ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to examine the characteristics and trends of special Chinese words used in Singapore (Singapore Mandarin).

The words examined were taken from the Times Dictionary of Singapore Chinese by Wang Huida. Data collection was done using the Lianhe Zaobao and Beijing Youth Daily, two of the major newspapers in Singapore and China respectively. The data was then analyzed for frequencies and trends.

Results showed that between 1999 and 2004, out of 479 words taken from the dictionary, 13.5% of these words were actually used in Putonghua, while 17.3% of these words have been replaced by words with the same meaning in Putonghua.

After eliminating words that are no longer exclusive to Singapore Mandarin, only 282 or 59% of the 479 words are taken into account as special words. The “Unique Words” (特有词) made up the biggest proportion of the special words, accounting for 52% of it. Although “words in Singapore Mandarin that have a different form in Putonghua but share the
same meaning”（异形同实） made up only 32%, its significance lies in the findings that 39.6% of the words in this category are frequently used. Compared to the other two categories, words that have the same form in Putonghua but a different meaning in Singapore Mandarin (同形异实) made up the smallest proportion of the special words and are not frequently used.

In conclusion, this study shows that special words in Singapore can be represented mainly by the “Unique Words” and the “words in Singapore Mandarin that have a different form in Putonghua, but share the same meaning”. The development of these special words is rapid and there is now a bilateral fusion between Singapore Mandarin and Putonghua.