Abstract

Mandarin has been gaining greater popularity since the government launched the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' in late 70s. Chinese language as a teaching subject in school basically follows the standard set by Mainland China.

This study attempts to investigate the tonal instability in Singapore Mandarin over a spectrum of ages. The pronunciation of 28 informants from various dialect backgrounds has been recorded. The informants have been categorized into 4 age groups. Comparisons have also been made among the Mandarin spoken in Mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore.

The salient features of speech of 28 Singaporean are summarized as follows:

Although the occurrence of the short falling pitch for characters with an Entering Tone in Middle Chinese was quite frequent (36.4%), it will gradually diminish in usage in the future, as indicated by the gradual decline in accordance with age.

Tonal instability includes change of tone caused by the Weak Stress, which give rise to tonal fatigue. The instability is more evident in Singapore than it was reported for Taipei.

With regard to confusion between Tone-2 and Tone-3, it is observed that Tone-2 is more unstable than Tone-3, whereas the
instability of both Tone-2 and Tone-3 is much more distinct in Singapore than it was in Taipei.

Comparisons between different age groups show that for the most part, the younger the age group, the more accurate the pronunciation. Although Singapore has followed the 1963-85 Revisions, pronunciations of the 1932 system still exist in various extents.