling of the non-finite morphosyntactic feature system of HKE. Gisborne (2000: 368) argues that this is an issue of morphosyntactic marking because of examples such as (7).

(7) I think it's very difficult to described.

In (7), the complement of *to* is a participle, rather than the normally expected infinitive.

From this discussion we can see that there are a few issues to factor out. I look at the realization of tense in §4.1; I discuss finiteness in §4.2.

#### 4.1 Tense

Let us begin by looking at tense. If tense contrasts are suspended in HKE, then it is likely that finite contrasts will be too. In main clauses, the most useful determinant of whether there is a tense contrast in Hong Kong English, as opposed to a finiteness contrast, is found where a verb is clearly used with past time reference but appears in the base form of the verb **and** the difference between the base form and the past form is not one that relies on a syllable-final consonant cluster for expression. Relatively good examples involve “strong” verbs, where the vowel changes such as *come* and *came* or those verbs where the past-tense morpheme *-ed* is realized as a syllable rather than a stop within a syllable cluster. So *decide* for *decided* is a

good diagnostic of whether there is tense marking, whereas *walk* for *walked* is not, because *walked* involves a consonant cluster which may be simplified.

The strong and irregular verb examples in Gisborne (2000) which are relevant to the question of tense in Hong Kong English are presented in (8)-(10).

- (8) In my first year, Cats come to Hong Kong.
- (9) He is born in Hong Kong and then just go to Hong Kong.
- (10) China want to took ... wants to take over.

In (8), the base form of the verb is used with past time reference. In (9), the present third person form of BE, *is*, has past time reference in the first clause, and then in the second clause, the base form of *go* is used with past time reference. In (10), *want* is used as a third person present tense form, which is made clear in the correction, and the past participle is again used as the complement of *to*. Interestingly, in this example there is a self-correction, which suggests that there is an element of register variation within this variety of English.

I looked at DECIDE in ICE-HK in order to follow up the question of whether there was levelling of tense expression. There were 63 instances of DECIDE where it has past time reference. Past time reference is realized with *decide* in approximately a quarter of the total instances: there are 16 instances of DECIDE with past time reference realized as *decide* and 47 are realized as *decided*.<sup>7</sup> There is an example in (11), which I will walk around. Recall that DECIDE was chosen because its past tense form does not involve a syllable final consonant cluster, so if there is no tense contrast in a HKE example, this cannot be due to interference from another domain in the grammar.

- (11) well we never decide which figure were out even though they out in the bill ... [ICE-HK]

In this example, the past tense *were* indicates that *decide* has past time reference even though it is in the base form. This speaker has two other non-native features: plural *figure* (for *figures*), which could be because Cantonese codas do not permit fricatives (Bauer and

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<sup>7</sup> There are 92 tokens of *decide* and 109 tokens of *decided* which show the normal distributions of these forms (as infinitives and participles as well as tensed forms), although some non-finite instances of *decide* have passive semantics.

Benedict 1997: 28), and zero copula in *they out in the bill*. I come back to this latter fact below.

So what do examples like this indicate, and how should they be understood? It seems straightforward to claim that tense is not always expressed in HKE but that its variable expression might be a consequence of the stage of HKE as a non-native variety in Schneider's (2007) formulation. I return to this point in §5. One point which is significant is that tense is one possible realization of an underlying morphosyntactic category. What evidence is there about the existence of that category in HKE? This is the topic of the next section.

#### 4.2 Finiteness

As we saw in §3.1 above, the best determinant of finiteness was distribution of subordinate complement clauses. Some verbs such as GUESS select for finite clausal complements; others such as WANT select for non-finite clausal complements.

Some verbs, such as EXPECT select for both finite and non-finite subordinate clauses, as (12) shows.

- (12) a. We expected him to go.  
b. We expected that he would go.

Other verbs, such as GUESS, REALIZE, and SUGGEST, do not take non-finite subordinate clauses in standard English. The example in (13) gives some examples for REALIZE.

- (13) a. We realized that he was right.  
b. We realized what he thought.  
c. \*We realized him to be right.

In (16), it is clear that REALIZE is another verb which cannot take a non-finite subordinate clause. In this case the complement clause has to be finite and headed by THAT, WHAT, or its finite verb.

None of the tokens of REALIZE had non-finite complements in the ICE-HK data, although there were instances with finite complements.<sup>8</sup> This shows that the claim for non-

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<sup>8</sup> The spoken corpus was searched for all the variant forms of the three verbs GUESS, REALIZE, and SUGGEST. Examples where the speaker was not a native of Hong Kong were excluded from the count, as were examples

finiteness in HKE is not an absolute claim. Where non-finite complements were found, they were never found in 100% of cases, which shows that the internal ecology of HKE has to be understood in the context of the external ecology, and that there is a clear pattern of social distribution for the feature under consideration, which is not surprising, considering that HKE is at stage 3 of Schneider's (2007) dynamic model, rather than the stage 4 of Singlish. The observation that non-finite complements were not found with REALIZE, although they were found with GUESS and SUGGEST, indicates that there may be lexical distribution (or diffusion) of the feature. Of course, it could also be an artefact of the corpus: there were 37 tokens of REALIZE in the corpus, many of which were from transcripts of legal cases. As a consequence, it is reasonable to assume that there is an element of register variation in the facts under discussion.<sup>9</sup> The next set of examples shows the standard pattern for SUGGEST.

- (14) a. We suggested that they should go.  
b. We suggested that they went.  
c. \*We suggested them to go.

The examples in (14) show that SUGGEST requires a finite complement clause.<sup>10</sup>

Example (15), which is taken from the essay of a student at Hong Kong University, is therefore evidence of the absence of a finiteness contrast in HKE.

- (15) I suggest him to go.

The complement clause is non-finite, and fails to make the mood or modality contrast which is required in normal uses of SUGGEST.<sup>11</sup>

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where the complement was a Noun Phrase, parenthetical examples, and (in the case of GUESS) instances of the noun.

<sup>9</sup> There was, however the example *But uh <,> as we move along you 'll probably realize that <,> I <,> not only focusing on the empirical <,> investigation* in the corpus data, which shows that although this speaker has a THAT-clause as the complement of REALIZE, the complement of *that* is not finite. Another example where the subordinate clause had a particular morphosyntax was this: *But Mr Au Yeung we must realise that in Wanchai is big area*. Although the clause under *that* is finite in this example, as *is* shows, the subject is not a noun phrase, and the predicate nominal does not have a determiner. This is not an example of locative inversion. It is clear from the context that it means not 'there is a big area in Wanchai', but 'Wanchai is a big area'.

<sup>10</sup> There is a complication in that for some speakers SUGGEST may select for the vestigial subjunctive of English as in *I suggest that he be back by 9 pm*. The English subjunctive cannot be straightforwardly classified for finiteness. However, I think that on the whole this is not an issue in the case of HKE—Paul Kerswill tells me (pc) that the English subjunctive is on the rise in the US but that this is a recent phenomenon; during the relevant period of history, most speakers of British English will have hardly had a subjunctive. Note too that in informal polls *\*I suggested that he were to go* is identified as simply ungrammatical, whereas it is fine to embed a subjunctive *were* under *if* in *if he were to go*.



In a search of ICE-HK, there were several tokens of SUGGEST. Excluding examples where SUGGEST was not complemented by a clause, as in *I suggested the answer*, there were 12 instances of *suggest*, *suggests*, *suggesting*, and *suggested* with non-finite complement clauses out of a total of 98 instances where it had a clausal complement. There are some examples given in (16), all of which are from ICE-HK.

- (16) a. It's a beautiful space and I suggest to turn it to a cyber café but it was kind of turn down  
b. Can I suggest to put bill?  
c. They think that English is too hard for them so I suggest them to change to uh an Chinese uh  
d. I wont suggest you to to buy from the one word because...  
e. According to you it was Madam Ho who suggested to you to have sex with her for five hundred dollars.

These examples all work in slightly different ways. (16a) involves an arbitrary PRO subject, whose referent is not in the discourse context. The subject of *to turn it to a cyber café* cannot be recovered from the immediate context. The discussion is about the snooker room in the Senior Common Room at the University of Hong Kong, and the referent of PRO must be the management committee.

The next example, (16b), has the same kind of structure as (16a). The example in (16c) involves a lexical subject in the non-finite clause *them to change to uh an Chinese uh*, so this is an unequivocal example that has the same structure as (15), as does (16d). The final example has *to you* after *suggested*, but clearly the subject of *to have sex* is *you*.

Apart from the (possibly) doubtful (16b), all of these examples show the kinds of structure which indicate that the finiteness contrast is suspended for these speakers. They are all non-finite. More to the point, they are not modelled on the kind of pattern where a finite clause alternates with a non-finite clause which shares its subject with the subject of the matrix verb, as in (17).

- (17) a. We requested that he should go.

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<sup>11</sup> No doubt this works by analogy to standard patterns of non-finite complementation in English. However, that analogy does not obviate the argument that what has happened here is that the normal selection by SUGGEST of a finite complement has been over-ridden and a non-finite complement has been chosen.

- b. \*We requested him to go.
- c. We requested to go.

In (17), *request* takes a full finite clausal complement or a non-finite clausal complement with subject-sharing as in (17c). This is an alternative pattern to the one where a finite clausal complement can alternate with a non-finite clausal complement. However, the examples in (16) do not fit the pattern of (17c)—even the examples with no overt subject have a PRO subject whose referent cannot be identified with the subject of the matrix clause.

To summarise the discussion, it seems that the examples in (15) and (16) suspend a finiteness contrast. There are two reasons for making this claim: the grammatical patterns we find in these examples are not modelled on patterns like that in (17), and they are entirely well-formed, except that they occur in a position where a different kind of clause is normally expected. All of the non-finite clauses in (15) and (16) are perfectly reasonable examples of non-finite clauses; it is just that we do not expect non-finite clauses to have this distribution.

Now we can return to the zero copula phenomenon in (11) in §4.1 which I repeat here.

- (11) well we never decide which figure were out even though they out in the bill ... [ICE-HK]

In the subordinate clause, *out* is treated as a predicator in the *even though* clause. Why does this matter? It matters because the example is on a parallel with the subordinate clause after *decide*, which has a tensed *were* in it. There are two parallel clauses: *which figure were out* and *they out in the bill*. The zero copula in the second clause suggests that there is no systematicity in the use of different predicators by this speaker. In one case, a tensed copula is used; in the other, there is no copula. Note too that *even though* is a head which normally requires a finite complement in standard varieties of English: I cannot say \**even though they to be out in the bill* for example. The absence of a finite complement here suggests that the finiteness contrast is non-systematic for this speaker.<sup>12</sup>

The example in (18) below supports the general point. In this example, there is an adjectival predicate under GUESS.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>It also suggests that this speaker is capable of treating both verbs and adjectives as predicates, suggesting that in their variety, HKE is like Cantonese—a language which does not distinguish between verbs and adjectives.

<sup>13</sup> There were only 3 out of 57 tokens of GUESS with this kind of structure. However, several of the clausal complements of GUESS were headed by IF, WHETHER and WHAT. Excluding these examples gives a total of 3 out of 45 tokens. There were also subjectless examples such as *I guess will be at least two* and *So I guess is just luck*

(18) Uh I guess his hands his hands too full and uh he had other priorities [ICE-HK]

The relevant point is that GUESS requires a finite complement in English, yet here not only is there a non-finite predicate, but also the predication is non-verbal, even though there is no possibility of structure sharing in an example like this. The subject-predicate relationship is between *his hands* and *too full*: we can see that the adjective phrase is a predicate here in a zero copula construction. This is important in two ways: first, it appears that this speaker does not necessarily make a lexical category distinction between adjectives and verbs; and, second, predication in this example does not require finiteness as expressed by a copula verb.

To sum up, in this section I have looked at a set of data which argue that some varieties of HKE do not make a finiteness contrast, and that recognising that lack of finiteness in HKE allows us to bring the complementation of verbs and the zero copula phenomenon under the same generalization.

## **5. Conclusions: language contact, typology, and the ecology of the language-contact environment in Hong Kong.**

There are two ways of taking the examples with finiteness in the examples above. One way is to argue that these examples reveal an imperfect transfer of the grammar of Standard English to speakers of HKE. On this argument, HKE would be a reflex of imperfect L2 acquisition in the Hong Kong context. But such an argument suggests that there is little or no systematicity in HKE, and furthermore fails to make the relevant connections between the different reflexes of finiteness and how they materialise in HKE.

On the other hand, if we recognise that there can be systemic transfers from the substrate<sup>14</sup> then we can see that some speakers' HKE has a grammar system which is typologically similar to Cantonese. Furthermore, I have argued that the right level of generalisation is to look at finiteness as a phenomenon, rather than at individual reflexes of finiteness such as tense marking, copular deletion or the apparent lack of a lexical category distinction between verbs and adjectives.

But, given that Singlish is another variety which shows substrate transfer from Sinitic varieties to a New English it is necessary to think about the similarities and differences

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*or if you try really hard.* Finally, I have excluded examples such as *to guess about how it... how it would operate* from the count, treating this as an example of GUESS complemented by ABOUT.

<sup>14</sup> As, for example, Siegel (2003) argues.

between HKE and Singlish. Ansaldo (this volume) observes that the grammar of Singlish also shows systemic transfer of features of Chinese grammar. These are topic prominence, zero copula, and blurring of the lexical category distinction between verbs and adjectives. I would claim that languages which have this bundle of typological features are also likely to be languages which lack a finiteness contrast, because the alternative bundle of features (subject prominence, mandatory copula, clear lexical category distinctions between adjectives and verbs) involves reflexes of the finiteness distinction. In this sense, then, HKE and Singlish are similar.

But there is a complication: the lack of finiteness is not systematic in HKE. For sure, I have found several examples which lack this morphosyntactic feature distinction, but it is not at all clear that the grammar has settled on one typological pattern over another. What are we to make of this? Considering the different stability of the two grammars, with HKE at Stage 3 of Schneider's dynamic model (i.e. nativization) and Singlish at Stage 4 (endonormative stabilization) we can see that English and Cantonese are still in contact in HK, and what we see is an emerging system with a considerable degree of variability. Ansaldo (this volume) makes a similar point about the two varieties.

Then there are arguments to be made about how features are selected from the feature pool. I would argue that for there to be the systematic acquisition of a Standard English finiteness distinction among speakers of HKE, the relevant feature would need to be strongly entrenched in the environment. As it is the sociolinguistics of HK indicate that the most frequently found morphosyntactic features in the ecology are those of Cantonese so it is unsurprising that Cantonese morphosyntax transfers into HKE. However, the feature system of English is typological marked relative to Chinese, which might account for the relatively high frequency of finiteness contrasts among some speakers of the variety. In a feature pool approach one predicts that features that are salient in the ecology will surface in the contact grammar. Therefore, we do not only allow for the possibility of substrate transfer, but we expect substrate features to be very salient where the substrate is dominant.

Finally, the evidence surveyed here calls into question the kind of Angloverals approach of Kortmann and Smrzecyani (2004) in as much as we can see that the relevant distinctions in HKE are to be found in the linguistic environment and do not emerge as a kind of default setting in the emerge of a New (contact) English. From this point of view, the typological approach, with its focus on what is there in the ecology, allows us to establish at a fine grain of grammatical description the relevant features of a variety of English such as HKE.

But the most important conclusion is the importance of studying language contact of a range of diverse kinds; it is important not just to look at L2 varieties and learner errors, or straightforward examples of a vaguely defined ‘creolization’ process. It is by exploring the full diversity of language contact situations that we can establish the processes by which language changes in contact environments and new varieties emerge.

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Population Aged 5 and Over by Usual Language, 1996, 2001 and 2006(1)

Usual Language	1996		2001		2006	
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Cantonese	5 196 240	88.7	5 726 972	89.2	6 030 960	90.8
Putonghua	65 892	1.1	55 410	0.9	60 859	0.9
Other Chinese Dialects	340 222	5.8	352 562	5.5	289 027	4.4
English	184 308	3.1	203 598	3.2	187 281	2.8
Others	73 879	1.3	79 197	1.2	72 217	1.1
Total	5 860 541	100.0	6 417 739	100.0	6 640 344	100.0

Note : (1) The figures exclude mute persons.

Source : 2006 Population By-census Office,  
Census and Statistics Department  
(Enquiry telephone no. : 2716 8025)

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**Table 1. HK Population Aged 5 and Over by Usual Language, 1996, 2001, and 2006**