Negative retentionism or co-optation? English final discourse particles in New Englishes

The study of borrowed discourse particles in Singapore English has provided a lively stream of interesting research over the past 30-40 years (e.g. Richards & Tay (1977), Kwan Terry (1978), Gupta (1992), Wong (2004), Lim (2007), Leimgruber (2015), Kuteva et al 2018), Leimgruber et al (2020), and continues to do so, as Li et al (to appear) have also shown recently. Kuteva et al (2018) reveal that a colonial British English archaism, the discourse particle *what,* was retained in Singapore English but has gone on to grammaticalize further in Singapore English than in the British English source varieties, illustrating an example of an extended retentionism from the pre-contact English lexifier form that has since become restricted or obsolete in the source variety. Such accounts deal mainly with features that were present in the pre-contact English source varieties. What is less often researched in new, contact English dialects are discourse markers from the English lexifier that were *absent* around the time of contact and have only emerged in their source varieties subsequent to contact. These include sentence-final pragmatic particles such as *though*, an item which was rarely found before the 1990s in Inner Circle varieties (Lenker (2010: 201), Traugott (2016: 53)), but is frequently used nowadays.

The current investigation looks at four final discourse markers, *actually, anyway, then,* and *though* in the spoken sections of the ICE Great Britain and ICE-Singapore corpora and compares the frequency of such forms with their appearance in the 1780-1850 section of the CLMETEV corpus which covers the most intensive period of British colonial activity in the region. ICE-India and ICE-Philippines are also searched as controls, Indian English being the oldest of the varieties in terms of transmission, and Philippines English being the youngest. The data reveal that the four sentence-final discourse markers appear to be much less frequently used in new, contact varieties of English such as Singapore English, Indian English, and Philippines English than in the ICE-GB. In fact, the average frequency scores reveal that the ICE-GB uses the four discourse markers more than twice as frequently as ICE-SG, and almost six times more frequently than ICE-India. A comparison with the CLMETEV section also reveals that the 1780-1850 texts show an average frequency comparable to that of ICE-SG. This raises the question whether the absence of a feature at the time of contact could affect its frequency in the contact dialect at later stages of development, a situation of (negative) retentionism of former states of the language at contact time.

However, other possibilities to consider are whether the four discourse markers are grammaticalized in Inner Circle varieties or involve co-optation (without grammaticalization) (Kaltenböck et al (2011), a process by which items from the sentence grammar can be shifted and redeployed into the discourse for extra-sentential pragmatic functions. If a case of co-optation, it is argued that it may be precisely because they are *not* grammaticalized that they are less likely to be replicated in contact Englishes, since they are not easily modelled on the pragmatic needs of the borrowed substrate discourse markers.

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Corpora:

ICE = The International Corpus of English*:* http://ice-corpora.net/ ice/avail.htm.

CLMET(EV): *The Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (Extended Version)*, compiled by Hendrik de Smet. https://perswww.kuleuven.be/~u0044428/clmet.htm.