ABSTRACT

It is a common phenomenon that colloquial Singapore Mandarin is code-switched with many discourse markers such as 'but' and 'so'. This study seeks to investigate the functions of discourse markers 'but' and 'so' in Singapore Mandarin and explore the pattern of usage through data analysis. The motivations behind code-switching and code-mixing are also discussed.

The data used in this thesis is collected from natural conversations of three and a half hours. I have based my analysis on Halliday and Hassan's (1976) definition of discourse markers 'but' and 'so' as having cohesive functions and on Schiffrin's (1987) definition of discourse markers 'but' and 'so' as having pragmatic functions. According to Associate Professor Lee Cher Leng's (unpublished) classification, these discourse markers are shown to have not only cohesive meanings but pragmatic meanings as well.

Thus, using Associate Professor Lee Cher Leng's (unpublished) classification method, I have analysed the use of discourse markers 'but' and 'so' according to two main categories, namely when used as a
conjunction to indicate their cohesive functions and when used in utterance-initial position to indicate their pragmatic functions. When discourse markers represent a cohesive function, they link two clauses together, semantically. When they serve a pragmatic function, they seem to indicate different meanings in different contexts. The significance of these discourse markers involves their use as a marker for code-switching, to begin a sentence or to change conversational topics.

The use of discourse markers ‘but’ and ‘so’ with other English phrases is also discussed. In addition, I seek to explain the prevalence of these English discourse markers as compared to corresponding Chinese phrases which suggest the same meanings. Since discourse markers ‘but’ and ‘so’ have multiple functions in Singapore Mandarin, it is convenient for bilingual speakers to use them. This explains the frequent occurrences of these discourse markers in colloquial Singapore Mandarin.