On the empty O-corner of the Aristotelian Square: A view from Singapore English

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Abstract

The problem of the absence of lexicalisation of the O-corner of the Aristotelian Square of Oppositions has challenged the field of pragmatics for many decades, and various explanations have been offered in an attempt to resolve it. The majority of the recent explanations have referred to the operation of Gricean or neo-Gricean scalar implicatures, though few have taken into consideration the significance of reanalysis of adjacent constituents. The present study looks at the interaction between negation and quantifiers in Singapore English, in which the tendency is for (universal) quantifier scope to hold precedence over negative scope, even when the quantifier follows the negation in the clause. A brief spontaneous survey of Singaporean speakers containing a passivization task and comparing a range of universal quantifiers reveals that the syntactic adjacency of the negation and the quantifier is the most likely factor affecting the presence or absence of O-corner lexicalisation in the Aristotelian Square. This is particularly relevant in the case of quantifiers of time, such as *always*.
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1. Introduction

The problems of negation combined with quantification may have been realised as far back as Aristotle, who first proposed a formula of sentence types that would be later used by philosophers, logicians and linguists for grouping the principal quantifying elements of the grammar with negation. This is known as the Aristotelian Square of Oppositions and is well known, especially to researchers working in formal semantics or logicians working in the philosophy of language. The primary linguistic function of the Aristotelian Square of Oppositions was recently described by Narrog and van der Auwera (2011:318n) as representing an early form of the semantic maps, later to be developed by Anderson (1982) and Haspelmath (1997). In today's linguistic usage, it feasibly demonstrates that quantitative values, once negated, may often reveal ambiguities between partial and total negation and shows that there are differences between the expression of negation in the form of contraries (which allowed for the simultaneous falsity of two opposites) and contradictions (in which the falsification of one member of a pair entails that the other is true, and vice versa). More recently, however, typologists have attempted to study the Aristotelian Square of Oppositions from a crosslinguistic perspective (van der Auwera, 2014; van der Auwera and de Vogelaer, 2008) and semanticists; e.g. Hoeksema (1999) questioned its usefulness against diachronic evidence from various languages in which some corners of the Square were not lexicalised. However, even if

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the Aristotelian Square were initially only intended for the representation of quantifier/negation relations in one or two languages, it is worth discussing it in relation to a range of languages, among which we may include the dialect of Singapore English, a Southeast Asian dialect of English that is strongly influenced grammatically by contact with Chinese languages, Malay and, to a lesser extent, Tamil. One of the purposes of the present study is to observe the relations represented on the Square in the context of such a contact situation.

The present study will question the role of the Aristotelian Square of Oppositions in an analysis of negative scope variation and the use of universal quantifiers observed in previous studies of Singapore English data. Three construction types related to the use of universal quantifiers in negative scope were isolated in a previous study (Ziegeler, in press) as showing variation, though they are not examples of non-standard usage (as often found in the colloquial contact sub-variety known as Singlish). However, they vary from similar constructions in other dialects of English and may be said to be related to contact features. An example of the particular construction under analysis in the present study is illustrated in (1), taken from the ICE-Singapore Corpus:

(1)   All of these not cooked yet (= 'None of these are cooked yet') (ICE-SIN:S1A-007#10:1:B) (Type 1)

The quantifier-negation order in this construction type can be described in the following schema:

(i)   Universal quantifier > neg. predicate $(\forall\neg)$[1]

The category "universal quantifier" is represented, as seen below, not only by universal indefinite pronouns and determiners but also by binary connectors such as *both* and universal temporal adverbs such as *always*. In standard varieties of English, quantification co-occurring with negation is almost invariably affected by the negation itself, so that universal quantifier subjects are replaced by a construction with an 'N-word' (Laka, 1990) subject and an affirmative verb, such as in the gloss in (1), i.e., the negation has been fronted. However, in at least one dialect of English, i.e. the contact dialect spoken in Singapore known as Singlish, there is considerable evidence of the presence of quantifier scope over a negated verb. This also has implications for some of the puzzles regarding the missing lexicalisation of O-corner items in the Aristotelian Square (e.g. Horn, 2012; van der Auwera, 2014).

The aims of the present study are to investigate some of the possible reasons that quantifier scope is seen to remain outside of negative scope in Singapore English (this has alternatively been described as quantifier scoping over the negation itself). The study will reveal that altering the position of the quantifier phrase from pre-negation to post-negation does not seem to affect the scope preferences: quantifier scope always takes precedence over the scope of negation. The paper will proceed as follows: in Section 2, a brief overview of the distinctive features of Singapore English will be provided in order to demonstrate the ways in which the contact languages spoken in Singapore may or may not affect the Singlish grammatical system. Section 3 gives a pragmatic account of the functions of the Aristotelian Square of Opposition. In Section 4, the results of an earlier study (henceforth, Study A) on negation and quantifiers are addressed. In Section 5, the question of substrate and contact influence is discussed, and in Section 6, the results of data derived from a survey of 57 Singaporean English native speakers will be illustrated. Section 7 discusses the data. It is hypothesised that the retention of wide scope for universal quantifiers after negation found in the majority of responses to the survey partly indicates the prevailing presence of conceptual iconicity (as first discussed in Haiman, 1986) in the construction, and this is supported by the responses to one particular question in the survey. The results of the survey may also assist in accounting for the absence of lexicalisation of O-corner items in the Aristotelian Square of Oppositions.

2. Singapore English

The study of Singapore English has advanced well beyond its initial stages in the 1970s and 1980s, in which it was confined within the domain of sociolinguistics and prescriptive grammars. Numerous recent accounts have discussed the dialect from the point of view of contact linguistics and creolisation (e.g. Bao, 2001, 2005, 2010), while others have continued to retain a descriptive approach (e.g. Lim, 2007; Schneider, 2003). More recently still, the distinctive features of the dialect have been examined within the diverse perspectives of cognitive construction theory (e.g. Ziegeler, 2015), with a view to investigating not only what may be explained about the dialect itself but also what such findings may contribute to wider fields of linguistic investigation as a whole. The dialect of Colloquial Singapore English (Singlish) is unique, in that unlike a creole, it has had continual exposure to contact influence from the lexifier and other contact languages long after its early stages of development; and unlike many contact varieties of English, it is spoken in a region subject to the restraining forces of local language policy guidelines, which have attempted in the past to proscribe its usage altogether. Nowadays,

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[1] In (i) and elsewhere, the arrowhead '>' is used to indicate linear precedence of quantifier vs. negation, as in van der Auwera, 2017, in press.