

# Colloquial Singapore English *never*

Amelia Leong Xue Wei  
*National University of Singapore*\*

## Abstract

Negation in New Englishes has been a topic of great interest. However, although some general features of negation in New English varieties have been identified, few have investigated specific varieties and accounted for the deviations of usage patterns away from Standard English usage. This paper investigates the use of the Standard English (StdE) emphatic negator *never*, which has gained non-emphatic functions in Colloquial Singapore English (CSE). CSE *never* is regularly used to negate single past events, and can function as an aspectual or simple past marker. It is usually used with additional adverbial markers, but can occur alone if both interlocutors are well-informed of the conversational context.

The various grammatical/morphosyntactic functions of CSE *never* were identified through a survey on Chinese CSE speakers' assessments of the grammaticality of *never* in various sentences, and compared against those of Hokkien and Cantonese negative constructions *bo* and *mo* respectively (very similar to Mandarin *mei you*). The syntactic and semantic behavior of *never* in CSE was found to be highly similar to the Hokkien and Cantonese negative constructions. This is expected since the majority of CSE speakers also spoke either Hokkien or Cantonese as their native language, and could have transferred the functions of Hokkien *bo* and Cantonese *mo* to CSE *never*.

However, the relation between the two constructs is not always apparent, and the specific functions of CSE *never* might arguably have arisen as a result of universal patterns of language learning rather than from substrata influence. However, although the surface structure of CSE *never* appears highly similar to that of *never* or other specific negation markers in other varieties of New Englishes, a closer look at the detailed functions and usage patterns reveals that these features of CSE *never* are highly complex, and bear too much resemblance to the unique grammatical patterns of Mandarin *mei you* to be attributable to universal patterns, or pure coincidence. Instead, the unique usage patterns of CSE *never* are determined by the discursal and microlinguistic environment in which they occur, as well as the social context in which the exchange is taking place and the speakers' motivation.

**Keywords:** Negation, New Englishes, Singapore English, Contact Languages, Linguistic variation

## 1 Introduction

Much has been written on the topic of Colloquial Singapore English (CSE), expounding on various aspects of it, including its unique features that set it apart from other varieties of English (Ho and Platt 1993; Gupta 1994; Deterding 2007; Lee 2009), its grammatical and semantic functions (Platt and Weber 1980; Teo 1996; Ansaldo 2004; Bao 2005), and a whole array of other related topics. A substantial amount of research has been focused on analyzing the grammar and usage of specific lexical and grammatical items in CSE, such as *kiasu* (Lee 2004), perfective marker *already* (Bao 1995), and particle *la* (Kwan-Terry 1978).

---

\* Questions and comments should be addressed to Amelia Leong Xue Wei at [A0030338@nus.edu.sg](mailto:A0030338@nus.edu.sg).

Despite the large amount of research already conducted on CSE, however, little has been said about its negation system. Ho and Wong (2001) provide some examples of *never* used in the newspapers of Singapore, but only as a point of comparison with CSE *ever*, and make only one main point with respect to *never*—that it frequently co-occurs with time adverbials such as *before*. As the main thrust of Ho and Wong (2001) was to illuminate the functions of CSE *ever* rather than CSE *never*, the paper provided little in-depth analysis of the semantic functions of the negative marker.

Schneider (2000) provided a typological perspective on negation patterns observed in New Englishes (see Dahl 1979; Payne 1985; Bernini and Ramat 1996) and identified two main ways of expressing negation—morphological and syntactic. Syntactic negation occurs most commonly as invariant single or double negative particles (Schneider 2000), which undergo alternating processes of semantic and phonetic weakening and ultimately loss of form, and are then replaced by new negative particles, whereupon the cycle repeats again (Jespersen 1917: 19-21). Within this framework, Schneider (2000: 210) then summarizes the general characteristics of English negation as follows:

- mostly syntactic (though it can be expressed by some prefixes as well), and
- expressed by a single negative particle, *not*;
- the position of this negator is normally after the operator (the first auxiliary element and finite constituent of a complex predicate);
- use of a dummy auxiliary before *not* (“*do*-support”) is mandatory and characteristic in full-verb clauses;
- in colloquial speech the negator commonly merges with the operator (yielding *don’t* and *didn’t* or, with modal verbs, *can’t* etc);
- nonstandard varieties commonly allow the copying of the negator to postverbal indefinites (“multiple negation”).

Schneider also provides a description of various negation markers in the “New Englishes” which function differently from their Standard English counterparts. The negation marker *never* was identified by Schneider as one such marker whose range of functions “went far beyond the plain standard English core meaning of ‘not at any time’” and had “acquired several specific meanings and functional properties” in these varieties, although he was unable, at the time of writing, to identify the factors and conditions that would activate each of the various specific functions.

Edwards and Weltens (1985: 108) state that “*never* can in many dialects refer to a single occasion in the past”, which would correspond closely to the Standard English negation marker *didn’t*, and indeed this appears to be the case based on the findings of Bauer (1997) for the various English varieties in Scotland and on those of Carr (1972) for Hawaiian English. *Never* is also used as a completive form, much like Standard English “have *never* V”, but the difference between them is that non-standard *never* may be used alone to represent aspectual negation in the absence of additional auxiliary verbal components, while StdE sentences containing *never* are only grammatical when used in conjunction with verbs marked with tense and aspect.

That said, this paper does not attempt to theorize a universal pattern or reason for the occurrence of non-standard *never*. The explanations and possible reasons given in this paper are based solely upon the unique sociolinguistic context in Singapore, and may not apply to other New Englishes. Although it is possible that some of the trends observed in other varieties of New Englishes may have arisen as a result of the same reasons and motivations as those in

Singapore, it is also possible that these are universal trends and patterns that have a natural tendency to arise due to certain characteristics of *never* itself, but whose occurrence may be triggered by various different events. The following sections will delve deeper into analysing the range of functions of *never*.

In Standard English, *never* is generally used to mean ‘not at any time’, but it is often also used in conjunction with other discursal elements such as adverbs or adjectives, and can occur in a number of different contexts. The Oxford English Dictionary documents most of the different functions and uses of *never*, including some of the more obscure or obsolete functions, but for the purposes of comparison and analysis against CSE in this paper, only the functions that are commonly used and heard in StdE are listed below:

### **never, *adv.* and *int.***

#### **A. *adv.***

1. At no time or moment; on no occasion; not ever.
  - a. With addition of limiting word, as *after*, *before*, *since*, *yet*, etc.
  - b. (a) Emphasized by immediate repetition.  
(b) With *ever* as postmodifying intensifier. Now *colloq.*
2. As a simple emphatic negative relating to a single event: not at all, in no way. In later use chiefly with imperatives, and in *colloq.* use expressing emphatic denial (freq. with the verb omitted). *never fear*: see [fear v. 4c](#). *never (you) mind*: see [mind v. 5b](#). *never neither*: see [neither pron.](#) *never nother*: see [notherpron.1 2a](#).  
In some cases, esp. (in early use) with verbs of knowing, an element of the temporal sense remains.

#### **B. *int.***

1. Expressing emphatic denial or refusal in response to a question or proposition. The idea of time is freq. expressed or implied in the question or the response, in which case the sense corresponds closely to sense [A. 1](#). Cf. [never again! at Phrases 5](#).
2. Expressing disbelief of or surprise at what has just been said. Also used *ironically*. (Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed 10/15/2012)

From the dictionary entry, it is clear that StdE *never* refers to the meaning of ‘on no occasion’, specifically that a particular action has ‘on no occasion’ been performed. It can be used with adverbials (see meanings A1a and B1) that limit the time period in question, such that *never* in that particular context becomes ‘not on any occasion within the stipulated time period’. Examples (1) to (4) given below are actual realizations of these meanings, taken from the International Corpus of English – Singapore (ICE-SIN), where I have added the italicized line to indicate the negator and the types of verbs used with it in different contexts and also the bracketed line, which provides more detail of the function played by *never* in each sentence, as well as the obligatory conditions placed on the verbs:

*Standard Singaporean use of never:*

- (1) Well at least you *never* had a problem of being drunk.  
*never + past/completive V*  
(not at any time in the past but past perfect tense compulsory for main V)
- (2) She was I've *never* seen her so.  
*have + never + completive V*

(not at any time in the past but completive form compulsory for main V)

- (3) Which you will *never* get to see here.  
*modal (future) + never + base V*  
(not at any time in the past, present or future but modal required)
- (4) I've told them the cost but they *never* came back to me.  
*modal + past V*  
(not at any time in the past up till now but past tense compulsory for main verb)
- (ICE-SIN)

The functions of *never* in CSE are very similar, and are in fact identical for the most part to those of Standard English. However, CSE *never* possesses a few additional unique features, and even with the Standard English senses given above, CSE *never* behaves slightly differently and occurs within a modified syntactic structure in order to fulfill the same function, thereby rendering it different from Standard English *never*.

The present paper seeks to analyse this negation marker *never* in CSE and attempts to identify the motivations or reasons for its various functions in this particular non-standard variety. This analysis will begin by investigating CSE *never* according to four semantic parameters used by Schneider (2000) to analyse the functions of *never* in New Englishes, namely: past time reference; reference to a single event or to an unspecified stretch of time; perfectiveness (past-up-to-the-present); and completedness.

This paper draws upon Bao (2005)'s theory on aspectual system transfer and the lexifier filter effect, in which he shows that the Chinese aspectual system is transferred into Singlish, and could be seen in the way various discourse items were used in Singlish in the same ways that they were used in the Chinese languages, but yet some of their functions in the Chinese languages were not transferred to Singlish, because these functions interfered with their Standard English functions. This paper therefore hypothesizes that CSE *never* is the English manifestation of Hokkien *bo* and Cantonese *mo*. For ease of reference, and since Hokkien *bo*, Cantonese *mo* and Mandarin *mei you* serve identical syntactic and semantic functions in the three different languages (Bao 2005; Leimgruber 2009), the Mandarin *mei you* will be used to represent collectively Hokkien *bo* and Cantonese *mo* from this point on. It is hypothesized that the additional non-StdE functions of *never* in CSE arose as a result of a systemic functional transfer of *mei you* into CSE *never* through the lexifier filter of StdE, which restricts the contexts and environments in which CSE *never* can occur. Although the scope of this study only covered the responses of Singaporean Chinese speakers, a Malay speaking informant was also consulted on the form and structure of negation in Malay, and it was found that CSE *never* corresponded more closely to Mandarin *mei you* than to any Malay negation markers.

To conduct an analysis of CSE, one must first understand the complexity of the sociocultural and linguistic situation in Singapore. In this multiracial, multicultural and multilingual country, day-to-day activities require its speakers to engage in social interactions with other speakers who come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Singapore's population of approximately 5.2 million people comprises about 3.8 million Singapore residents, the majority of whom are native Singaporeans, and about 1.4 million non-residents. Of the Singapore residents, an estimated 74.1% are Chinese, 13.4% Malay, 9.2% Indian, and 3.3% persons of other races (Singapore Department of Statistics: Aug 2012). Since the colonial period, BrE has been the main mode of instruction in schools, and even after the colonial period, BrE conventions

(such as rules of spelling) are still followed in the education system (Lee 2009). English is also the language of legislation alongside the three other official languages, Mandarin, Malay and Indian. All schoolchildren are required to learn their ‘Mother Tongue’, a term used to refer to the language of their ethnicity—as designated by the Singaporean Ministry of Education—rather than their native tongue. Hence all Chinese will learn Mandarin as their ‘Mother Tongue’, all Malays will learn Malay, and all Indians will learn Tamil (Leimbruger 2009). In reality, many children grow up in homes where the adults are more proficient in their native tongues, which comprise a vast array of languages and dialects such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Baba Malay, Sinhala, etc., other than the four ‘prescribed’ ethnic languages (Leimbruger 2009). As such, children may have varying attitudes towards learning their ‘Mother Tongue’ languages in school and varying degrees of speed and success with which they learn these languages.

BrE was, and still is, the main mode of instruction and legislation (although this has become a debatable topic in recent years, as the use of other StdE varieties such as American English (AmE) has become more prevalent, and there has been a relaxation of the strict use of BrE in schools), and a majority of the population spoke the Mandarin dialects (most significantly Hokkien and Cantonese) and Malay, to a lesser but still significant extent, (Schneider 2003) during the formative years of the lingua franca, CSE. It is therefore hardly surprising that CSE, emerging in the face of this linguistic ecology, has BrE as its lexifier but displays strong influence from the substrate languages.

With such a complex network of interacting languages and language varieties, it is inevitable that discourse items will be transferred from the various languages into CSE, especially when CSE lacks a word that represents a discourse (lexical or grammatical) item which serves a particular function in its source language. In such cases, words could either be borrowed directly from the source language into CSE (e.g. lexical items like *rojak*, *sian*, *bodoh*), or the functions of the discourse item in its source language could be transferred to an existing CSE word, thereby expanding the set of functions of that word. Grammatical items are usually transferred in the latter manner, but such transfers are often less transparent and require in-depth investigation for more conclusive identification. At the same time, because grammatical items seldom occur in isolation, it is more likely that any such transfer of functions will entail a partial, or even full, transfer of entire “grammatical subsystems” (Bao 2005), involving more than a single discourse item. Bao (2005) has explored the possibility of such transfers of “grammatical subsystems” as opposed to one-to-one transfer of individual lexical or discourse items and has developed a theory about the aspectual system transfer (from Mandarin to CSE) and lexifier filter effect (of StdE on the grammatical transfer to CSE), which has since been explored in greater detail by Lee (2009), who looks at CSE *got* in great detail. Bao (2005) concludes that the aspectual system is “a self-contained grammatical subsystem” that has been systemically transferred from Mandarin into CSE through the lexifier filter—English. This functional transfer of the aspectual system may be inhibited if “it does not meet the grammaticality requirements of the lexical-source language” (Bao 2005). As a result of that, the CSE aspectual system is not identical to that of Mandarin, but yet is, as Bao says, “strikingly similar”. Indeed, Bao’s theory can potentially be extended to apply to many other discourse items in CSE. This paper investigates the regular and grammatical CSE use of negative discourse markers, with particular attention to *never* in comparison with the default past tense negation marker *didn’t*, in ways that would be considered anomalous in Standard English, and seeks to explain this phenomenon using Bao’s theory.

In this paper, Mandarin examples will be used to represent relevant features of the Mandarin language as well as the various Mandarin dialects, following Bao (2005)'s labeling convention. This way of labeling is based on the shared 'universal Chinese grammar' (Chao 1968: 13) among the Mandarin dialects, despite morphosyntactic differences, as well as a lack of mutual intelligibility, such as the correspondence of Mandarin *le* to Hokkien V- *u* and S- *liau* (*le* and *liau* are cognates), and to Cantonese V- *tso* (Bao 2005). These differences are more related to the form of Mandarin and its dialects and are less relevant to the unique grammatical features of said dialects. As such, they do not affect the argument of this paper.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Questionnaire

A survey was conducted among 40 respondents from a range of economic, social and educational backgrounds. All respondents were speakers of Singlish and Mandarin with whom I had prior correspondence, but a majority could also speak at least one other dialect of Mandarin, and a smattering of them could not speak any dialect but could comprehend the basics of at least one dialect if it was spoken to them. To test if age was an influencing factor in the type of responses provided, an equal number of respondents above fifty and below thirty were gathered, taking into consideration that the twenty-year age gap between the two groups would be sufficiently large for any emerging change in patterns of usage to be observable. To ensure that gender was not a factor in determining manner of usage of the item being studied, responses were also obtained from an equal number of male and female respondents. Only one member of each family was asked to complete the survey, to prevent any possible convergence of answers due to similarities in usage of the item within the family unit. The survey was disseminated via email, and a clear explanation of the instructions was provided to the survey respondents over the phone to ensure that they understood the requirements of the survey. They were then given some time to complete the survey and email it back to the investigator.

The questions in the survey were constructed to garner the opinion of the average CSE speaker on the use of the two items of negation in CSE, *never* and *didn't*. A series of 27 short dialogues were provided, differing from one another in terms of situational context and grammatical features. Each dialogue comprised a short sentence providing the situational context in which the dialogue was occurring, followed by a short statement made by the first interlocutor, and lastly, two possible responses that a second interlocutor could provide to the first statement, which were completely identical except for the negation marker (see APPENDIX I for survey questions). The respondents were required to provide their judgments on how natural each of the five responses seemed to them in that context on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the most natural and 5 being the most unnatural. They were allowed to give two sentences the same rank if they felt that both were equally natural. If they felt that a particular response was completely unnatural or ungrammatical, they could rank it 0. There was also space provided for any additional comments on the sentences and their meanings, or any justifications and explanations for the rank they had provided.

After the responses were obtained, the numbers were calculated separately for the two age groups and for each gender. However, responses from the datasets did not appear to be significantly different. Since the two factors did not seem to affect the type of responses provided within the sample group, the 4 datasets were subsequently merged in a single general

dataset encompassing all the responses gathered. The percentage of respondents who provided a score of 0 was calculated and excluded from the calculation of the average rank. The average rank was then calculated by taking the average of the scores provided by all the respondents to a particular response. This was done for every dialogue, and the results were collated in Table 1 for individual analysis (of the functions a particular negative discourse marker could take on as well as the possible syntactic positions in which they could occur), or comparative analysis between the two negative discourse markers (which would show their different roles and functions within the CSE negation system).

## 2.2 Corpus Data

Besides conducting a survey to assess people's judgments of the negation markers, corpus data from the ICE-SIN database was also analysed for Singaporeans' natural usage patterns of the two items *never* and *didn't*. The data analysed comprised 100 recorded transcriptions of private dialogues (direct conversations and telephone calls) among Singaporeans. Any observations from this source are therefore representative of the usage patterns of an average CSE speaker. The concordance software [AntConc \(ver. 3.3.2\)](http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/index.html) (<http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/index.html>, accessed 03/07/2012) was used to identify all instances where *never* and *didn't* occurred. From the corpus data, three main ways in which *never* was used in CSE were identified, namely, as non-emphatic negator, emphatic negator, and as a component of the idiomatic expression 'never mind'<sup>1</sup>. However, CSE speakers used StdE *never* 18.8% of the time, far exceeding their use of CSE *never* at 8.4%, providing evidence that the standard functions of *never* are still far more robust than CSE functions.

The sentences containing *never* were then divided into two categories to mark its emphatic (StdE) and non-emphatic (unique to CSE) functions. The frequency of occurrence of CSE *never* was then observed with respect to the frequency in which it was used in the standard manner by the CSE users together with the frequency of occurrence of *didn't*, so that its robustness as a CSE non-emphatic negator marking simple past tense could be assessed in comparison to the other two Standard negation markers. The frequencies were charted and can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Dialogues (6) and (7) from ICE-SIN show the contrasting uses of StdE *never* and CSE *never* in Singaporean speech.

*StdE usage:*

- (6) D: Ya you're paying for your sins ya ya.  
C: Ya.  
D: So actually I won't be too bad as a GP teacher but I never did that to my GP teacher.  
B: But you know actually ha.  
But actually ha I was I was.  
I was interested what I was always interested I didn't chit-chat.  
C: They chit-chat uh.

---

<sup>1</sup> The use of *never* in 'never mind' will not be analysed, as the entire expression is used to signify that something 'does not matter', and the word *never* in this case does not appear to contribute any specific meaning on its own, nor can any meaning be isolated from it such that it can be used in a different context.

B: Some of them ya and I don't know what to do with them any more.  
I mean we *never* had that last time you see.

CSE usage:

(7) B: So what's happening with your married colleague.  
C: Shhhhh.  
In case she knows we *never* mention name.  
B: Ya I *didn't* mention any name what.

In dialogue (6), *never* occurs in two utterances together with an inflected verb, and is used on both occasions in the same way that it would be used in StdE—as an emphatic negator that negates an event at every point in the past. In dialogue (7), *never* is used alongside an uninflected verb and the interlocutor responds with agreement and a recast of the original utterance using *didn't* in place of *never*. The lack of verbal inflection indicates use of CSE *never*—a non-emphatic negator—and this manner of usage is made clearer by B's recasting of C's utterance with *didn't* in place of *never*.

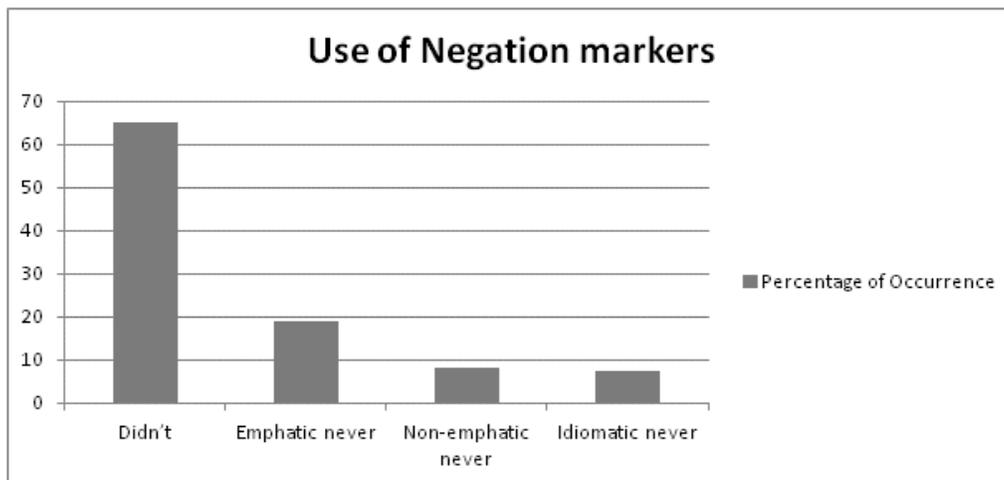


Figure 1: A chart of the frequency of use of the various negation markers (*didn't*; emphatic *never*; non-emphatic *never*; idiomatic *never*) in CSE speech as obtained from ICE-SIN.

As seen previously, CSE *never* is used non-emphatically to indicate negation on a single occasion. The following examples (8) to (11) from ICE-SIN show the specific functions of CSE *never*:

Simple Past:

(8) B: While he is into scientist and a biologist.  
Excuse me.  
C: We all are aren't we.  
B: I *never* say I was did you.  
[I *didn't* say I was, did you.]  
A: No.  
C: I *never* say I I I was also what.  
[I *didn't* say I was either]

B: You did.

*Simple non-Past:*

- (9) B: Ya so now I take the MRT up to Yio Chu Kang.  
A: Hor.  
B: That is why they.  
A: Hor that is why nowadays I *never* see you at the bus-stop.  
[Oh, so that's the reason I *don't* see you at the bus stop these days.]  
B: Yes.
- (10) G: Tomorrow bring to church uh.  
H: Ya ya.  
G: Oh you are uh uhm.  
H: Uh uhm.  
G: Ya finally.  
I *never* see.  
She *never* come to church one.  
[She *doesn't* (usually) come to church.]  
H: Ya.

From these examples, some features and functions of CSE *never* can be isolated. Firstly, it can be used as a simple negator of a past, or as a perfective verb. Secondly, it can serve to convey the meanings as seen in A1a and B1 of the dictionary entry given in the Introduction. In the case of CSE *never*, however, the use of adverbials is less important in telling time as compared to the context in which the dialogue is held, together with the background knowledge shared between the interlocutors. In fact, the time adverbials can be left out completely without causing ambiguity in the time of occurrence, as observed in examples (8), (9) and (10), except when it serves the function of being a completive marker, in which case the time adverbial *yet* is required in order to avoid ambiguity. A sentence that only includes *never* without an accompanying time adverbial indicates that the event has completely past. However, if *yet* is included, it indicates that the event is not completely over, and that there is intention to complete the event, as can be seen in example (11) below.

*Aspectual – Completive:*

- (11) A: A lot a lot of people finish already.  
Ya.  
C: That is they are short of binding lah *never* bind yet.  
[They are short of binding (so) they *have not* bound it yet.]  
At most ah final maybe final touches.

Here, the presence of *yet* indicates intention to complete the action of binding sometime in the near future, while an absence of *yet* would have indicated that the parties involved had not completed and would not be completing the action of binding.

## 2.3 Results

This section will describe the results obtained from the survey conducted, which will then be further analysed in Section 3.

**Table 1:** Summary of percentage of respondents who found each negative marker acceptable, and the average score they provided for each negative marker in each of the various contexts.

Survey Dialogues	'never'		'didn't'	
	% Unacceptable	Acceptability Score	% Unacceptable	Acceptability Score
Completeive Action (-tense)	4.5	1.3	18.2	1.6
Simple Past Mental V	4.5	1.4	18.2	1.3
Simple Past Action	4.5	1.5	0.0	1.5
Simple Past Mental V (+priming)	4.5	1.6	0.0	1.2
Simple Past Action	4.5	1.6	22.7	1.4
Present Intention (-)	4.5	1.6	45.5	2.0
Present Emotion (+)	4.5	1.8	22.7	1.9
Present Intention (+)	4.5	1.9	27.3	1.7
Completeive Action (-tense)	9.1	1.4	0.0	1.5
Simple Past Action	9.1	1.5	4.5	1.3
Inchoative Action	9.1	1.6	27.3	1.7
Future Intention	13.6	1.4	50.0	1.9
Present Emotion (-)	13.6	1.7	40.9	2.2
Simple Past Action	18.2	2.0	9.1	1.1
Emphatic Cessative Action	22.7	1.6	9.1	1.5
Present Intention	27.3	2.0	18.2	2.1
Simple Negation Intention	31.8	1.5	36.4	2.0
Completeive Action	31.8	1.9	22.7	1.4
Completeive Action	31.8	2.3	9.1	1.7
Emphatic Emotion	36.4	1.5	54.5	2.3
Completeive Action	36.4	2.2	9.1	1.8
Future Action	45.5	1.6	59.1	1.6
Cessative Action (-tense)	45.5	2.3	40.9	1.7
Cessative Action (-tense)	54.5	2.4	31.8	2.0
Cessative Action (-tense)	54.5	2.5	40.9	1.9
Present Possessive	81.8	3.5	54.5	2.6
Present Possessive	90.9	4.0	77.3	2.6

Table 1 above shows the unacceptability percentage (percentage of respondents who ranked a particular option 0) and average rank score provided by native CSE speakers for *never* in comparison with *didn't* when used in various contexts to negate verbs. The functions of the verbs in each case are stated in the first column of every row. The numbers are arranged in decreasing order of acceptability of the use of *never* in the various contexts. From the survey results, it was found that *never* is generally more acceptable when used to negate simple past, or completeive verbs, but also in some cases, verbs that are in the present tense. As the time

frame of the verb in question shifts into the future tense, or describes actions which are not completed and are unlikely to be completed, the use of *never* becomes more unacceptable. It was also found that *never* was rarely used by Singaporeans to negate possession (80-90% found it unacceptable).

A similar trend is also observed for *didn't*, although there are differences in the percentage of people who found one acceptable over the other – *never* was more acceptable in some cases, and *didn't* in others. Generally, however, much like *never*, *didn't* was more acceptable for negation of events which have already been completed, or are past, and less acceptable for negation of future events or events which are unlikely to be completed. One interesting finding was that in the negation of present events or actions, Singaporeans found it more acceptable to use *never* as compared to *didn't*.

#### *Present Intention:*

- (12) B has left her dinner on the table for an hour, and A is threatening to eat it.  
A: You don't want I eat already ah.  
B: *I never don't want!!* (4.5% found it unacceptable, acceptability score 1.6)  
*I didn't don't want!!* (45.5% found it unacceptable, acceptability score 2.0  
[I want (to eat it)]

It was also found that out of the 27 dialogues, in all three of the dialogues marked for simple past tense, almost 100% of the respondents found both *never* and *didn't* acceptable, and both were scored relatively highly on the scale for the naturalness of their occurrences within the given contexts, where the naturalness refers to the score given for each item of negation, 1 being most natural and 5 being the least. Despite this, however, *didn't* received a marginally better score as compared to *never*. The results obtained from the comparison of these three dialogues show that both negative markers have similar functions and hence are both considered to be acceptable for use in these contexts, but that *didn't* is still more robust in terms of functionality.

#### *Simple Past:*

- (13) A mother is questioning her son about his decision to take the cab home after midnight.  
A: Why you never take the Nightrider bus? Cab surcharge so expensive!  
B: Oh, never think of it. (4.5% found it unacceptable, acceptability score 1.6)  
Oh, didn't think of it. (0% found it unacceptable, acceptability score 1.2)  
[Oh, (I) did not think/had not thought of it (then).]

A further two dialogues, marked for simple negation and negation of cessative action, were found to have an almost equal percentage of people who rated both *never* and *didn't* unacceptable (with only a difference of 4.5%—one person in a sample of twenty). These examples reflect the high degree of similarity between the functions of CSE *never* and *didn't*, such that where the use of *never* is deemed acceptable, *didn't* can also be used in the same context, and if *never* is deemed unacceptable, *didn't* will be unacceptable in that context. In these contexts, the use of *never* and *didn't* is interchangeable, which leads us to the conclusion that in CSE, *never* and *didn't* play very similar functions, and in some contexts, can be considered functionally identical.

*Simple negation:*

- (14) B has just been defiant to his teacher when she scolded him for being late.  
A: You want to die ah! Talk back to teacher.  
B: I never want to die la. (31.8% found it unacceptable, acceptability score 1.5)  
I didn't want to die la. (36.4% found it unacceptable, acceptability score 2.0)

*Negation of cessative action:*

- (15) A and B are washing up after dinner. B is washing the plates, and A is drying them to put into the cupboards.  
A: Can pass me the clean plates?  
B: I never wash finish. (45.5% found it unacceptable, acceptability score 2.3)  
I didn't wash finish. (40.9% found it unacceptable, acceptability score 1.7)

### 3 Analysis

#### 3.1 CSE *never*

The grammar of Singlish has been studied by many linguists, and it has been observed that tenses tend to be dropped in Singlish (see Ho and Platt 1993; Gupta 1994; Deterding 2007). The lack of verbal inflections in CSE is a well-recorded and robust phenomenon, where there is a tendency for present tense to be used to express all events in CSE, regardless of when they happened. Time adverbials are often used instead of tense to indicate the time of occurrence of an event (Ansaldo 2004: 136). Therefore, the verbal inflections in CSE are not always accurate in indicating the time an event occurred with respect to the present. This does not mean that tenses are never used in CSE, but that the absence of use is acceptable and indicative of the activation of the CSE variety. That is, absence of tenses is a CSE feature, but use of tenses is not solely an SSE feature. Instead, more in-depth analysis of the utterances in a particular context will have to be done in order to determine the variety being used. This feature of CSE is particularly important in the analysis of CSE *never*, as the presence of tense when using StdE *never* and the absence of it when using CSE *never* is one of the features that distinguishes the Singaporean usage of StdE *never* from that of CSE *never*.

In the results obtained from ICE-SIN, the sense of *never* in each context was identified by first considering the tense of the verb within the utterance. When tense was used, it was generally found that the StdE meaning of *never* was being activated. It was also found that when tense was absent, the StdE meaning of *never* could not be obtained from the utterance without the addition of other time adverbials marking single points in time, unless *never* was spoken within a context where the reference timeframe was already clearly established and recognized. It was also evident from the corpus that CSE speakers tended to use the correct tense when they were trying to activate the standard meaning of *never*, despite earlier observations that the use of verbal inflections is not the preferred practice in CSE. Therefore, whenever a sentence containing “*never* + non-inflected V (+ optional time marker)” is observed, one can quite safely conclude that it is a CSE construct, and that the standard meaning of *never* is not activated. The categorization of the utterances containing *never* into different classes for StdE *never* and CSE *never* was conducted on the basis of this principle.

From the survey, it was found that a majority of the respondents found the negation marker *never* acceptable in most contexts, except for use in negation of possession, and for use

as a marker of permanent negation when there was actually an intention to complete the negated action but it was just not completed yet. For each of the other functions of negation as identified in previous sections—simple past, simple non-past, aspectual–completive, as well as other more specific functions such as negation of present ideas, intention, thoughts or emotions, where it functions purely as a negative marker (much like the simple negative marker *not*) or negation of future actions—it was found that the responses with regard to the level of acceptability varied greatly even when two contexts seemed highly similar. It seemed that for each of the cases where *never* played a certain function and was found to be highly acceptable in CSE, there was also an example where the same item was deemed to be much less acceptable in a similar environment. This presents a problem for analysis.

It appears that there is no consistent environment in which *never* can always or can never occur. The use of this negation marker might then be considered unsystematic and disorganized. However, a closer investigation of these utterances reveals that many of these assessments do indeed correspond, in both a systematic and an organized manner, to the grammaticality of their Mandarin counterparts. This supports the idea that the grammar of *never* follows that of Mandarin *mei you*, and that this transfer is not a one-to-one syntactic transfer, but rather a systemic and functional transfer of the various functions of a negative construct in Mandarin into CSE through a specific CSE negator, *never*.

Consider the following Mandarin sentences:

(16)

- |    |                                    |                   |                    |            |            |                 |                   |           |
|----|------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------|------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|
| a) | <i>wo</i>                          |                   | <i>mei you</i>     |            | <i>kan</i> | <i>dao/jian</i> | <i>na ben shu</i> |           |
|    | 1PP                                |                   | NEG                |            | see        | PST             | that book         |           |
|    | “I did not see that book”          |                   |                    |            |            |                 |                   |           |
| b) | <i>wo</i>                          | <i>(cong lai)</i> | <i>mei you</i>     |            | <i>kan</i> | <i>guo</i>      | <i>na ben shu</i> |           |
|    | 1PP                                | (emphasis)        | NEG                |            | see        | before          | that book         |           |
|    | “I have never seen/read that book” |                   |                    |            |            |                 |                   |           |
| c) | <i>wo</i>                          |                   | <i>mei you</i>     |            | <i>kan</i> |                 | <i>na ben shu</i> |           |
|    | 1PP                                |                   | NEG                |            | read       |                 | that book         |           |
|    | “I didn’t read that book”          |                   |                    |            |            |                 |                   |           |
| d) | <i>wo</i>                          |                   | <i>mei you</i>     | <i>zai</i> | <i>kan</i> |                 | <i>na ben shu</i> |           |
|    | 1PP                                |                   | NEG                | ASP        | read       |                 | that book         |           |
|    | “I am not reading that book”       |                   |                    |            |            |                 |                   |           |
| e) | <i>wo</i>                          | <i>shi</i>        | <i>bu/*mei you</i> | <i>hui</i> | <i>kan</i> |                 | <i>na ben shu</i> | <i>de</i> |
|    | 1PP                                | FUTURE            | NEG                | FUT        | read       |                 | that book         | emphasis  |
|    | “I will never read that book”      |                   |                    |            |            |                 |                   |           |
| f) | <i>wo</i>                          | <i>(cong lai)</i> | <i>mei you</i>     |            |            |                 |                   |           |
|    | 1PP                                | (emphasis)        | NEG                |            |            |                 |                   |           |
|    | “I didn’t/don’t have/don’t/never”  |                   |                    |            |            |                 |                   |           |

Each of the examples above conveys negation and differs only in terms of tense or aspect. (16a) and (16c) illustrate the simple past, and (16e) illustrates the future, while (16b) and (16d) show the use of aspectual markers, and (16f) is a truncated sentence which is grammatical, but whose meaning is determined by the context in which it occurs. As shown in the examples, *cong lai* can emphasize negation only when used independently (16f), or in conjunction with *guo* (16b), but it is optional in both cases. In the case of (16b), *mei you guo* is sufficient to convey emphatic

negation, meaning ‘has/have never (not on any occasion) performed a particular action’, where *guo* modifies the simple negator *mei you* and the construct *mei you guo* acts as an emphatic negator, while *cong lai* merely provides further emphasis. In (16f) on the other hand, *cong lai* modifies *mei you* such that the entire construct *cong lai mei you* now becomes the emphatic negator, and in the case where *cong lai* is omitted, *wo mei you* is still grammatical, but conveys non-emphatic negation. (16e) conveys emphatic negation that continues into the future, and is the only example in which *mei you* is unacceptable. It has been observed that *mei you* is generally used in sentences which portray the past and not the future.

Unlike in StdE, the constructs marking for tense and aspect in Mandarin exist separately from the verb. From the examples, it is clear that the combination of Mandarin *mei you* with different discursal markers attributes different time periods and times of occurrence to the event stated in the sentence. Lexical items such as *jian* and *dao* indicate past tense (terms differ according to the verb types), while *zai* (16d) marks aspect.

As can be seen from the examples in (16), the differing meanings in the sentences occur only because of the use of the additional discourse markers, while the negation marker remains the same in all cases (except 16e), regardless of tense and aspect. Additionally, in sentence (16f), the negation marker *mei you* can fulfill a variety of functions depending on the context of the utterance.

Since the Mandarin language has such strong influence on CSE, it is expected that Mandarin language features—such as the lack of tense and aspectual marking on the negation marker, as well as the flexibility of a single negation marker allowing it to be used to fulfill a range of functions—will also be transferred to CSE. Since Mandarin and English have drastically different grammatical systems and since CSE is derived from English and draws its lexicon mainly from the English language while adopting some “grammatical subsystems” (Bao 2005) from Mandarin, it is inevitable that the mismatches of structure and function between the two languages will result in one form being chosen over another. The differences that arise between CSE and StdE will then be judged by StdE speakers to be ungrammatical. CSE users would often use Mandarin grammatical systems to frame their English utterances, adding discourse items to mark for time periods and time of occurrence, and dropping the tense or aspect markers on verbs.

However, the mismatch of grammatical systems and functions may occasionally lead to the use of certain discursal items in unexpected ways, where an incomplete transfer may mean that an item neither follows English nor Mandarin systems of use completely, but is used in a context-dependent manner. This can be seen in the imperfect mapping of the functions of Mandarin *mei you* to CSE *never*. While CSE *never* seems to fulfill many functions and in many cases appears to be interchangeable with other negation markers such as *didn’t* or *haven’t* or even *not*, this is not always the case, and by default, CSE *never* is used. The use of different negation markers can sometimes distinguish among different tenses. In the following example, *mei you* refers to the past, while *bu* used in the same context would be more likely to refer to present or future situations.

- (17)   wei shen me   ni       mei you/bu   zuo    ji cheng che   qu    ne?  
           Why            2PP    didn’t/don’t   take   a cab            there   PART?  
           “Why didn’t/don’t you take a cab there?”

Another factor that must be taken into consideration in this analysis is the fact that *mei you* also plays the function of negating possession, as in:

(18) wo mei you bi  
1PP NEG pen  
“I don’t have (a) pen.”

(19) \*I never pen.

A large percentage of respondents consider the above CSE construct—in which *never* was used to replace Mandarin *mei you*—ungrammatical, despite the fact that so far, all evidence points to the idea that *never* seems to have adopted the various negation functions of Mandarin *mei you*.

This phenomenon may seem contradictory to previous conclusions, but in fact can be easily explained. When *mei you* is used to negate a verb (V) or verb phrase (VP), *never* can often be used in combination with other tense or aspectual markers. However, when *mei you* is used before a noun (N) or noun phrase (NP), it indicates negation of possession of that NP, and therefore the use of *never* will be considered ungrammatical, and instead a term for negation of possession such as *don’t have* will be used instead. This is further explained by the following feature of Mandarin negation: while *mei you* can be used as a single collective term to negate VPs, *mei* can also be used on its own as a negation marker such that examples (20), (21), (22) below are identical in meaning to examples (16a), (16b) and (16d) above<sup>2</sup>.

(20) wo mei kan dao/jian na ben shu.

(21) wo mei kan guo na ben shu.

(22) wo mei zai kan na ben shu.

The use of the negation marker *mei* in conjunction with *you* (meaning ‘to have’) then negates possession of the subsequent NPs, i.e. *mei you* means *not have* rather than *didn’t/never/haven’t* in this analysis.

Example (18), which contains *mei you*, is grammatical in Mandarin, but when translated into *never* in (19), is considered ungrammatical in CSE. In many other contexts however, *mei you* could be perfectly mapped onto either CSE *never* or *didn’t*, which appeared interchangeable (example (13)). In yet other contexts, both *never* and *didn’t* received the same acceptability score, but respondents indicated that although both items were equally acceptable, each attributed a different meaning to what was being said, and that in some cases, the same word could have slightly different senses depending on the context of the utterance.

The following examples taken from Schneider (2000) show other varieties of English which also use *never* as a non-emphatic negator:

(23) *Ai naewa du et.* ‘I didn’t do it.’  
*Yu naewa bin si mais toela enisaid?* ‘Have you seen my partner anywhere?’  
(Norfolk; Buffet and Laycock 1988: 34, 14)

---

<sup>2</sup> This does not seem to apply to sentences where tense and aspect have not been indicated with the use of additional markers, such as in (16c). In such cases, *mei you* has to be used and use of *mei* causes the sentence to become ungrammatical and incomplete.

- (24) *I nevah take that picture.* ‘I didn’t take that picture.’  
*I nevah sleep today.* ‘I haven’t slept today.’ ...  
 (Hawai’i; Carr 1972: 139)
- (25) *yu nevo rimembo enii o dem sangz?* ‘You don’t remember any of those songs?’  
 (Guyana; Rickford 1987: 248, line 1274)
- (26) *may fada didn layk me pley atahl. Im neva layk mi pley but mi neba layk it so much, mi no layk it.* ‘My father didn’t like me to play at all. He never liked me to play but I didn’t like that very much. I didn’t like it.’  
 (Limon, Costa Rica; Herzfeld 1983: 135, StdE gloss added by author)
- (27) *Massa never say ’nother word and walks away.*  
 (Earlier AAVE; Schneider 1989: 196)

Naijá, a language of Nigeria, shows a different single negative marker that is used for a range of tense and aspectual functions. This negative marker is backed up by other tense and aspect markers within the clause, and has a wider range of functions than the StdE functions of the same negation marker, as shown in the following example taken from the “Language Varieties Web Site” (<http://www.hawaii.edu/satocenter/langnet/definitions/index.html>, accessed on 03/12/2012):

- (28) *A no kom.* ‘I did not come’  
*Wi no go kom.* ‘We will/shall not come’  
 (Nigeria; Esizimotor, 2011)

Some may argue that such negation patterns are prevalent in many of the newer varieties of Englishes and are employed by English speakers universally. If this were indeed the case, then it would appear that the use of *never* in CSE for a wide range of functions is neither unique to CSE nor a result of substrate language influence from Mandarin. However, despite the general similarity in patterns of usage, the finer grammatical structures of CSE *never*, as well as its specific combination of features, differ from the other varieties of English.

I will now describe some of the features that make CSE *never* unique. Firstly, CSE *never* has a higher tendency to function as a negator of past actions or actions that hold true up to the point the utterance was made, than of future actions or intention, and is often used in conjunction with adverbials indicating time. It also serves the function of being a tense and aspect marker in itself. With these two features working hand in hand, CSE speakers are able to tell the time or time period to which their interlocutors are referring. For example:

- (29) *But I never go before.* ‘But I have not gone (there) before (this)’ (ICE-SIN)

In such cases, the word *before* functions adequately as an emphatic marker for the sentence, and the function of *never* seems to have been reduced to simple negation regardless of tense or length of time period negated. This function even extends to other instances of use where the emphatic function is not required by the sentence.

(30) *I never think that he's <unintelligible word> until I <unintelligible word> him in performing ah.*

'I didn't think that he was <adj> until I <V> him in performing'

(ICE-SIN, word classes of unintelligible words added by author in gloss)

In cases where the emphatic function is required, it would be activated through the use of time adverbials. Secondly, it is likely that *never* is perceived by CSE speakers to have a lower functional load in Standard English as compared to the other negation markers. In the lexifier, StDE, the negative marker *didn't* has a very fixed set of functions and can only be used to indicate past, or a permanent state of negation when used in conjunction with *ever*. Other negative markers such as *not* and *no*, are the simplest and most basic negation markers, and are used in many newer varieties of English as general negation markers regardless of tense and aspect, for example:

(31) Tomson i *no* bin salem haos. 'Thompson did not sell the house.' (past)

(32) Tomson i *no* kukum raes. 'Thompson does not cook rice.' (present)

(33) Bae ol man oli *no* kukum raes. 'The men will not cook rice.' (future)

(Bislama (Vanuatu), Terry Crowley, 2012)

In CSE however, *no* has functions of negating possession apart from its normal functions in StDE. It is used together with a noun, to indicate negation of possession of an item. For example:

(34) but physical variety got *no* bridge lah. 'but the physical variety does not have a bridge.'

(ICE-SIN)

At the same time, *not* already fulfills the function of Mandarin *bu*, which has a range of functions of its own and is usually used to negate present and future events rather than past. As such, it is used in different contexts from *mei you*, and the two Mandarin negation markers cannot be used interchangeably. Since *not* already has such a wide range of functions of its own derived from those of Mandarin *bu*, which are established and distinct from those of *mei you*, it is therefore natural that CSE speakers use a different general negation marker to take on all the roles of *mei you*.

Based on the above reasoning, it is easy to see how CSE speakers may overgeneralize the interchangeability between *never* and the various negation markers, applying *never* to any context of negation in a past time period. As a result of this, the meaning of 'not on any occasion' has been diluted, and to achieve that emphatic function of the Standard English *never*, CSE speakers use the correct tense forms, as mentioned previously. They also have a higher tendency to either use time adverbials or reduplication of the word *never* as in examples (35) to (38):

(35) I mean we never had that last time you see. (ICE)

(36) Never tried it before. (ICE)

(37) Never I never I was only. (ICE)

(38) because I never never never consider missionary work before never. (ICE)

Although these adverbial markers and reduplications are not deemed to be mandatory, the higher tendency of occurrence shows the greater need for additional markers of emphasis to achieve emphatic negation in these utterances, which in turn shows the weakened emphasis provided by *never*.

#### 4 Conclusion

CSE is spoken by Singaporeans who come from very diverse backgrounds and may use different lexical and grammatical items, or use some of these items in different ways. The ways in which certain items may be used differently are also affected by their sociocultural background, as well as their linguistic background. Different substrate languages will affect the form of CSE spoken by different people. Since the data for this investigation was obtained from Chinese CSE speakers, only one form of CSE was observed. It is possible that observations from other ethnic groups may yield different results, and this possibility should be explored in future studies on this topic.

The study was conducted on a very small scale, and as a result, might not be representative of the entire population of Singaporeans. Nevertheless, it provides an insight to the patterns of use of negation markers *never* and *didn't*, and allowed the comparison of the two markers which will be helpful in subsequent studies. Through this preliminary study, it was also found that some of the patterns of use were related to the Mandarin *you*, and therefore also to the CSE construct *got* which has already been investigated by several academics (see Teo 1996; Lee 2009). Such relations between *never* and *got* are unsurprising since *mei you* (corresponding to CSE *never*) directly negates *you* (corresponding to CSE *got*).

The use of *never* as a non-emphatic negator by the Mandarin-speaking CSE speakers in this study shows clear evidence of influence from Mandarin grammar, and more in-depth studies can be conducted to further explore the mechanisms of the CSE negation system.

## References

- Anthony, L. (2000). AntConc (Version 3.2.4) [Computer Software]. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University. Available from <http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/>
- Ansaldi, U. (2004). The evolution of Singapore English: Finding the matrix. In Lim, L. (ed.) *Singapore English: A grammatical description*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 127-149.
- Bao, Z. (1995). *Already* in Singapore English. *World Englishes*. 14(2), 181-8.
- Bao, Z. (2005). The aspectual system of Singapore English and the systemic substratist explanation. *Journal of Linguistics* 41, 237-67.
- Bauer, L. (1997). Scottish influence on New Zealand English. In Edgar W. Schneider, ed. 1997, 2: 257-72.
- Bernini, G. and Paolo R. (1996). *Negative Sentences in the Languages of Europe: A Typological Approach*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Buffet, A. and Don L. (1988). *Speak Norfolk Today*. Norfolk Island: Himii Publishing Company.
- Carr, E. B. (1972). *Da Kine Talk: From Pidgin to Standard English in Hawaii*. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii. Chao, 1968: 13
- Crowley, T. (1990). *Beach-la-Mar to Bislama*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Dahl, Ö. (1979). Typology of sentence negation. *Linguistics* 17: 79-106.
- Deterding, D. (2007). Singapore English. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Edwards, V. and Bert W. (1985). Research on non-standard dialects of British English: Progress and prospects (1). In Wolfgang Viereck, ed. *FocusOn: England and Wales*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins, 97-139.
- Esizimotor, D.O. (2011). A Study of the History and Structure of Naijá Words. A paper presented at the Meeting of the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics (SPCL), 2-6 August 2011, Accra, Ghana.
- Gupta, A. F. (1994) *The Step-Tongue: Children's English in Singapore*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Greenbaum, S and Nelson, G. (1996). The International Corpus of English (ICE) Project. *World Englishes*, 15(1): 3-15.
- Herzfeld, A. (1983). The creoles of Costa Rica and Panama. In John Holm, ed. 1983: 131-56.
- Ho, M. L. and Platt, J. T. (1993) *Dynamics of a Contact Continuum: Singaporean English*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ho, M. L. & Wong, I. (2001). The use of *ever* in Singaporean English. *World Englishes* 20(1): 79-87.
- Jespersen, O. (1917). *Negation in English and Other Languages*. Copenhagen: Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri.
- Kwan-Terry, A. (1978). The meaning and source of the *la* and *what* particles in Singapore English. *RELC Journal* 9, ii: 22-36.
- Lee, J. T-T. (2004). A dictionary of Singlish and Singapore English. Website. <http://www.singlishdictionary.com>, accessed 13 December 2012.
- Lee, H. N. (2009) One substrate, two lexifiers and the lexifier effect. Master's thesis, National University of Singapore.
- Leimgruber, J. R. E. (2009). Modelling variation in Singapore English. D.Phil thesis, Faculty of English, University of Oxford.
- Soanes, C, and Stevenson, A. (2004). Concise Oxford English dictionary. New York: Oxford University Press. (Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed 10/15/2012)
- Payne, J. R. (1985). *Negation* in Timothy Shopen, ed. *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 197-242.
- Platt, J. and Weber, H. (1980) *English in Singapore and Malaysia: Status, Features, Functions*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Rickford, J. R. (1987). *Dimensions of a Creole Continuum: History, Texts, and Linguistic Analysis of Guyanese Creole*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Schneider, E. W. (1989). *American Earlier Black English*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Schneider, E. W. (2000). Feature diffusion vs. Contact effects in the evolution of New Englishes: A typological case study of negation patterns. *English World-Wide* 21(2): 201-230.
- Schneider, Edgar (2003). The dynamics of New Englishes: from identity construction to dialect birth. *Language* 79(2): 233-81.
- Siegel, J. (2012). The Language Varieties Website. <http://www.hawaii.edu/satocenter/langnet/definitions/index.html> accessed on 3rd December 2012
- Singapore. Singapore Department of Statistics. Key Annual Indicators. <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/keyind.html#demoind> accessed on 27 Aug 2012
- Teo, P. S. (1996) The syntax and semantics of *got* in colloquial Singapore English. Honours thesis, National University of Singapore.

APPENDIX I – Survey on use of Singlish negative markers

The following are a series of casual dialogues between close friends or family members. **A** is your close friend or family member, and he/she has made the given statement. You are **B**. Please select rank your response to **A** on a scale of 1-5, 1 being most natural and 5 being least natural. If a response is completely unacceptable to you, please rank it 0. Your responses can be ranked with the same number if they are both equally natural to you. Additionally, if two or more responses are equally natural, but convey different meanings in response to **A**'s statement, please indicate with asterisks, and provide a short explanation of the different senses conveyed by each response. You can also make any additional comments to indicate why you may have ranked an option 0.

Sample Dialogue:

Daughter: I need to go toilet.

Mother: Option (a): Haiyo, why just now never go? ( 1 )  
Option (b): Haiyo why just now didn't go? ( 1 )

Any other comments:

'never' and 'didn't' seem almost interchangeable in this context.

Dialogue 1: Mother left some cake for her daughters before she went out. She has just returned home.

Mother: Why your sister never eat the cake I leave on the table?

Daughter: Option (a): She never see. ( )  
Option (b): She didn't see. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 2: Two friends are talking. B has an odd expression on his face.

A: Eh why your face like that, you want to go toilet ah.

B: Option (a): No ah, I never want to go toilet. ( )  
Option (b): No ah, I didn't want to go toilet. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 3: Two friends are talking about a third person.

A: (Sigh) No matter what I do he also don't like me one la.

B: Option (a): He never don't like you la, maybe he just bad mood. ( )  
Option (b): He didn't don't like you la, maybe he just bad mood. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 4: Two friends are talking about a couple in a television drama.

A: Wah the guy so good to her, he must love her a lot.

B: Option (a): He never love her, he just using her. ( )  
Option (b): He didn't love her, he just using her. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 5: A wants to borrow a pen from B.

A: You got pen now?

B: Option (a): I never. ( )  
Option (b): I didn't. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 6: A is on a diet and occasionally skips lunch. It is now 7pm at night, and B wants to know if A has skipped lunch today.

A: So you got eat lunch today?

B: Option (a): Never eat. ( )  
Option (b): Didn't eat. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 7: A is meeting B at 12.30pm, and wants to know whether they'll be having lunch together.

A: You eat already?

B: Option (a): Never eat. ( )  
Option (b): Didn't eat. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 8: A and B are at a famous food stall. B dislikes Laksa.

A: Let's eat here! It's the best Laksa in Singapore.

B: Option (a): Don't want, I never liked Laksa. ( )  
Option (b): Don't want, I didn't liked Laksa. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 9: Mother is asking her daughter about the exams she finished sitting for a week ago.

Mother: So you tried your best in the recent examinations?

Daughter: Option (a): No, I never try my best. ( )  
Option (b): No, I didn't try my best. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 10: A and B are waiting for their groupmate who is already half an hour late, and has not informed them why she is late, or whether she is going to be turning up.

A: You tried calling her?

B: Option (a): No, I never tried. ( )  
Option (b): No, I didn't tried. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 11: A is pointing at a stall and asking B about it.

A: Eh you got try the food there before?

B: Option (a): No, never try before. ( )  
Option (b): No, didn't try before. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 12: B has just been defiant to his teacher when she scolded him for being late.

A: You want to die ah! Talk back to teacher.

B: Option (a): I never want to die la. ( )  
Option (b): I didn't want to die la. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 13: A is looking at the computer game that B is playing.

A: Eh this game look so nice! What game is it?

B: Option (a): You never play before meh? ( )  
Option (b): You didn't play before meh? ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 14: Mother is asking her daughter whether she has completed the homework given by the teacher.

Mother: Do your homework already?

Daughter: Option (a): No, never do yet. ( )  
Option (b): No, didn't do yet. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 15: B has left her dinner on the table for an hour, and A is threatening to eat it.

A: You don't want I eat already ah.

B: Option (a): I never don't want!! ( )  
Option (b): I didn't don't want!! ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 16: B is a girl who has just fallen very heavily from her bicycle and is in great pain.

A: You want to cry ah?

B: Option (a): I never. ( )  
Option (b): I didn't. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 17: B has just knocked against the edge of a table and scraped the skin off her leg.

A: Eh! Your leg bleed already!

B: Option (a): Where got, never start bleeding what. ( )  
Option (b): Where got, didn't start bleeding what. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 18: A and B are washing up after dinner. B is washing the plates, and A is drying them to put into the cupboards.

A: Can pass me the clean plates?

B: Option (a): I never wash finish. ( )  
Option (b): I didn't wash finish. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 19: B is having her dinner. A calls her on the phone.

A: Finish eating already?

B: Option (a): I never finish. ( )  
Option (b): I didn't finish. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 20: Mother had prepared breakfast for her son in the morning but had left the house while her son was eating.

Mother: Got finish your breakfast this morning?

Son: Option (a): I never finish. ( )  
Option (d): I didn't finish. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 21: Mother is giving instructions to her child before dinner time.

Mother: Quick go wash your hands and have your dinner!

Child: Option (a): Wait, I never finish playing yet. ( )  
Option (b): Wait, I didn't finish playing yet. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 22: A is asking B about a painting that he had started five years ago, but never got around to finishing.

A: So did you ever finish that painting?

B: Option (a): No, I never finished painting la, no time. ( )  
Option (b): No, I didn't finished painting la, no time. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 23: A student has been caught cheating in an examination and is being questioned by his teacher.

Teacher: Why did you do it since you know you will get punished?

Student: Option (a): I never think about the consequences. ( )  
Option (b): I didn't think about the consequences. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 24: A mother is questioning her son about his decision to take the cab home after midnight.

A: Why you never take the Nightrider bus? Cab surcharge so expensive!

B: Option (a): Oh, never think of it. ( )  
Option (b): Oh, didn't think of it. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 25: A child is pestering her father to play a game with her, but he is very distracted as he is rushing out for an important meeting.

Child: Daddy, can you play with me, please?

Father: Option (a): Later. I never time for this now. ( )  
Option (b): Later, I didn't time for this now. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 26: Mother wants to know if her daughter would be going to school on the following Monday.

Mother: You got go to school on Monday?

Daughter: Option (a): Never. ( )  
Option (b): Didn't. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Dialogue 27: A is asking B about her future plans.

A: You got want to stay in big house next time?

B: Option (a): Never leh. ( )  
Option (b): Didn't leh. ( )

Any other comments:

---

---

Participant's Info:

Gender:

Age range:

Dialect:

Best spoken language (could be more than one):

Most frequently used daily language (could be more than one):