ABSTRACT

This thesis examines refusals in Singapore Mandarin. It takes a closer look at how refusals vary in directness and the different forms of strategies they take on in verbal interaction. This study was prompted by interest to replicate the various refusal studies which had been done abroad, in the local context. In this way, this study sought to discover patterns and features of refusals in Singapore Mandarin.

Data for this study were all drawn from natural language conversation. These were recorded and collected from three groups of people with varying closeness in relationship, namely from strangers, friends and family members. Supporting materials for theoretical framework were drawn largely from English and Chinese books and research papers.

This study reveals that strangers and family members located on both extremes of the spectrum of relationship, exhibited similar behavioural patterns in the speech act of refusals, being more direct. Friends on the centre of the spectrum, unlike the other two groups, exhibited great indirectness in refusals. The above mentioned phenomenon conformed to Wolfson’s Bulge Theory. Though some refusal strategies were adopted in all three groups, there were some strategies which were particular only to each individual group.

Finally, the study concludes that there are some distinct features of refusals in Singapore Mandarin. They are the use of pragmatic particles and code-switching as marked features of refusals. Pragmatic particles play the roles of a supplement and indicator to refusals. Code-switching on the other hand, marks the dispreferred response of refusals through its effects of emphasis, insistence and dissociation from the speaker.