Abstract

As a multi-cultural and multi-racial nation, a diverse range of languages and dialects are spoken in Singapore. Amongst the different communities, Ethnic Chinese accounts for the majority; and within the Chinese community which is sub-divided into dialect groups, the Hokkiens form the largest group. Hence, the Hokkien dialect is one of the most influential and common language spoken by Singaporean Chinese.

Hokkien (or Minnan dialect) had its roots in Fujian Province, China. When the Chinese travelled from Mainland China to Malaya to pursue a living in the late 19th century, their culture and languages were brought along with them. Gradually, the different dialects from China became embedded in the local linguistic environment. However, in the process of language migration, there will be language shift and language contact, and that will inevitably result in the loss of certain characteristics of the original linguistic system. This paper hence seeks to explore the process and result of language migration of the Xiamen dialect (the official representative accent of the Minnan dialect) by studying the differences
between the tonal system of the China and Singapore Xiamen dialect.
Through a lateral and synchronic contrastive study on the tonal system of
the two Xiamen accents, key features of the tonal system of Singapore
Xiamen dialect can be established and from there, some patterns and
consequences of language migration can be derived and explained. In
addition, the societal reasons behind the differences will also be explained.

This paper is broadly divided into five sections. The first section
provides a general overview of the linguistic system of both China and
Singapore Xiamen dialect, providing the basis for the contrastive study
that will describe the current features of the Singapore Xiamen dialect
tonal system. The second section describes and explains the methodology
adopted in this study. The third section gives a summary of the research
findings. A detailed analysis in the fourth section explains the differences
found in the Singapore and China Xiamen dialect; this section also
explores the factors that affect the process of language migration and
dialect integration into a society. Finally, the paper will conclude with a
summary of the previous sections and a review of this research paper.