Abstract

Age is one of the defining factors in one’s use of language. Brouwer’s studies in 1982 revealed that age, not gender, determines one’s use of Politeness Expressions such as hedges, tag questions etc. Such studies on the foreign components of Singapore Mandarin are, however, uncommon, as most are focused on the entirety of the phenomenon itself. In view of this, this paper aims to survey the characteristic features of foreign components in spoken Singapore Mandarin across the various age groups, namely: children (6-11 years old), teenagers (12-17 years old), young (18-34 years old), middle-aged (36-59 years old) and elderly (60 years old and above).

Voice recordings of their daily conversations are done, with the total audio length of each age group capped at 35 minutes. The voice recordings are transcribed into Text in accordance to Bois (1993) discourse transcription symbols and form of transcription. Word segmentation and part of speech tagging are done with the aid of a computer software, following which there is manual proofreading. This paper then analyses the three types of foreign components in spoken Mandarin of the five age
groups with regards to the part of speech and frequency of use, and at the same time, linking to the psychological and social factors that motivated it.

The analysis in this study reveals that children, teenagers and young are more inclined towards using English components, with the frequency of use peaking at young. The middle-aged and elderly used significantly lesser English components as they are more used to speaking Mandarin or dialects. Chinese components whose usage and meaning have been influenced by English appeared in the children, teenagers and young's Mandarin. The teenagers used the most of such components. Malay components are only seen in the young, middle-aged and elderly's Mandarin, with the elderly's frequency of use being the highest.

Dialectal components are found in all age groups, with the frequency of use increasing with age. Chinese components whose usage and meaning have been influenced by Chinese dialects appeared in all age groups, with the middle-aged using the most.