Copula Deletion in English as a Lingua Franca in Asia

Journal Article

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Non-standard features such as copula deletion have long been dismissed as learner errors or were interpreted as results of simplification processes in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), and only recent publications tend to acknowledge the influence of language contact in ELF settings (cf. Schneider 2012). The present paper analyses tokens of copula deletion in the Asian Corpus of English (ACE 2014) with respect to speaker L1s, situational context and syntactic environment, with our results suggesting a correlation between copula usage patterns in the speakers' L1s and constructions involving copula deletion found in ACE. Thus, opening up the field to ELF settings, our data confirm findings of previous studies such as Sharma (2009) that point to contact-induced copula usage in non-standard English(es).

1.   Introduction

Walker's claim that the copula is "probably the most studied but least understood variable in sociolinguistics" (2000: 35) is as loaded a statement today as it must have been at the time of its publication. The on-going debate on the status of copula deletion[1] exemplifies the lasting relevance of this quotation: Chambers' inclusion of zero copula constructions into his group of potential vernacular universals, i.e. "a small number of phonological and grammatical processes [that] recur in vernaculars wherever they are spoken" (2004: 128), put copula deletion back on the map and suggests that zero copulas belong to "the language faculty, the innate set of rules and representations that are the natural inheritance of every human being" (Chambers 2004: 128).[2]

In response to the controversial idea that copula deletion – a feature that has been part of the discussion of World Englishes at least since Labov's seminal study on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (1969) – might be one of several vernacular universals, follow-up research (cf. Sharma 2009) frequently concerned itself with the potential of Chambers' claim. Believing that "it is premature to draw a universalist conclusion unless substrate transfer has been ruled out" (2009: 171), Sharma conducted a typological comparison of Indian English, South African Indian English, and Singapore English with the respective major contact languages of these varieties. Her analysis revealed a correlation between copula structures in the substrates and usage patterns found in her English corpora, ultimately putting Chambers' theory into question.

The present paper moves further along the path paved by Sharma and asks whether a contact hypothesis holds for the presence of copula deletion in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Asia or whether another explanation or a combination of factors is

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[1]   The terms 'copula deletion' or 'zero copula' are employed in a strictly descriptive way, i.e. they are not to be regarded as evaluative in any kind or as characterising the absence of open copulas as defective. For a further discussion see Sections 3 and 4.

[2]   Although Chambers acknowledges the importance of cross-linguistic validation of his hypothesis, he chooses the isolated community of Tristan da Cunha as his primary example to prove that language contact is negligible or perhaps of no

importance at all in the emergence of vernacular universals.

more likely. Since this study is looking at ELF data from ACE, the Asian Corpus of English, another, comparatively young strand of research is brought into the debate, adding a further dimension: As scholars like Swan claim that "[t]he many-coloured and un-codifiable Englishes of non-native speakers have not turned into a current or emergent variety with its own norms" (2012: 388), the question arises how much systematicity can be assumed behind copula usage in ELF and how much of what the data show are, in fact, instances of spontaneous creativity or plain errors. However,

> ELF usage always implies a language contact situation to which speakers bring their respective native language competences, with all the consequences known from language contact descriptions. (Schneider 2012: 60)

Thus, investigating the effects of language contact from a typological as well as from an ELF research point of view constitutes, in our belief, a valuable concern. With the ever-growing interest in ELF and the change in perspective when it comes to errors and innovations (hitherto with a strong focus on ESL and EFL) dominating recent research in World Englishes, we want to contribute to the field from a specifically contact linguistic point of view.

After discussing the special status of ELF in Asia in Section 2, we will give a brief overview of the copular verb *be*, the phenomenon of copula deletion and recent research on this issue in Section 3. This will be followed by an in-depth description of the methodology used in this study and some caveats and concerns resulting from our method of choice in Section 4. Sections 5 and 6, then, serve as presentation and discussion of our results, with Section 7 concluding our paper.

2. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Asia

As mentioned above, the data investigated for our purpose come from the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), a 1-million-word corpus consisting of naturally occurring spoken interactions in so-called "ASEAN+3" countries, i.e. in the ten states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus China, Japan and Korea (ACE 2014). In the world at large, non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers by far, i.e. English has the function of an additional language used for interethnic communication, a lingua franca, for most of its speakers. This makes it legitimate to state that "if the goal of investigating […] English is to understand its use in today's world, ELF must be one of the central concerns in this line of research" (Mauranen 2006: 147; cf. also Matras 2009: 275). For the status of English in Asia, this becomes even more relevant, as the use of English between non-native speakers is expanding rapidly in this area. In Art. 39 of its 2009 Charter, the ASEAN officially assigned English the status of a 'sole working language' (Kirkpatrick 2010: 5-6), an extraordinary decision, whose significance is particularly emphasised by the fact that half of ASEAN's member states "have had no British colonial background and no special relationship with English before" (Schneider 2014: 251). Together with China, Japan and Korea, the number of multilinguals who know English[3] in ASEAN+3 is now estimated to be at least as high as 450 million people, probably higher (Kirkpatrick 2013: 18).

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[3] We use the term 'know' as the count includes both speakers who are passively exposed to English (e.g., via education, media) and speakers who actively use it.

Apart from their sheer number, the fact that ELF speakers in East and Southeast Asia are inevitably bi- or even multilingual, with first languages (L1s) coming from typologically "diverse language families, which include Sinitic, Austronesian, Dravidian and Indo-European, […] makes for intriguing contact situations" (Lim & Ansaldo 2016: 16). Moreover, due to heterogeneous L1 backgrounds, varying degrees of structural nativisation of English (cf. Schneider 2007) and different proficiency levels, "ASEAN[+3] ELF is not a single variety" (Kirkpatrick 2008: 28). It covers not only so-called 'Outer Circle' countries, i.e. typically former British or American colonies where the present status of English is that of a second language which is used intranationally (as, for example, is the case in Singapore or the Philippines), but also includes countries which can be classified as belonging to the 'Expanding Circle' (such as Cambodia or Thailand), i.e. countries where "English now enjoys an official status […] but is not (yet) spoken widely" (Schneider 2014: 251; Bolton 2008: 3-4; for the Three Circles model see Kachru 1985).[4] That is, by

definition ELF interactions usually involve "different constellations of speakers of diverse individual Englishes" (Meierkord 2004: 115), and any study focusing on English in Asia will necessarily have to deal with the consequences of language contact (Ansaldo 2009: 133-134).

All this makes ACE a promising database for the investigation of contact-induced language change – in fact, the corpus has been explicitly designed for this purpose. Compiled as a data collection representative with respect to factors such as gender, regional diversity, types of events and L1-backgrounds, ACE enables scholars to identify linguistic features which might be typical of or possibly unique to Asian ELF (Kirkpatrick 2013: 19-20). Several publications have already shown that such features exist even with proficient and fluent speakers of English, and that they may, in fact, enhance communication (cf. Deterding & Kirkpatrick 2006; Kirkpatrick 2008, 2010). Rather than dismissing the presence of non-standard forms in ASEAN+3 ELF – and copula deletion is one of them – as learner

errors, it therefore makes sense to investigate them from a contact linguistic point of view within the World Englishes paradigm. In this respect, the paper at hand follows Kirkpatrick's (2013: 25-27) preliminary study on a number of non-standard forms in ACE and the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) in which he claims copula deletion to be one of the features typical of Asian ELF. Focusing on ACE only, we will expand his findings by means of a comparative typological analysis of the L1s involved. This will enable us to discuss whether language contact is a likely explanation for the occurrence (or absence) of copula deletion, or whether this feature might be due to ELF tendencies as such.

3. Copula Deletion

Copula deletion can be defined as the omission of forms of the copular verb *be* between the subject and predicate of a sentence, i.e. copular verbs link the subject of a clause with an attribute that can be either a subject complement or an obligatory subject-related adverbial. Hence, verbs are defined as copular if they occur in one of the two sentence patterns SVC_S or SVA_{obl} (Biber

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[4] We want to stress that we do not assume a correlation between the proficiency level of individual speakers of English and the placement of the countries in the Circles model. Studies such as

Buschfeld (2011, 2013) on English in Cyprus and Edwards (2016) on English in the Netherlands show that the picture is not that clear-cut.

et al. 2002: 140; Quirk et al. 1985: 54-56 and 1170-1171). This study will focus on one type of copular verbs only, the main verb *be*, which is the most common and neutral of all copular verbs. *Be* belongs to the class of current copulas, i.e. it is typically stative and describes states of existence; however, it can co-occur with the progressive aspect as well (Quirk et al. 1985: 1171-1174). In this paper, a relatively narrow definition of the copula was employed: Rather than investigating both stative and progressive or resulting uses of the copula *be* (this approach can be seen in studies like Holm 2009), the study at hand only classified stative constructions as relevant. This can be seen in the following examples:

(1) SVC$_S$:   *She is a singer.*
(2) SVA$_{obl}$:   *They are out of town.*

The subject position in copular constructions like (1) or (2) can be filled by an NP or a nominal clause; in questions it is filled by the WH-element (Quirk et al. 1985: 724-725). Therefore, the following parts of speech can occur directly before the omitted or realised copula: nouns, pronouns, numerals, adjectives as heads of noun phrases, clauses, and existential *there*. The post-copular slot needs to be filled either by a subject complement (which, again, might be nominal or adjectival) or by a complementing adverbial, which is typically a space adjunct (Quirk et al. 1985: 1171-1175). For more details and an overview of the word classes which were chosen for the analysis in pre- and post-copular position, see Table 2.

As far as definitions of copula deletion are concerned, one given by Hickey (2014: 80) in his *Dictionary of Varieties of English* stands out. He defines zero copula constructions as

> [a] feature of many varieties of English, particularly of pidgins and creoles, where the verb *is* does not occur in copulative sentences. It is also found in African American English, for example *My uncle a teacher in our high school*.

First of all, Hickey limits the definition to the deletion of *is*. While this decision was perhaps informed by the higher frequency of *is*-deletion in pidgins, creoles and AAVE as compared to tokens of *am*- and *are*-deletion, focusing exclusively on the 3rd person singular seems puzzling in the context of World Englishes research at large. This is even more striking given that, at least

initially, Hickey sets a comparatively wide scope by not focusing on a particular variety of English.

It is certainly hard to deny that especially with respect to Caribbean pidgins and creoles as well as to AAVE, the status of the copula has been subject to intense discussion (cf., e.g., Holm 2009; Reaser 2004).[5] Referring to AAVE in the US, Labov even stresses that "the question arises whether or not a copula is present in the deep structure or higher-level structure of [AAVE]" (1972: 227). However, although the occurrence of zero copula constructions has attracted attention within these contexts, there are comparatively few studies to date dealing with copula deletion in Asian Englishes or in English as a Lingua Franca (some notable exceptions being Ho and Platt (1993), Sharma (2009), and Ansaldo (2000)). As far as Asian Englishes are concerned, Sharma (2009) is particularly noteworthy. Sharma compares copula usage patterns in Singapore English, South African Indian Eng-

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5   We do not want to position ourselves in the creolist and dialectologist debate here; however, copula deletion is clearly an important feature of AAVE and has been discussed extensively for decades (see, for instance, Labov's (1969) seminal study and more recent analyses such as Sharma & Rickford (2009)).

lish, and Indian English to usage patterns in the respective major contact languages, namely Malay, Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil, and Hindi (cf. Sharma 2009: 189). She identifies substrate transfer as a major influence on copula deletion in these varieties and concludes that "copula omission occurs in both IndE [=Indian English] and SgE [=Singapore English] but quantitative analysis reveals a distinct patterning according to grammatical context in the two varieties, driven by substrate differences" (Sharma 2009: 190).

In spite of the fact that copula deletion has been identified as a feature of many English varieties for years now, analyses such as Sharma's, which look for language contact as the driving force behind copula deletion, are few and far between, in particular with regard to the still relatively young field of ELF research. This is why we aim to carry out a study in Sharma's footsteps considering L1 (or, depending on the speakers' linguistic inventory, even L2) influence on zero copula constructions in English to a greater extent than has usually been done.

4. Methodology

In order to retrieve and analyse sentences which feature zero copulas constructions, the ACE data was edited in several ways. In a first step, the individual corpus files were downloaded from the ACE website and saved in text files. Since ACE is modelled after the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE), identical mark-up as described in the VOICE mark-up conventions (2007) was used for the compilation. These conventions include tags and symbols for speaker noises (e.g. <sneezes>, <coughs>), non-English speech (e.g. <L1de> for a speaker with German as their L1), laughter (one or more @-symbols) and a number of other contextual and non-contextual phenomena. The text files were prepared for the tagging procedure by clearing them from this (for our purposes unnecessary) mark-up as well as from the metadata included at the end of every file.

In order to allow for a systematic query of relevant pattern combinations without a form of copular *be*, we tagged all files with TagAnt (Anthony 2015). The tags used by this software are based on the POS-tags of the Penn Treebank Project (cf. Santorini

1990). They proved detailed enough to warrant a high degree of precision with regard to the possible combinations of constituents before and after a zero form instead of a form of *be*.[6] After the files had been cleaned up and tagged, the next step required a method of token retrieval that would be thorough in the sense that all or at least the majority of tokens could be identified, but, at the same time, still remained more efficient than reading through the corpus.

Based on the fact that copula deletion can occur between constituents that might have a variety of different realisations in actual language usage, several possible combinations had to be investigated. For this reason, we decided to look for tokens in AntConc (Anthony 2014) by means of a regular expression (regex) identifying all possibilities in only one search cycle.[7] Based on Goyvaerts & Levithan (2009), Table 1 gives an overview of the functions used in the regular expression:

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[6] The tags that we used are shown in Table 2; for a full list of tags, see https://www.ling.upenn.edu/courses/Fall_2003/ling001/penn_treebank_pos.html/ and the official manual (Santorini 1990).

[7] We thank Thorsten Brato for his help in preparing the regular expression.

Function	Description
<(?i)>	turns on case insensitivity for the remainder of the regular expression
<\b>	a word boundary matching at the start or the end of a word
<\w>	matches a single word character, i.e. a character occurring as part of word
<+>	repeats the preceding regex token at least once
<*>	repeats the preceding regex token zero or more times
<\s>	matches any whitespace character, i.e. spaces, tabs, and line breaks

Table 1   RegEx Commands Based on Descriptions Given in Goyvaerts & Levithan (2009: 27-28, 32, 41, 217)

The regular expression used to retrieve possible instances of copula deletion was

(?i)\b\w+_(NN|NNS|NNP|NNPS|EX|POS|PRP|PRP$|WP|WP$|VBG|DT)*\s\w+_(NN|NNS|NNP|NNPS|EX|JJ|JJR|JJS|RB|RBR|RBS|PRP|PRP$|WP|WP$|PDT|DT)*\b

and consists of various functions as well as the tags of interest in parentheses.[8]

The tags in the regular expression are listed in Table 2, which reflects the structure of the regular expression with potential occurrences of certain word classes in pre- and post-copular position.

The word classes in pre-copular position are much more straightforward to determine than those in the post-copular position. As mentioned above, since the copula's most important function is to link the subject with a complement that will characterise or identify the subject NP, an NP realised by either a noun or a pronoun can be expected before a form of *be* or zero copula. Exceptions to this are existential clauses, which nevertheless correspond to our definition of the copula as describing a state of existence; and determiners, which we

included solely for the purpose of being as thorough as possible.[9]

A problematic case are nominal clauses, which could not be analysed in enough detail in the present study. Since a nominal clause may end in almost any word class, this would have complicated the search procedure in such a way that an automated approach would no longer have been an option preferable to reading the entire corpus. There is ample reason, however, to assume that copula deletion is less readily employed after clauses, especially when the clause becomes exceedingly long. Research in the tradition of Rohdenburg (1996) and Schneider (2012: 65) suggests that speakers tend to be more explicit when longer chunks of information need to be processed; Rohdenburg calls this 'explicitness', while Schneider uses the term 'redundancy'.[10]

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[8]   The somewhat generalising term 'function' is used here as a place holder for the various terms used in regular expressions. In Goyvaerts & Levithan (2009), for instance, <*> and <+> would be called 'quantifiers', whereas <\b> is frequently called a 'token'. Since we use that terminology in linguistic contexts, restricting the description to the word 'function' is done purely to avoid confusion.

[9]   As the study at hand is based on spoken language only, TagAnt sometimes fails to identify demonstrative pronouns and labels them determiners.

[10]   The redundancy effect has been found to play a role in second-language varieties of English in Asia, cf. for instance Koch et al. (2016) for the 'intrusive *as*'-construction.

For the post-copular slot, we narrowed the word classes down to those that would be most likely to occur at the beginning of an NP or an AdjP. The most glaring omission here certainly are the prepositions, which we believed to bloat the number of hits to a critical extent – had we included all word classes technically possible in the post-copular spot, the number of hits that required manual analysis would have been even higher. Nevertheless, we were able to find some zero copula constructions with prepositions irrespective of the omission of this word class in the regular expression (cf. Section 5). At the moment, however, adding more parts of speech needs to be considered as work for future analyses.

In a next step, the results yielded with the help of the regular expression in Ant-Conc were exported to a text file and subsequently transferred to a table. In separate columns, this table captured information regarding

(1) consecutive number of the token;
(2) the token in context (i.e. with five words as left and five words as right concordance);
(3) the name of the file which included the token;

(4) the relevance of the token for this study;
(5) the syntactic pattern of the token;
(6) the L1 of the speaker who produced the utterance.

Pre-copular position		Post-copular position	
Word class	Tag(s)	Word class	Tag(s)
Nouns		**Nouns**	
singular or mass	NN	singular or mass	NN
plural	NNS	plural	NNS
proper noun, singular	NNP	proper noun, singular	NNP
proper noun, plural	NNPS	proper noun, plural	NNPS
possessive ending	POS		
Pronouns and wh-pronouns		**Pronouns and wh-pronouns**	
personal pronoun	PRP	personal pronoun	PRP
possessive pronoun	PRP$	possessive pronoun	PRP$
wh-pronoun	WP	*wh*-pronoun	WP
possessive *wh*-pronoun	WP$	possessive *wh*-pronoun	WP$
(Existential) *there*	EX	(Existential) *there*	EX
		Adjectives	
		positive	JJ
		comparative	JJR
		superlative	JJS
Premodifiers		**Premodifiers**	
determiner	DT	adverb	RB
		adverb, comparative	RBR
		adverb, superlative	RBS
		predeterminer	PDT
		determiner	DT
Verbal forms			
gerund or present participle	VBG		

Table 2 Possible Tags Occurring in Pre- and Post-copular Position (Based on Santorini 1990)

Points (1) to (3) were automatically provided by AntConc. For that reason, only (4), (5), and (6) needed to be taken care of manually and only tokens that received the rating 'relevant' in (4) were further annotated for (5) and (6). The patterns identified in column (5) are based on the constructions described in Table 2 and reflect (phrasal) zero copula combinations: NP+NP, NP+AdjP, NP+AdvP, NP+Clause, NP+Other, EX+NP, or any other combination, few of which were found. The information required for (6) could be added with the help of the metadata given at the end of each corpus file in ACE.[11]

In total, the search procedure yielded 48,219 tokens that needed to be annotated. Each of these tokens was closely analysed to clear out irrelevant cases such as the following:

(3) *mars (3) the long hair girl*
(irrelevant AntConc result, SG_ED_con_7)

Although (3) can be classified as NP+NP pattern, the long pause in-between gives reason to assume that rather than

constituting a NP+Ø+NP construction, i.e. an instance of copula deletion, this utterance is made up of two separate clauses. In fact, the length of the pause is indicated as 3 seconds in ACE, thus clearly exceeding the average gap duration between turns shown by Stivers et al. (2009) to be between 200 and 500 ms in a study involving ten major world languages. Similarly, due to the strict definition of the copula employed in this paper, a large number of non-stative uses of the copula, i.e. the combination of noun phrases with present or past participle forms, was marked as irrelevant, for example in cases like the following:

(4) *which we can decide what the student they Ø saying er and variation from the standard*
(deletion of non-stative copula 1, VN_ED_qas_tesol_learner error)

(5) *so in this we can see that (3) erm the teachers Ø also being recruited from different sources*
(deletion of non-stative copula 2, VN_ED_qas_tesol_innovation in language and teaching welcome)

Once the information on syntactic pattern and speaker L1 had been added to the relevant tokens, Goddard's (2005) classification of language families was taken as a basis to group the L1s in ACE (cf. Table 3). This allowed for tracing possible correlations between zero copula constructions in the speaker's L1 and their occurrence in the ELF conversation. The results of this procedure can be seen in the section below.

5. Results

After cleaning up the data manually, 235 tokens were considered as relevant according to the parameters described above. The analysis of the syntactic patterns underlying these tokens revealed that the vast majority (138 tokens) could be classified as NP+Ø+AdjP, i.e. utterances such as (6):

(6) *are we teaching them folktales that Ø relevant to their native countries?*
(NP+Ø+AdjP, VN_ED_wsd_use of asian folklores in classrooms 1, L1: Thai)

All in all, the NP+Ø+AdjP pattern made up about 58.7% of all tokens, followed by the

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[11] Please note that L1s are not always indicated in ACE. Therefore, L1s were only counted if they were mentioned in the mark-up; if several L1s were listed, they were all counted.

NP+Ø+NP pattern which accounted for 31.1% (73 tokens) of all cases, for example in (7):

> (7) @@ *they* Ø *demons*
> (NP+Ø+NP, VN_LE_con_jobs and professions 2, L1: Vietnamese)

Other syntactic patterns were strikingly less common. About 4.7% (11 tokens) were classified as NP+Ø+Other, i.e. mostly as instances in which the copula was not realised preceding prepositional phrases, as in the following utterance:

> (8) *we send all of the student and no one* Ø *in the classroom*
> (NP+Ø+Other, VN_LE_con_teaching and assessment, L1: Vietnamese)

Similarly, zero copula occurred in only 4.3% (10 tokens) of the relevant data in situations where it was followed by a clause:

> (9) *<7> goldfish Ø not </7> easy to (.) not easy to: (2) <8> last </8>*
> (NP+Ø+Clause, SG_ED_con_5, L1: Mandarin)

With only 7 tokens (3.0%), instances with zero copula preceding adverb phrases were even less frequent, as were syntactic patterns in which a noun phrase followed directly after existential *there* (5 tokens, 2.1%) or after an adjective phrase (1 token, 0.4%). These structures are exemplified in the utterances below:

> (10) *<8> lizard Ø here </8>*
> (NP+Ø+AdvP, SG_ED_con_7, L1s: Indonesian Malay, English, Hokkien)

> (11) *i think that there Ø many way you choose*
> (EX+Ø+NP, VN_LE_int_English speaking club_music, L1: Vietnamese)

> (12) *silent Ø we*
> (AdjP+Ø+NP, VN_LE_con_pho restaurant, L1: Indonesian Malay)

Taking the speakers' L1-background into account, the analysis showed that L1-speakers from all the language families present in Southeast Asia (cf. Goddard 2005) used zero copula constructions. However, the amount of copula deletion (as well as the representation of the language families in ACE) differed greatly. Out of the 235 instances of zero copula, a majority of 27.7%

(65 tokens) involved speakers with Sinitic L1s, mostly Mandarin/Chinese/Putonghua or Cantonese/Yue. Similarly, approximately 26% (61 tokens) can be linked to Austronesian L1-speakers, typically Filipino/Tagalog or Malay (both Indonesian and Malaysian Malay). These language families are two of the major L1 groups in ACE with about 27% for the Sinitic L1s and 20% for Austronesian languages. Mon-Khmer L1s, in most cases Vietnamese, can be accounted for speakers in 18.3% of all zero copula cases (43 tokens), with Vietnamese or Khmer being the L1 for 22% of the speakers in ACE. Apart from that, speakers with Tai-Kadai L1s (which constitute about 7% of the corpus) produced approximately 6.8% of zero copula constructions (16 tokens). The Tibeto-Burman language family only makes up 2% of L1s in ACE and just 1.7% (4 tokens) of all the relevant zero copula cases can be attributed to speakers with Burmese as L1. Due to the small proportion of Tibeto-Burman L1s and the low number of tokens in the corpus (cf. Table 3), these speakers were excluded from further analysis. Hmong-Mien L1s had to be excluded as well, as this

	Austronesian	Mon-Khmer	Tibeto-Burman	Tai-Kadai	Sinitic	Other
NP+NP	24	13	1	5	19	15
	39.3%	30.2%	25%	31.3%	29.2%	26.8%
NP+AdjP	27	23	2	10	36	33
	44.3%	53.5%	50%	62.5%	55.4%	58.9%
NP+AdvP	2	0	0	0	3	4
	3.3%	0%	0%	0%	4.6%	7.1%
EX+NP	1	1	0	0	2	1
	1.6%	2.3%	0%	0%	3.1%	1.8%
NP+Clause	5	1	0	1	2	3
	8.2%	2.3%	0%	0.6%	3.1%	5.4%
NP+Other	1	5	1	0	3	0
	1.6%	11.6%	25%	0%	4.6%	0%
AdjP+NP	1	0	0	0	0	0
	1.6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	61	43	4	16	65	56

Table 3 Absolute and Relative Frequencies of Phrasal Types Across Language Families

In order to make these results more palpable, the ggplot2 package (cf. Wickham 2009) in R was used to create Figure 1, which illustrates the relative frequencies of each syntactic environment per language family. This allows for direct comparisons between L1 language families and syntactic environment.

As is evident from Table 3 and Figure 1, speakers of Austronesian L1s produced mostly zero copula constructions involving an NP+Ø+AdjP or NP+Ø+NP pattern (44.3% or 39.3% of all zero copula cases). The same is true for the other language families; however, a preference for NP+Ø+AdjP constructions is much more clear-cut with these L1s (cf. for example the Sinitic language family with 55.4% of NP+Ø+AdjP constructions as opposed to 26.8% of NP+Ø+NP cases). Another aspect which is worth mentioning is the occurrence of NP+Ø+Clause constructions, which are almost exclusively restricted to the speech of speakers with Austronesian L1s. Similarly, NP+Ø+Other patterns make up 11.6% of zero copula cases involving speakers of

language family is not represented in ACE.[12] A last group is comprised of speakers with L1s other than those mentioned above, typically, this was English. These speakers make up approximately 21% of all known L1s in the corpus and produced 23.8% (56 tokens) of all zero copula tokens.

Combining these results, we calculated the relative frequencies of different zero copula constructions in different L1 surroundings. In the upper row, Table 3 gives an overview of the absolute frequency for each syntactic environment; in the lower row, it shows the calculated relative frequency, each presented for all language families that featured at least one token of copula deletion.

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[12] Goddard lists the Hmong-Mien language family as one of the six major families of East and Southeast Asia but also states that it consists of about 35 languages only and is "relatively little known in the West" (2005: 36).

Mon-Khmer L1s but can hardly be found in other linguistic surroundings.[13]

Figure 1

Relative Distribution of Syntactic Environments Across Language Families
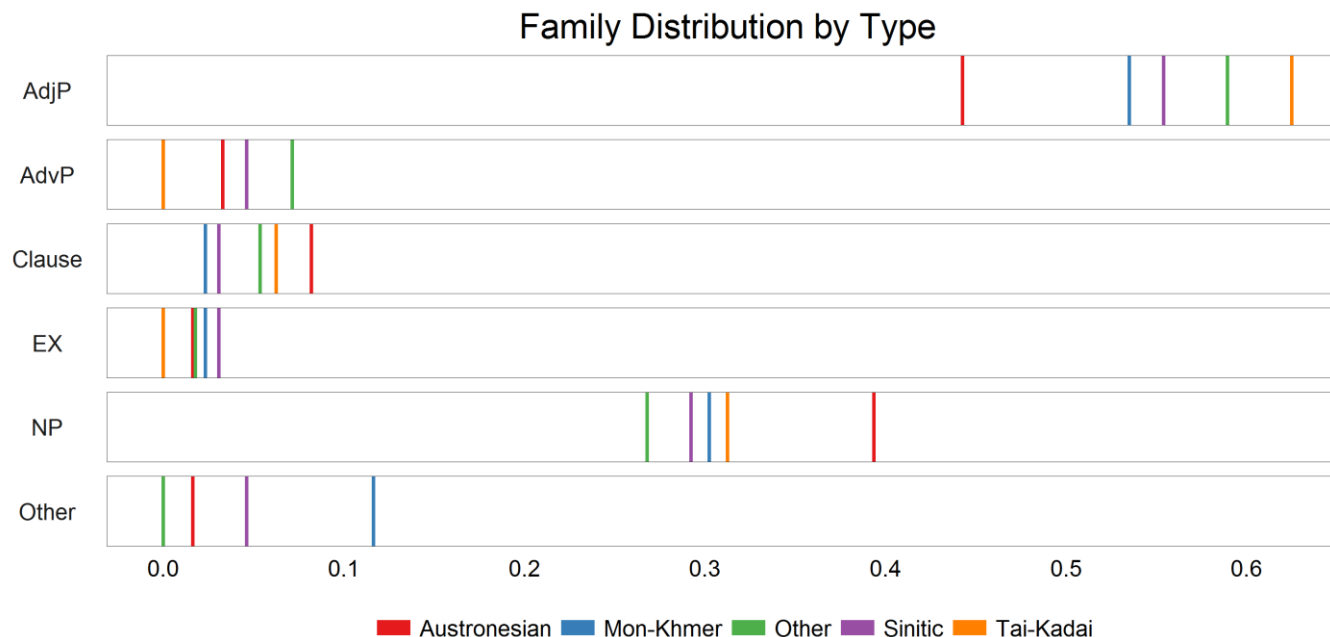
Moreover, taking the different settings in which the conversational interactions took place into account, it can be seen that zero copula constructions occur in all kinds of settings covered by ACE but differ greatly in their distribution (cf. Table 4).

Table 4

Number of Zero Copula Constructions in Different Settings in ACE

Family Distribution by Type

setting	no. of zero copula occurrences	proportion of setting in ACE (ACE 2014)
leisure	55 (23.7%)	10%
education	153 (65.9%)	25%
professional Business	2 (0.9%)	20%
professional organisation	21 (9.1%)	35%
professional research/science	1 (0.4%)	10%
total	232 (100%)	100%

settings, namely leisure and education.[14] In fact, although educational contexts only make up 25% all the ACE data, 65.9% of all zero copula constructions are concentrated there. Similarly, with only 10%, leisure is one of the settings with minor representation in ACE; however, 23.7% of all instances of zero copula can be found here.

The analysis showed that instances of copula deletion are almost limited to two kinds of

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[13] Leaving aside the Tibeto-Burman language family (cf. discussion above).

[14] Please note that education does not imply classroom interaction in ACE but rather covers a variety of situations involving members of the educational sector, including everyday conversations.

6.   Discussion

The results presented above allow for the discussion of our data from a typological, contact linguistic point of view. First of all, instances of zero copula clearly cannot be classified as mere learner errors or as being due to simplification processes, a view which has been argued in the context of Caribbean creoles (Ansaldo 2009: 139). This becomes particularly obvious when looking at cases like (13) or (14):

(13) *ah to me (.) <u><spel> k l </spel></u> Ø <u>nothing much</u> because (.) <spel> k l </spel> **is** quite like singapore*
(zero copula constructions and learner errors 1, SG_ED_con_6, L1: Mandarin)

(14) *<8> it's </8> important er <u>what probably Ø <u>important</u> is us being able to</u>*
(zero copula constructions and learner errors 2, CN_PO_int_reducing and preventing disasters, L1: Tagalog)

Example (13) shows that the NP+Ø+AdjP construction employed by the Mandarin L1-speaker cannot be explained as a simple learner error, i.e. as being due to the

speaker's inadequate proficiency in a second language. In fact, in the second part of the speaker's utterance, the copula is used, which demonstrates the speaker's ability to use these constructions. Similarly, in (14), the Tagalog L1-speaker first realises the copula in an NP+copula+AdjP sentence structure; the second part of the utterance, however, lacks the copula. Again, there is no reason to assume that copula deletion in this context is due to learner errors of any kind, and this view is further strengthened when taking into account that ACE focuses primarily on speakers who attribute them-selves a "high proficiency in English" (ACE 2014).[15]

The fact that ELF speakers in Asia can switch between overt and zero copula and might even do so deliberately further suggests that copula deletion is not a vernacular universal or an 'angloversal' (called 'New Englishims' by Simo Bobda, who defines them as "the many common features at all levels of analysis which occur across the Englishes of former British colonies" (2000: 64); cf. also Mair 2003: 84). We are fully aware that ELF and post-colonial

varieties of English cannot be lumped together without establishing a complex theoretical fundament first. However, we agree with Sharma in her belief that even though universal patterns may be at work behind the emergence of certain features, this does not imply that the features themselves are universals (cf. 2009: 191).[16]

Thus, if instances of copula deletion cannot be discounted as mere learner errors and if they cannot be classified as vernacular universals or angloversals, this allows for a view which treats language as dynamic, as a complex adaptive system, with language change as a consequence of ecological variation (Ansaldo 2009: 134). That is, in multilingual contexts – and Southeast Asia is a prime example for these ecologies –, multilingual speakers face a pool of very different linguistic features or variables from which they have to select (Ansaldo 2009: 135-136). Among these, "some variety of English represents only one set of features available to speakers. In the same ecology, other grammars are present, be they Chinese, Malay, Filipino or Hindi, and

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[15]   This, of course, does not necessarily imply that they actually are highly proficient.

[16]   In non-standard English(es), universal tendencies involve various strategies helping to create a "processing advantage", e.g. redundancy and isomorphism (Schneider 2012: 64-67).

grammatical features of these languages also play a role in the selection and replication process" (Ansaldo 2009: 137-138).

Our study gives reason to suggest that this is also what is happening in the case of copula deletion in Asian Englishes. Ansaldo (2009) has already shown that in many Southeast Asian languages both predicative adjectives, i.e. adjectives that behave like (copula) verbs, and zero copula con-structions can be found. He therefore concludes with respect to Singlish that "[t]he fact that zero copula and predicative adjectives feature in Singlish grammar must be seen as a selection of adstrate features (or substrate transfer) from the multilingual pool" (Ansaldo 2009: 142), a pool which – in the case of Singlish – is largely dominated by Sinitic and Malay grammar. This is also what could be observed for the cases of copula deletion in ACE. As mentioned above, zero copula constructions mostly occurred in utterances involving speakers with Sinitic L1s, typically Mandarin/Putonghua or Cantonese. A closer look at copula constructions in the typology of these L1s reveals that there is a copular verb *shi* 'to be' in Mandarin Chinese, but it is typically reserved for emphasis and "ordinarily not used with adjectival verbs or stative verbs"

(Ross & Ma 2006: 63). That is, the lack of a clear distinction between verbs and adjectives in Mandarin renders the use of an additional copula unnecessary: "*shi* is not used when the predicate is an adjectival verb" (Ross & Ma 2006: 171). Similarly, in Cantonese "the verb hay4[17] 'be' is deleted when the complement is an adjective or locative phrase" (Killingley 1993: 37). Keeping this in mind, the fact that in ACE 55.4%, i.e. more than half of all zero copula constructions produced by speakers with Sinitic L1s, follow the NP+Ø+AdjP pattern strongly points at substrate influence.

With respect to Austronesian L1s, most zero copula cases could be traced to L1 speakers of Malay (both Indonesian and Malaysian) or Filipino/Tagalog. Again, these are languages where the use of an overt copula is non-obligatory and restricted to cases of emphasis or clarification, or where, as in the case of Tagalog, copulas do not exist (Platt 1979; Schachter 2015: 1666; Sneddon 1996: 237-8). It is therefore not surprising that 26% of all zero copula constructions found in ACE can be attributed to speakers with these L1s, and that it is also Malay and

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[17] If Chinese characters are romanized, numbers denote tones.

Tagalog L1 speakers who omitted the copula in complex syntactic environments (8.2% of the relevant tokens found in this language group were instances of NP+Ø+Clause). Speakers of Mon-Khmer L1s, predominantly Vietnamese, make up 22% of all ACE speakers, and 18.3% of all relevant zero copula constructions were uttered by them. More than half of these structures correspond to the NP+Ø+AdjP pattern, which again follows the L1 typology: In Vietnamese, adjectives can function as verbs, and although *là* can be used as an identificational marker 'be', it is largely restricted to contexts of emphasis, whereas zero copula constructions with predicative adjectives constitute the unmarked case (Thompson 1965: 206-207, 217, 236-237). Interestingly, Vietnamese L1 speakers also produced utterances in which the past form of the copula was missing, such as (15):

(15) *no i i Ø sorry and i said*
(past tense copula deletion,
VN_LE_con_jobs and professions 2,
L1: Vietnamese)

Structures of this kind were very rare in the ACE data but they are possible in Vietnamese where "[e]ach temporal

predicate is paralleled by a similar sequence differing only in the absence of a tense marker" (Thompson 1965: 206).

With respect to L1 speakers of Tai-Kadai languages, i.e. typically Thai speakers, which, however, only make up about 7% of the underlying L1s in ACE, a clear dominance of NP+Ø+AdjP constructions is visible when it comes to cases of zero copula. Of all the languages whose typology we investigated with regard to copula usage, Thai seems unique in that "the lack of a copula occurs in locative predications which are directly linked to the parameters of the communicative situation" (Herrero-Blanco & Salazar-García 2005: 303). Rather than retaining or omitting the copula categorically based on complement type or emphasising strategies, Thai therefore requires an assessment of the relevance, accessibility and perhaps even entrenchment of, at least, the complement.[18] Since an evaluation of such categories is far beyond the scope of our study, we cannot make a conclusive statement about this underlying L1. However, certain constructions found in

our data, such as (6), clearly fit Herrero-Blanco & Salazar-García's description.

To sum it up, the typological analysis of complementation patterns revealed that the vast majority of ACE speakers who produced zero copula patterns are L1 speakers of languages where the use of the copula is at least restricted and where the boundaries between verbs and predicative adjectives are often blurred. That these features can be found in the ecologies of languages from different language families is hardly surprising in the Southeast Asian context, as

> mainland Southeast Asia is a linguistic area where [...] language stocks have been in touch with one another for over a thousand years. In this kind of situation, all sorts of linguistic features [...] diffuse from language to language, regardless of the genetic affiliation of the languages involved. (Goddard 2005: 27-28)

That is, ELF speakers in ACE are faced with at least two different language ecologies: that of English, in which the copula is obligatory in SVC_S/A_{obl} constructions, and that of their respective L1s, in which – as the analysis has shown – the use of an open, verbal copula is non-obligatory or even

unusual or where it serves specific purposes which differ from the English usage. In many ways, this is a classical situation of language contact as defined by Matras, who highlights that "[t]he relevant locus of contact is the language processing apparatus of the individual multilingual speaker and the employment of this apparatus in communicative interaction" (2009: 3). This is akin to the situation present in the ACE conversations, where English takes over the role of a lingua franca, i.e. a momentary, "pragmatically dominant language" (Matras 2009: 98), but other linguistic repertoires remain active and accessible for the speaker: "Complete separation of repertoire subsets in 'monolingual' contexts is an extreme mode of communication in most multilingual situations, whereas some degree of mixing – that is, of drawing on elements of the full repertoire regardless of subset-affiliation – is common" (Matras 2009: 128; cf. also Grosjean 2010: 75). Zero copula constructions therefore have to be regarded as multilingual speakers accessing their full linguistic repertoire. Rather than treating them as mere learner errors, they are contact-induced features which are consciously or subconsciously employed based on the individual requirements of the

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[18] 'Entrenchment' is a category from the domain of cognitive linguistics that describes the degree of routine the activation of a category has acquired (cf. Schmid 2007: 118).

specific conversation: "The speaker aims at pursuing a particular communicative goal, embedded into a particular communicative context" (Matras 2009: 241).

With respect to the notion of communicative context, the paper at hand clearly shows that zero copula constructions predominantly occur in two ACE contexts, leisure and education. In fact, although these two contexts together only constitute 35% of all settings covered by ACE, 89.6% of all zero copula constructions can be found there. This finding, however, is hardly surprising as non-standard constructions, which might be considered inappropriate in formal contexts (such as the radio talk shows and interviews in ACE), can be expected to be "more readily available for selection and replication" in relaxed surroundings (Ansaldo 2009: 144). In these situations, syntactic structures which might be deeply entrenched through a speaker's L1 are more likely to escape their active control in the ELF conversation (cf. Matras 2009: 89-99; Green 1998: 77).

The speakers' communicative goals in the present study differed slightly from setting to setting but were necessarily marked by a need to communicate using English as a Lingua Franca. However, at the same time, it became apparent that speakers have "the entire [linguistic] repertoire at their disposal and [do] […] not 'block' or 'de-activate' any particular language 'system'" (Matras 2009: 241). In the ELF context, this is particularly relevant, as it is typically the speakers L1s which have a "higher type- and token-frequency in the multilingual contexts in which speakers […] communicate" (Ansaldo 2009: 144). L1 patterns therefore remain constantly accessible and in certain situations zero copula constructions, i.e. L1 patterns filled with English 'linguistic matter', can even be regarded as more effective or preferable over the Standard English structure. This is reinforced by the fact that the feature under investigation is typically shared by the co-conversationalists and the new construction is therefore likely to be accepted, as the typological comparative analysis above has shown (Matras 2009: 240-243). For the specific case of ELF, all our findings thus point to cases of what Mauranen calls 'second order contact':

> Second-order contact means that instead of a typical contact situation where speakers of two different languages use one of them in communication ('first-order contact'), a large number of languages are each in contact with English, and it is these contact varieties (similects) that are, in turn, in contact with each other. Their special features, resulting from crosslinguistic transfer, come together much like dialects in contact. (2012: 30)

7.   Conclusion

In this study, we analysed tokens of copula deletion in the Asian Corpus of English, an ELF corpus, with the aim of identifying recurring patterns in spoken Asian ELF and comparing these to the L1s involved in the various contact situations. Our findings strongly speak in favour of a contact hypothesis as suggested by Sharma (2009) for L2 Englishes. For the specific case of ELF, they can be interpreted as instances of second order contact (Mauranen 2012). While a number of differences in terms of syntactic distribution across the various language families represented in ACE could be observed, a closer typological analysis of the L1s revealed that speakers who used zero copula constructions often did so in contexts where they would make the same choice in their L1. Hence, we agree with Ansaldo, who claims that "morphological reduction is not necessarily an instance of

simplification or faulty acquisition, but rather a reflection of typological traits of isolating languages (where present) which win in the competition and selection process" (2009: 145). Whether copula deletion truly becomes an 'innovation' in Asian ELF remains to be seen, since such a statement would require larger corpora and diachronic comparisons. However, it clearly could be shown that the question of error vs. innovation fades into the background in ELF. Instead "the ability to accommodate to interlocutors with other first languages than one's own (regardless of whether the result is an "error" in ENL) is a far more important skill than the ability to imitate the English of a native speaker" (Jenkins 2007: 238).

For future analyses, it will be particularly interesting to compare copula usage patterns in Asian ELF (with underlying L1s from language families typically found on the Asian continent) with ELF situations involving L1s from other language families. Furthermore, we also plan to include non-stative uses of the copula. From a methodological perspective, we will look for a more fine-grained regular expression that is more precise and yields fewer dismissable hits. Being able to include all relevant patterns while at the same time still considering the actual contextual situation remains of the utmost significance for the progress of our study if we want to extend our database.

Finally, we believe that using larger corpora to analyse features such as copula deletion remains a worthwhile undertaking as long as speaker realities do not have to step into the background. ELF communication by definition involves multilingual speakers with different linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of proficiency in English, which already requires a fine-tuned approach. Most importantly, however, it should not be forgotten that successful communication is the *raison d'être* of ELF: Were it not for the need to overcome language boundaries, there would be no use for ELF. In the particular case of Asian ELF, it became apparent that the use of zero copula constructions is employed by several speakers with L1s from different language families at least in mixed or informal settings, where contact-induced features show more readily than in formal situations.

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