ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to investigate those monosyllabic Chinese characters (single words) that have experienced linguistic changes in Singapore.

Recently, research studies on Singapore new Chinese words or special Chinese words have been carried out intensely. However, until now, nobody has mainly focused on the changes of the single words. Since polysyllabic words are formed by two or more characters, they have more extent for changes, either changes in their meaning or changes of their usage in actual context. In contrast, monosyllabic characters have a rather stable condition given that they are only one character and have a fixed number of meaning or acceptation. In this case, if a monosyllabic characters had experienced alteration in any form, the process of the transformation is surely attractive and worth being studied.

To carry out this study, I have examined all the words that used in a corpus linguistic, consisted by 70 Chinese books which are written by Singapore Chinese. From there, I have chosen a list of single words that have showed changes in meaning or usage by looking at the context their appeared. After that, I have carried out a survey and interviewed 100 people to examine the frequency of those single words being used.

After ascertaining those words that experienced changes, I have analyzed and sorted them into 3 categories:-

1. Single words that have changes in meaning,
2. Single words that have changes in word class, and
3. Single words that have changes in usage.

For the first category, which is discussed in Chapter 2, the single word is either forming a new meaning in Singapore Chinese or its original meaning has been distorted or misinterprets.

For the second category, which is discussed in Chapter 3, the single word has some changes in meaning as well, however the creation of the new meaning is mainly caused by a conversion of word class which undergone by the single word.

For the third category, which is discussed in Chapter 4, the single words have changes in neither its acceptation nor its word class. Nonetheless, it reveals some trend of changes in its usage.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, I have suggested that those single words that have extremely high frequency in both colloquial and written usage should be ingathered into Singapore local dictionary. Besides, those single words which are being wrongly used should be made known to the public to impede the wrong usage. In my opinion, the “differences” in Singapore Chinese should not be taken as “wrong usage” at the first impression as there is may be a pattern or trend for the transformation. Nevertheless, for those usages which are unquestionably erroneous, we should correct it and bring it to a halt.