Chapter 1

Singaporean Hokkien Adjectives

I begin this chapter first by mapping out the diaspora of Hokkien speakers globally. Following that, I list the various names by which this language is being referred to. Next, I describe the orthography used to write this language followed with a phonological and a grammatical sketch. After that, I present the methodological approach of this thesis and the literature review of previous studies in this language. Then, I state the objectives, propose the hypothesis and define the scope of study in this thesis. Finally, I end this chapter by reporting the limitations encountered while conducting this thesis as well as providing definitions of technical terms addressed in this thesis, and offering the possible contributions of this thesis to future scholaristic works.

1.1 The Hokkien Population

Hokkien is a Southern Min language belonging to the Sinitic Branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Although there are a significant number of speakers of this language (approximately 49 million), it is not recognized as a major language due to political issues of the People's Republic of China. Speakers of this language according to the Ethnologue[1] (Lewis 2009) are scattered from the southern region of the People's Republic China down to as far as the State of Brunei Darussalam. To be precise, the geographical spread of this language can be located in the following areas: the Republic of China (Taiwan), the People's Republic of China, Thailand, Malaysia, the Republic of Singapore, the Republic of Philippines, the Republic of Indonesia and the State of Brunei Darussalam. The number of speakers in Taiwan account for approximately 15 million (1997), which is estimated to be 66.7 percent of the nation's population (1993). In Mainland China, the number of speakers is approximately 25.7 million (1984) and that number is estimated to be 2.5 percent of the total population of the country. For Thailand, there are estimated to be 17,600 speakers of this language which is approximately 0.3 percent of the total population. The numbers of speakers in Malaysia is approximately 24,600 people residing in

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[1] The figures presented in Section 1.1 are obtained via Ethnologue

Sabah (1980). In Singapore, the number of speakers approximates 736 thousand people which accounts roughly for 28.8 percent of the total population (1993). For the Philippines, the number of speakers of this language is estimated to be about 5 to 6 thousand which approximates 98.7 percent of the Chinese population residing in the country. Indonesia has approximately 700 thousand people speaking this language mainly in Java and Bali (1982) and Brunei has about 10 thousand speakers (1979). The Ethnologue also states that there are speakers of this language in the United States of America. However, whether the number is significant or not is obscure.

1.2 The Hokkien Language

Hokkien is called by various names e.g. Fujian, Fukien, Fulao and Hoklo, etc. There are several varieties of Hokkien. The variety that is considered the most prestigious is the Xiamen variant spoken in the southern region of Fujian province, Guangdong province and several other scattered areas in Mainland China. The Xiamen variant is also spoken in Taiwan despite the fact that the local one, being the Taiwanese variant, exists as well. Nonetheless, the two variants are mutually intelligible. On the other hand, other Southern Min varieties such as Teochew and Hainanese are less mutually intelligible or totally unintelligible with Hokkien. The former is lexically and phonologically similar to Hokkien whereas the latter is totally different from the other Southern Min varieties mentioned above.

Apart from the Xiamen variant, it is worthy of mention that there are two other variants of Hokkien; the Quanzhou and the Zhangzhou language variants. These two variants are mainly spoken in Southern Fujian and they vary from each other to a slight extent in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation. The Xiamen variant is a hybrid of both the Quanzhou and Zhangzhou variants, as it contains vocabulary and pronunciation belonging to both variants.

The Taiwanese variant is also a hybrid of the two abovementioned variants, differing from the Xiamen variant in terms of the combination of vocabulary and pronunciation. The term "hybrid" is applied to this linguistic phenomena in order to explain the way a word is uttered in terms of morphological composition and phonological make up. A word in the Xiamen variety of Hokkien may be of the same pronunciation to the Quanzhou variety. On the other hand, another word in the Xiamen variety may be of the same vocabulary to the Zhangzhou variety. Applying this term "hybrid" further leads to the realization that a Hokkien variant may have a

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X:Y ratio of Quanzhou to Zhangzhou vocabulary/ pronunciation similarities while another variant might have a A:B ratio of Quanzhou to Zhangzhou vocabulary/ pronunciation similarities. The representation of the comparison of the ratios X:Y to A:B demonstrates the fact that different variants of Hokkien have a undeterminable ratio of Quanzhou/ Zhangzhou resemblances in vocabulary and pronunciation.

Other than the major variants of Hokkien found in Southern Fujian province of Mainland China and in Taiwan, there are also regional varieties spoken in other parts of the world especially in the region between East Asia and Southeast Asia. To mention a few, they are Penang Hokkien and Singaporean Hokkien. The former variety is spoken in Penang state of Malaysia and the latter in Singapore. The latter variety is the variety that is discussed in this thesis and will therefore be referred to as Singaporean Hokkien hereafter to correspond to the thesis title.

1.2.1 Hokkien Orthography

Hokkien is traditionally written in Sinitic script along with innovated characters exclusive to that place where the language is used depending on necessity of usage. Due to these characters, which are not standardized, confusion often occurs in written communication. For instance, if a Mainland Hokkien character is used in Singapore the speakers of Singaporean Hokkien may not be able to understand what is being written and vice versa. Apart from Sinitic characters, The Roman alphabet is also used to write Hokkien. The Presbyterian missionaries in Mainland China were the first to develop them and the indigenous Presbyterian Church in Taiwan developed them further. For other places like Singapore, there is a tendency for Hokkien to be transcribed in a non Sinitic method by utilizing Roman letters without any tone indications. For this thesis, I shall transcribe all utterances in IPA with tone markers.

1.3 Singaporean Hokkien Phonological Sketch

The focus of this thesis is on Singaporean Hokkien, which is not the same as the prestigious and standard Xiamen variant. Therefore, the phonological inventory of Singaporean Hokkien may or may not be identical to its Xiamen counterpart. As a result, this is a tentative phonological sketch of the language and the sketch may or may deviate from the standard language variety in various degrees.

1.3.1 Singaporean Hokkien Consonant Chart

This consonant chart is a tentative chart of consonant sounds which are realized phonetically from the data collected for the thesis. It is not based on a systematic phonological analysis of Singaporean Hokkien.

Table 1. Singaporean Hokkien Consonant Chart

	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Alveolar	Alveo-Palatal	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Voiceless Aspirated Stop	p^h		t^h			k^h	
Voiceless Unaspirated Stop	p		t			k	ʔ
Voiced Stop	b					g	
Nasal	m		n			ŋ	
Voiceless Aspirated Affricate				ts^h			
Voiceless Unaspirated Affricate				ts			
Voiced Affricate				dz			
Voiceless Fricative			s				h
Lateral approximant			l				
Glide	w				y		

1.3.2 Singaporean Hokkien Vowel Chart

The number of vowels in Singaporean Hokkien charted in this thesis is a partial one due to the fact that the researcher deems that the data collected is insufficient for a complete analysis.

Table 2. Singaporean Hokkien Vowel Chart

	Front		Mid		Back	
	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded
Close	i		ɨ			u
Close-Mid	e					o
Open			a			

1.3.3 Singaporean Hokkien Tone Chart

According to a Hokkien language learning book and other linguistic sources, there are 8 tones present in this language. However, the researcher has not conducted a systematic study of Singaprean Hokkien and therefore the tones represented in this thesis may not be complete. As presented in Table 3, there are 5 tones discovered while exploring adjectives in this thesis.

Table 3. Singaporean Hokkien Tone Chart

Tone Number	Tone Description	Examples
44	High Level	ts^him^{44} 'deep'
42	High Falling	gwa^{42} 'I'
24	Low Rising	hin^{24} 'dizzy'
33	Mid Level	ts^ham^{33} 'mix'
21	Low Falling	lak^{21} 'six'

1.3.3.1 Singaporean Hokkien Tone Sandhi

Tone sandhi is a very prominent phonological feature in Sinitic languages and Singaporean Hokkien is no exception. Nonetheless, the aim of this thesis is to provide grammatical insights of Singaporean Hokkien and thus tone sandhi will not be discussed in great detail. Despite the fact that tone sandhi is not accounted for in this thesis, the researcher is aware of its prevalence and observed the effect it has on

data throughout the grammatical study of adjectives in Singaporean Hokkien. The effects of tone sandhi on Singaporean Hokkien are included in Appendix A.

1.4 Singaporean Hokkien Grammatical Sketch

Singaporean Hokkien is an analytic language. A sentence is made up of sequences of free morphemes strung together. Each word is composed of a single morpheme with intact meaning. Though the structure of this language is considered analytical, words can be constituted by the use of prefixes or suffixes other than being expressed by the use of separate words. The general word order of Singaporean Hokkien is Subject-Verb-Object. Nevertheless, the typological pattern of this language is similar to Mandarin in that many grammatical structures of Singaporean Hokkien follow the Subject-Object-Verb sequence.

The modifying configuration of Singaporean Hokkien is left-branch modification. This type of modification is reflected by the occurrence of the adjective which precedes the head noun, the adverb which also precedes the adjective and the relative clause which has a head noun following it. As it is a language located in the eastern part of the world and in the East to Southeast Asian linguistic area, the Singaporean Hokkien noun classifier construction is prevalent and sentence particles are not uncommon. Question words do not get moved to the initial position of a sentence and question particles occur in sentence final position. Zero Anaphora is also frequently employed in discourse to indicate the presence of an already established participant in a narrative.

1.5 Methodology

This thesis has been conducted by the following procedures: data collection, which consisted of transcription, translation and checking. The researcher employed multilingual elicitation in acquiring data from the language resource persons, who commanded a multitude of other languages other than Singaporean Hokkien. The main language used in acquiring oral data was Mandarin as it was the language both the researcher and language resource persons were most comfortable with. There were two language resource persons whom the researcher elicited data from; Ms. Suat Hong Tan and Mr. Teng Wah Tan.

The first language resource person is Ms. Suat Hong Tan, who is the aunt of the researcher. She is 71 years old. Ms. Tan was born in Singapore. When she was nine

years old, the entire family moved to Pontien, Malaysia. Five years later, the family moved back to Singapore and she has lived in Singapore since. Ms. Tan is a retired Mandarin teacher who taught in grade school. She obtained a teacher's diploma after three years of training at the Teacher's Training College of Singapore. Before that, she completed her high school education of Grade Three which is equivalent to Matayom Six by Thai standard.

Ms. Tan speaks six languages: 1) Singaporean Hokkien, 2) Mandarin, 3) Cantonese, 4) Teochew, 5) Bahasa Melayu and 6) English. She is most fluent in Singaporean Hokkien as it is the ethnic tongue spoken in the family domain. Mandarin is her second most dominant tongue due to the fact that it is the language used in her teaching career. Cantonese is her third language which is used to communicate with other members of the society in Singapore who are usually ethnic Cantonese. Teochew is her fourth language because of the genetical resemblance between Singaporean Hokkien and Teochew which are both languages belonging to the Southern Min branch of the Sinitic language family. Moreover, her husband is of Teochew descent. Bahasa Melayu is her fifth dominant language due to the reason that she spent five years in Malaysia and as a result picked it up as a language used to communicate with ethnic Malays. English is her least dominant language due to the fact that she attended a Mandarin medium school. Of all of the languages she knows, it is only English that she tends to engage in one-way communication; she has a tendency to be able to listen better than speak.

Ms. Tan's father was born in Xiamen, Fujien Province, the People's Republic of China. Her mother was born in Singapore. Both her parents are of Hokkien ethnicity and therefore speak Hokkien as the language of communication. They both lived in Singapore and her mother passed away due to tuberculosis when Ms. Tan was only a year of age. The researcher utilized a combination of Mandarin and Singaporean Hokkien to elicit oral data from Ms. Tan. Her grammaticality judgements were the most natural of the two language resource persons due to limited non-Sinitic language contact and influence.

The second language resource person is Mr. Teng Wah Tan. He is Ms. Tan's half brother and the father of the researcher. Mr. Tan is 67 years old and was born in Singapore. Like his half sister, when he was five he moved to Pontien in Malaysia with his family. He spent five years living there before going back to Singapore. When he was forty-five years of age, he retired early due to poor health and

migrated to Thailand and has been living there since. He first lived in Pang Mo Puang Village, Pasak Sub-District, Chiang Saen District, Chiang Rai Province during the beginning of his migration. He lived there for four years before moving to Chiang Mai for the sake of his children's education. Mr. Tan lived in Nai Fun Residence, Padad Sub-District, Muang District, Chiang Mai Province for 7 years before moving to Hod District to venture into Longan plantation business. He currently resides in Nong Baen Village, Hang Dong Sub-District, Hod District, Chiang Mai Province and has been living there for 9 years. Mr. Tan is a once-retired businessman who now has become a longan cultivator. He holds a pre-university degree which is equivalent to Matayom Six by Thai standard.

Mr. Tan speaks seven languages: 1) Singaporean Hokkien, 2) Mandarin, 3) Teochew, 4) English, 5) Cantonese, 6) Thai and 7) Bahasa Melayu. He is most proficient at Singaporean Hokkien as it is his mother tongue and the language of communication used most extensively in the family. Mandarin counts as his second language due to the reason that he was educated in Mandarin medium. Teochew is his third best language as it is very similar to Singaporean Hokkien in terms of phonology and grammar. In fact, his best friend is of Teochew ethnicity and he picked up the language by communicating with his friend's family members and the Teochew in Singapore are considered a major community as well. Mr. Tan speaks English as his fourth language due to the fact that he once dealt with business selling fitness equipment both domestically and internationally. Cantonese as his fifth language is the language used to communicate with Cantonese people residing in both Singapore and Malaysia. Thai is his sixth language as he learned it while living in Thailand. As he did not receive formal and proper education in Thai, his vocabulary is a mix of Northen Thai and Standard Thai. He speaks Thai with a dominant Chinese accent and sometimes aligns his Thai grammar with Sinitic influence. Behasa Melayu is his least dominant lanaguge as he has not been in contact with Malay speakers except in Singapore and Malaysia.

Mr. Tan's father is from Xiamen, Fujien Province, the People's Republic of China who migrated to Singapore. He married Ms. Tan's mother. After she passed away, he married Mr. Tan's mother. Mr. Tan's mother was born in Singapore. Both the parents are of Hokkien ethnicity and thus use Hokkien in the family domain. They both lived in Singapore until the end of their lives. The reasercher elicited oral data from Mr. Tan utilizing a variety of languages. The most commonly used language was Mandarin as the researcher had limited competence in Singaporean Hokkien. The

researcher also had limited competence in Mandarin. When he was at loss of words, he resorted to English or Thai. Mr. Tan was considered less natural then Ms. Tan in terms of grammaticality judgement due to the fact that he had had more contact with non-Sinitic languages especially Thai. Moreover, Mr. Tan had a tendency to respond to the researcher's questions after lengthy ponderances. Upon inquiring why he took such a long time to answer certain questions, he related that he wanted to supply best examples in explaining ideas. As a result, he may have thought too hard and therefore provided less natural language data.

Data collection was conducted by collecting oral data. The collected oral data consisted of utterances that contained adjectives. The adjectives were discovered by the utterances of them in the form of isolated articulation, as part of a phrase, as part of a clause and as part of a sentence. Upon completion of data collection, the oral data was transcribed by Leipzig Glossing Rules (www.mpg.de). Data that were interlinearized consisted of sentences, clauses, noun phrases, verb phrases and adjectival phrases. A grammatical analysis was carried out in order to provide a brief grammar sketch.

The data were subsequently scrutinized in detail for all nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and classifiers, and these are characterized for structure and function at both phrase and clause levels. Following that, the identification process of the adjective construction was conducted. The position of occurrence of the adjective was determined by implementing basic syntactic classification and by observing the language from the researcher's native speaker's insight. After that an analysis of adjectives, using an adaptation of Susie Cheng's methodology (1979), was utilized.

A classification of adjectives was established by investigating the internal structure of Singaporean Hokkien adjective formation in terms of phonological and morphological features. Next, the relationship between the adjective and the degree expression was examined to discover how the adjective in Singaporean Hokkien could be modified in terms of grammar. Then, the negation of the adjective is accounted for in terms of grammar and semantics. Finally, a report of findings is presented.

As an outcome of this analysis, an identification of the major constructions in which a Singaporean Hokkien adjective can occur as well as a description of the structures and meanings of such constructions are proposed.

1.6 Literature Review

There have been studies conducted in Southern Min in mostly the sinospheric region of the world. The venue in which the studies have been carried out rendered most works in Mandarin Chinese. Quite a number of researches have been done in Taiwanese Hokkien. However, their availability is in question. The researcher has strived to search for dictionaries but to no avail. For the case of Singaporean Hokkien, the researcher suggests that more studies should be done. The scarcity of data of this language stems from two factors; a lack of a grammatical description in English and the lack of a dictionary. Nonetheless, the researcher has reviewed literature from various sources in order to consider relevant analyses.

Hokkien:

Huang, Chu-Ren. 1992. Adjectival Reduplication in Southern Min: A Study of Morpholexical Rules with Syntactic Effects. Academia Sinica.
This article attempts to explain how morpholexical rules (initially based on Lexical Mapping Theory in Bresnan 1989, Bresnan and Kanerva 1989, and Huang 1991) interact with phonological processes as well as how they affect syntactic and semantic classification of reduplicated adjectives. The theoretical framework was based on Cheng 1981 and Chang 1987.

Tsao, Feng-Fu. 2001. Semantics and Syntax of Verbal and Adjectival Reduplication in Mandarin and Taiwanese Southern Min. Sinitic Grammar: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives, ed. by Hilary Chappell, 285-308. New York: Oxford University Press.
An analytical comparison of reduplication between Mandarin and Taiwanese Southern Min in terms of the discourse feature, radial structure. The radial structure which takes on 'tentativeness' as the focus is used by the two related languages to form reduplication differently. This analysis is utilized to account for adjectival reduplication in this thesis.

Li, Charles N. and Sandra Thompson. 1981. Mandarin Chinese: A Functional Reference Grammar. Berkeley: University of California Press.
A functional grammatical description of Mandarin (which is similar to a certain extent to Hokkien) is adapted in lieu of a grammar of Singaporean Hokkien for which no grammars are available.

Li Dejin and Cheng Meizhen. 1988. A Practical Chinese Grammar for Foreigners. Beijing: Sinolingua.

A brief, yet non-technical explanation of basic grammatical rules of Mandarin Chinese and a useful classification and features in the functions of words and phrases as well. This book is used adapted to account for grammatical structures in Singaporean Hokkien.

Theoretical/ Methodological Approach:

Cheng, Susie S. 1979. A Study of Taiwanese Adjectives. Taiwan: Student Book Co., Ltd.

A practical method of grouping adjectives, describing the constraints of the occurrence of the adjectives, identifying the different types of negation of the adjective and discussing the functions of the adjectival phrase. Cheng's approach in analyzing adjectives serves as the main framework of this study. Her methodologies are adapted and modified in terms of comparison between Taiwanese and Singaporean adjectives.

Philips, Audra and Prang Thiengburanathum. nd. Verb Classes in Thai. Chiang Mai: Payap University.

The modified Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) framework utilized in analyzing verb classes in Thai proved to be most useful for adapting in analyzing Singaporean adjectives, which behaved more like verbs than nouns.

Ayabe, Hiroko. 1994. Reduplicated and Semi-Reduplicated Forms in Thai. Current Issues in Sino-Tibetan Linguistics, ed. By Hajime Kitamura, et al., 883-889. Osaka: Organizing Committee of the 26th ICSTLL.

This study presents the phonological and semantic structure of reduplicated forms of words in Standard Thai. The methodological approach of this paper can be adapted to fit in the analysis of Singaporean Hokkien reduplicated adjectives.

1.7 Objectives

This thesis attempts to explore Singaporean Adjectives by adapting the framework of Susie Cheng (1979). The objectives are threefold as follows:

1. To identify and demonstrate commonly used adjectives in Singaporean Hokkien
2. To categorize Singaporean Hokkien adjectives according to their types of formation

3. To identify and demonstrate possible constructions in which a Singaporean Hokkien adjective can occur as well as describe the structures and meanings of such constructions

1.8 Hypothesis

1. Other than phonology and morphology, semantics also plays a substantial role in determining the forms and functions of adjectives.
2. The functions of the adjectival phrase are discourse driven, having cultural constraints as the motivation of the constitution of such phrases.
3. The outcome of the analysis should help explain typological issues in the Southeast Asian linguistic area.

1.9 Scope

This thesis is centered on oral data which consist of utterances that contain adjectives in isolation, as part of a phrase, as part of a clause and as part of a complete sentence. The spoken data were analyzed and an interlinearization was conducted to come up with a basic grammar overview.

More attention is given to a detailed analysis of adjectival phrase structure, the types of degree expressions that modify it, the negation of it and the functions of the adjectival phrase. I attempt to describe the constraints that constitute an adjective construction, to study the modifications of the adjective, to discuss the method of negating an adjective and to investigate the cultural motivation that determines the functions of the adjectival phrase.

Word classes that lack an apparent interrelationship with the adjective are considered outside the scope of this study. Furthermore, tone sandhi which is a prominent phonological phenomenon in Singaporean Hokkien will not be discussed in any detail as the approach I employ is more of a grammatical one. An estimated outcome of this research is to enable a better understanding of Singaporean Hokkien in the light of how a noun is described in terms of language and culture.

1.10 Limitations

This thesis was conducted on the basis of exclusively oral utterances. Data examples were collected by interviews. The language informants are native Hokkien speakers.

However, they are not monolingual speakers. The wordlist implemented for the research was limited. As the majority of the language resource persons lived in Singapore, the researcher who resides mainly in Thailand had limited time and access to them.

The sentences collected were mostly narratives, and idiosyncrasies which may have occurred during data collection were not accounted for. As mentioned above, the language informants are multilingual and thus emerged the problem of language interference. The informants can not only speak Hokkien but also other languages as well e.g. other Southern Min languages, Non Min languages and non Sinitic languages. Related Southern Min languages such as Teochew and Hainanese, non Min languages such as Mandarin and Cantonese and non Sinitic ones like English and Bahasa Melayu all played a part in interfering with the language resource people's linguistic realization. At times, they would formulate a Hokkien utterance under the influence of the abovementioned languages be it on a phonological, grammatical or morphological scale. These interferences have been borrowed, loaned and assimilated with the variety of Hokkien spoken in Singapore and native speakers from time to time had difficulties in distinguishing Hokkien from other languages due to approximate and prolonged language contact.

Analysis, interlinearization and translation of examples are limited by the fact that the researcher has not enough intuition and competence in Singaporean Hokkien, and has relied on a series of Singaporean Hokkien speakers, to assist him in understanding the data accurately. Coupled with limited competence in Singaporean, the lack of a Singaporean Hokkien dictionary and the lack of a sufficient grammatical description in Singaporean Hokkien also contributed to the limitation of the study.

1.11 Definitions of Technical Terms

Adjective: a lexical item that can take on a degree expression. In this study, the phrase structure rule of the adjectival phrase is as follows: ADJP → (NEG) (ADV) ADJ.

Adjectival phrase: a phrase that consists of an adjective with or without a degree expression and with or without negation. It is a type of stative verb phrase, being a non-action verb phrase.

Degree Expression: a lexical item or construction that answers degree question words like 'to what extent' or 'how much'.

Verb: a lexical item that describes events, actions, states, processes and experiences.

Verb Phrase: the construction of a simple sentence in which the nucleus is the verb.

1.12 Contributions or Benefits of the Thesis

It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to a better and larger body of scholarly work focused on Southern Min languages, which have been little documented in English. So far, not much academic study has been done in this variety of Hokkien. There may be studies done about this language in Chinese. However, there is need to conduct a study in English to expand its recognition to a wider global scale. A study of Singaporean Hokkien adjectives will not only contribute to better documentation of the Southern Min language group, but will also help in distinguishing minute details in different varieties of Hokkien which is a language widely spread over many parts of East and Southeast Asia.