ABSTRACT

In multilingual Singapore, language contact is a prevalent phenomenon. This involves code-mixing and code-switching, whereby speakers alternate between two languages. As a result, this promotes the borrowing of lexicons across languages. According to Myers-Scotton (1993), discourse markers are ‘core’ borrowings which are not particularly motivated. According to A/P Lee Cher Leng (2003), the frequent occurrences of English discourse marker ‘then’ do not seem to have any particular motivation as they have entered into the mental production of Singapore Mandarin. Thus, it is more of a core borrowing rather than a code-switch. A/P Lee Cher Leng (unpublished) studied the connective and pragmatic functions of ‘then’ in Singapore Mandarin. She encouraged me to compare ‘then’ in Singapore English and Singapore Mandarin.

This paper aims to analyse and compare the pragmatic functions of discourse marker ‘then’ in colloquial Singapore Mandarin and Singapore English. In this paper, the functions of ‘then’ are divided
into two sections, namely 'discourse connectives' and 'pragmatic markers'.

As a discourse connective, 'then' in Singapore Mandarin and Singapore English have additive, temporal and causative meanings. In addition, 'then' has an adversative meaning in Singapore Mandarin, but this meaning is not present in Singapore English.

As a pragmatic marker, 'then' has a variety of functions in Singapore Mandarin, such as marking requests for confirmation, functioning as fillers, highlighting, connecting topics and subtopics, and quoting. In addition, 'then' in Singapore English is used when stating examples. However, this function is not present in Singapore Mandarin.

Through comparisons of the pragmatic usage of 'then' in Singapore Mandarin and Singapore English, this paper concludes that both languages exhibit differences in certain functions. This possibly implies that the usage of English discourse marker 'then' has no major influence in Singapore Mandarin.