ABSTRACT

Since the 1980s, new Chinese words have caught the eye of language researchers over at Mainland China and this has led to comprehensive analysis and study of the topic. In contrast, not much, or should I say, very little research has been done on the new Chinese words that has emerged in the Singapore society.

Faced with such a stark contrast, I have to decided to initiate this topic of interest with the hope that my research can firstly, encourage more people to focus on the topic. Secondly, be of use to those who might be thinking of publishing new Chinese words dictionaries, which is seriously lacking in our society as compared to the situation over at China.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate new Chinese words in Singapore, specifically new Chinese words that appeared in Lian He Zao Bao from 1996 to 2001. Firstly, a statistical breakdown of the formation of the new Chinese words, focusing on a few key areas, is carried out, followed by an analysis of the trends and features. The trends and special features derived from the data include 1) the mass production of trisyllabic and "quadrisyllabic" Chinese words that overshadows the growth of disyllabic words, 2) the steady increase of a new type of loanword formation, alphabetical words. The country’s development, roadmap for the future and the government’s bilingualism policy is brought into the picture for an explanation of the trends, and then based on the future development plans, we speculate that trisyllabic and "quadrisyllabic" Chinese words will continue to grow in number,
amongst other hypotheses regarding the continuation of the trends and special features.

Next, with respect to the first trend stated above, a survey that focused on the Chinese community’s perception of what is a Chinese word is done. The purpose is to observe whether the perception of Chinese community has “evolved” in accordance with the Chinese word development, from disyllabic to trisyllabic and “quadrisyllabic”. The results indicate that trisyllabic words seem to be more “stable” than “quadrisyllabic” words, and that there is a marked difference between the perceptions of university students from Chinese department and those who are not, among other findings.

Chapter 1 provides the background of my topic of interest, the methodology involved and the constraints of this paper. Chapter 2 covers the statistical breakdown followed by the analysis of the words gathered. Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the survey.

Lastly, Chapter 4 summarizes the findings. These findings are aimed at enhancing our understanding of the new Chinese words and the perception of Chinese community, thus contributing to the study of the local Chinese language.