

## Chapter 2

### Types of Singaporean Hokkien Adjectives

This chapter is a discussion of the types of adjectives found in Singaporean Hokkien. Before categorizing the adjectives I discuss relevant word classes to establish criteria that make up word classes. The relevant word classes that are brought up for discussion are as follows: the noun, the verb, the adjective and the adverb. Each word class is discussed by describing grammatical behavior followed by examples and prose explanations to support the claim that makes the word class. Following that, adjectives and verbs which are similar to each other grammatically are differentiated from each other using language examples and prose explanations. Finally, types of adjectives are discussed followed by examples and prose explanations according to the following order: the monosyllabic adjective, the disyllabic adjective, which is subcategorized into simple, compounded and derived disyllabic adjectives and the polysyllabic adjective.

#### 2.1 Relevant Word Classes

In this research, I shall discuss only word classes that are relevant and deserve attention. The word classes that I deem central to this study are as follows: 1) The noun, 2) the verb, 3) the adjective and 4) the adverb. Of the four word classes mentioned above, the adjective is the main focus of discussion while the others are addressed according to their relevance in analyses. Examples of each word class are given according to requirements followed by brief explanations for the sake of clarity. Concepts that call for additional elaboration will have entire sections dedicated to them for discussion in later parts of the study.

##### 2.1.1 The Noun

In identifying nouns of Singaporean Hokkien, I adhere to a generic approach adapted from Givón (1984) based on the following hierarchically arrayed features illustrated in Figure 1.

ENTITY > TEMPORAL > CONCRETE > ANIMATE > HUMAN

**Figure 1. Noun Hierarchy (Adapted from Givón 1984)**

The notion on the leftmost of the Noun Hierarchy is “entity”, which means ‘that which exists’, most commonly refers to an abstract noun. In Singaporean Hokkien, examples of such entity nouns are *hi*<sup>21</sup> *baŋ*<sup>21</sup> ‘hope’, *hɔk*<sup>45</sup> *kyen*<sup>21</sup> *ʔue*<sup>21</sup> ‘the Hokkien language’ or *seŋ*<sup>33</sup> *li*<sup>42</sup> ‘business’.

The notion “temporal”, which means ‘exists at a particular time’ often refers to semi-abstract nouns such as *ni*<sup>24</sup> ‘year’, *gwe*<sup>33</sup> ‘month’ or *tsa*<sup>45</sup> *k<sup>h</sup>i*<sup>42</sup> ‘morning’.

The notion positioned in the middle of the Noun Hierarchy is “concrete”, which means ‘exists in both time and place’, refers to general nouns that have spatial dimensions and other concrete qualities having to do with physical objects such as *tsu*<sup>21</sup> ‘house’, *hɔŋ*<sup>33</sup> ‘wind’ or *swā*<sup>33</sup> ‘mountain’.

The notion “animate”, which means ‘living organism’, refers to concrete nouns that are generally living things such as *be*<sup>42</sup> ‘horse’, *hi*<sup>24</sup> ‘fish’ or *tsyaw*<sup>42</sup> ‘bird’.

The notion on the rightmost of the Noun Hierarchy is “humans”, which means all of the abovementioned features added with the feature ‘be human’, refers to human nouns such as *lo*<sup>24</sup>*kun*<sup>33</sup> ‘doctor’, *peŋ*<sup>21</sup>*yu*<sup>42</sup> ‘friend’ or *syen*<sup>33</sup>*si*<sup>33</sup> ‘teacher’.

If a noun contains a feature of the above hierarchy, it inherently also contains the features to the left of the hierarchy. The noun has grammatical functions. However, that is outside the scope of the thesis and therefore is left out of this study.

### **2.1.2 The Verb**

In the identification of Singaporean Hokkien verbs, I adapted Li and Thompson’s (1981) approach. The fact that they deal with grammar with focus on Mandarin, which is similar to Singaporean Hokkien because they both are languages belonging to the Sinitic family makes their approach a good choice for me to adapt to in order to analyze verbs in Singaporean Hokkien.

Verbs are words that describe events, actions, states, processes, and experiences. They dictate what kind of participants, namely noun phrases, which can possibly occur with them in a sentence. In this thesis, a basic identification of types of verb phrases is illustrated as follows: the transitive and intransitive verb phrase.

Transitive verb phrases are verb phrases that require one or more object complements. The one that requires one object complement is a typical transitive verb phrase as in (1) while the one that requires more than one object complement is a ditransitive verb phrase as in (2).

- (1)    *ʔi*<sup>33</sup>    *ti*<sup>21</sup> *le*<sup>24</sup>    *t<sup>h</sup>aat*<sup>45</sup>    *tsit*<sup>21</sup>    *lyap*<sup>21</sup>    *kyu*<sup>24</sup>
- he (she)                      kick    one                      ball
- 3P                      PROG    V                      NUM    CLF                      D.O
- ‘He (She) is kicking a football.’

- (2)    *ʔi*<sup>33</sup>    *ho*<sup>21</sup>    *gwa*<sup>42</sup>    *tsit*<sup>21</sup>    *pun*<sup>24</sup>    *ts<sup>h</sup>eʔ*<sup>21</sup>
- he (she) give I                      one                      book
- 3P                      V                      I.O                      NUM    CLF                      D.O
- ‘He (She) gave me a book.’

In (1), the object complement *tsit*<sup>21</sup> *lyap*<sup>21</sup> *kyu*<sup>24</sup> ‘a football’ of the transitive verb *t<sup>h</sup>aat*<sup>21</sup> ‘to kick’ is the direct object as it is the participant of the verb to which the action is directed.

In (2), there are three participants in the sentence. In other words, three noun phrases are present. The first noun phrase *ʔi*<sup>33</sup> ‘the third person pronoun’ is the subject of the sentence, being the doer of the action *ho*<sup>21</sup> ‘to give’. The following noun phrases *gwa*<sup>42</sup> ‘the first person pronoun’ and *tsit*<sup>21</sup> *pun*<sup>24</sup> *ts<sup>h</sup>eʔ*<sup>21</sup> ‘a book’ are coded as the indirect object and direct object complements respectively. The noun phrase *tsit*<sup>21</sup> *pun*<sup>24</sup> *ts<sup>h</sup>eʔ*<sup>21</sup> ‘a book’ is the direct object complement, being the entity that is being conveyed whereas the noun phrase *gwa*<sup>42</sup> ‘the first person pronoun’ is the

indirect object complement, being the entity which is not coded as the doer of the action *hɔ<sup>21</sup>* ‘to give’ nor the entity that was directly affected by the action but rather described better as a recipient or goal in terms of semantic roles.

Another interesting fact about the ditransitive verb phrase is that the direct object occurs always after the indirect object, unlike in English where the direct and indirect objects can be transposed in terms of precedence.

A way to test the validity of verbs is to negate them. If the word in question can be negated, it contains qualities that a verb has. An example of negating the verb phrase is given in (3) as follows:

- (3)    *ʔi<sup>33</sup>*    *bo<sup>21</sup>*    *tsya<sup>21</sup>*    *ts<sup>h</sup>ay<sup>21</sup>*
- He (she) not    eat    vegetable
- 3P            NEG    V            D.O
- ‘He (She) does not eat vegetables.’

The underlined part of the sentence shows negation by the occurrence of the negative particle *bo<sup>21</sup>*. Negation most commonly occurs preceding the verb. Another instance of negation is given in (5) where the example negatively responds to the question given in (4).

- (4)    *ʔi<sup>33</sup>*    *lay<sup>24</sup>*    *lyaw<sup>42</sup>*    *bwe<sup>21</sup>*
- He (she)    come    SFP            NEG
- 3P            V            CMPL ASP    QPRT
- ‘Has he (she) come yet?’

Note that the negative particle *bwe<sup>21</sup>* is placed at the end of the sentence to form a question in (4).

(5) (ʔi<sup>33</sup>) a<sup>33</sup> bwe<sup>21</sup> (lay<sup>24</sup>)

he (she) not yet come

3P NEG V

‘(He or she) (has) not (come) yet.’

In (5), the verb *lay*<sup>24</sup> ‘to come’ is negated by the negative particle construction *a*<sup>33</sup> *bwe*<sup>21</sup> ‘not yet’. The third person pronoun as well as the verb has been elided due to zero anaphoric discourse context. The person in question and the verb *lay*<sup>24</sup> ‘to come’ have already been established as schema or background (old) information in (4) thus, rendering the third person pronoun and verb optional in (5). A positive response to (4) is given in (6) as follows:

(6) (ʔi<sup>33</sup>) lay<sup>21</sup> lyaw<sup>42</sup>

He (she) come SFP

3P V CMPL ASP

‘(He or she) has come.’

In responding to a question like in (4), the positive response is to answer with the verb which in this case the verb *lay*<sup>24</sup> ‘to come’ whereas the negative response is to answer with the negative construction *a*<sup>33</sup> *bwe*<sup>21</sup> ‘not yet’.

There are other cases where the negative particle precedes the predicate verb. Furthermore, there are various types of negation in Singaporean Hokkien and that will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Apart from classifying types of verbs according to Li and Thompson’s methodology, there are semantic roles to consider as well. Due to the fact that the focus of this thesis is on adjectives, the concept of semantic roles is left out of this study.

### 2.1.3 The Adjective

In identification of the adjectival word class, I modified Li and Thompson's (1981) as well as Cheng's (1979) methodologies to suit Singaporean Hokkien Adjectives. Before going into detail of this word class, a generic description is deemed necessary for establishing a background in understanding Singaporean Adjectives.

Payne (1997:63) remarks that an adjective is a word that is able to be utilized in a noun phrase in order to indicate certain properties of the head noun of the phrase. He further addresses the problems of adjectives, which occur in almost every language. His claim holds that adjectives, unlike their noun and verb counterparts, cannot be categorized in terms of a prototype as there exists no semantically definable class of concepts that can be universally grouped into a characterization.

That characterization, the adjective word class, lexicalizes properties or characteristics that cannot be determined or varied in terms of time stability. To sum up, they stand somewhere in between nouns and verbs as shown in Figure 2 below:



**Figure 2. Time-Stability Scale of Nouns, Adjectives and Verbs (Adapted from Givón 1984)**

Payne (1997) further explains that adjectives exhibit certain properties such as age (young, old, etc.), dimension (big, little, tall, short, long, etc.), value (good, bad), color (red, yellow, green, etc.), physical characteristics (hard, smooth, light, etc.), shape (round, square, etc.), human propensity (sad, happy, jealous, etc.), and speed (slow, fast, quick), etc.

Adhering to Payne's description of adjectives, I posit several examples of Singaporean Hokkien adjectives by adapting Li and Thompson's functional methodology of example description according to the adjectival properties mentioned above:

### 2.1.3.1 Age adjectives: *sin*<sup>33</sup> ‘new’, *ku*<sup>21</sup> ‘old’, *syaw*<sup>42</sup> *lyen*<sup>21</sup> ‘young’, *law*<sup>21</sup>

‘old’

Note that the adjectives *sin*<sup>33</sup> ‘new’ and *ku*<sup>21</sup> ‘old’ can describe nouns that are generally inanimate in nature like house and car as in (7) and (8) respectively.

(7) *sin*<sup>33</sup> *ts<sup>h</sup>u*<sup>21</sup>

new house

ADJ N

‘A new house.’

(8) *ku*<sup>21</sup> *ts<sup>h</sup>ya*<sup>33</sup>

old car

ADJ N

‘An old car.’

As for the age adjectives *syaw*<sup>42</sup> *lyen*<sup>21</sup> ‘young’ and *law*<sup>21</sup> ‘old’, they modify nouns that are generally humans. Examples of these types of adjectives are given in (9) and (10) respectively.

(9) *syaw*<sup>21</sup> *lyen*<sup>21</sup> *laŋ*<sup>24</sup>

young human

ADJ N

‘Young people.’

(10) *law*<sup>21</sup> *ʔa*<sup>33</sup> *ʔm*<sup>42</sup>

old ah female elder

ADJ DIM N

‘An old lady.’

The explanation offered below is an adaptation of Cheng’s methodology of describing adjectives according to their morphological make-up coupled with original analysis of my own dealing with the semantic content of age adjectives.

For animate nouns like animals, the young are referred to as ‘offspring of animal’. A puppy is called *kaw*<sup>24</sup> *kya*<sup>24</sup> ‘dog offspring’. This construction of animal followed by *kya*<sup>24</sup> ‘offspring’ holds valid for young animals in general. The noun *kya*<sup>24</sup> ‘offspring’ means child when uttered in isolation. When it is preceded by a noun which generally is an animal, the semantic content of *kya*<sup>24</sup> ‘offspring’ shifts from the human domain to the animal domain.

Animals that are old can take on the adjective *law*<sup>21</sup> ‘old’ as a modifier. A cat that is old is called *law*<sup>21</sup> *nyaw*<sup>44</sup> ‘old cat’. For age adjectives, *syaw*<sup>42</sup> *lyen*<sup>21</sup> is used exclusively for humans that are young whereas the noun construction X + *kya*<sup>24</sup> applies only to animals that are young. The adjective *law*<sup>21</sup> is more flexible as it can be used for both humans and animals.

### 2.1.3.2 Dimension adjectives: *twa*<sup>21</sup> ‘big’, *swey*<sup>21</sup> ‘small’

Examples of noun phrases modified by these adjectives are given in (11) and (12) respectively.

(11) *twa*<sup>21</sup> *pat*<sup>45</sup> *tɔ*<sup>42</sup>

big stomach

ADJ N

‘Big stomach.’



Note that in (11), the adjective-noun combination has both a literal and metaphorical meaning. The noun phrase *twa<sup>21</sup> pat<sup>45</sup> t<sup>42</sup>* either means 1) ‘fat’ or 2) ‘pregnant depending on context and these two connotations should be distinguished from reference.

(12) *swey<sup>42</sup> tsya<sup>21</sup>*

small

ADJ CLF

‘A small one.’

The noun phrase in (12) is worthy of notice in that the phrase is composed of merely an adjective *swey<sup>42</sup>* ‘small’ followed by a classifier *tsya<sup>21</sup>* (used for nouns that have limbs) and the head noun is not present. There is discourse context excluded from this sentence. The elided noun has been established in a sentence uttered before (12) and therefore zero anaphora is applied to it, rendering it old information that can be deleted yet retrievable by referring to context clues in earlier utterances. The example sentence in (12) is actually a response to the example below:

a) *to<sup>42</sup> lo<sup>42</sup> tsit<sup>21</sup> tsya<sup>21</sup> ∅*

where one

QPRT NUM CLF N

‘Which one?’

b) *swey<sup>42</sup> tsya<sup>21</sup> (ʔe<sup>21</sup>) ∅*

small of

ADJ CLF NOM N

‘The small one’

As shown in a), a context has been established by questioning in specification between two entities. The interlinearization suggests that a noun has been already omitted in the utterance. This means that the omitted noun has already been understood by both the questioner and answerer. Therefore, the response is as

shown in b) by specifying the selected entity which in this example is the small one *swey*<sup>42</sup> *tsya*?<sup>21</sup>.

### 2.1.3.3 Value Adjectives: *ho*<sup>42</sup> ‘good’, *p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>42</sup> ‘bad’

Value adjectives in Singaporean Hokkien do not only function as modifiers to noun phrases but also have other functions as well. Section of 2.4.3.1.1 is dedicated to the study of these adjectives.

### 2.1.3.4 Color Adjectives: *an*<sup>24</sup> ‘red’, *ɿiŋ*<sup>24</sup> ‘yellow’, *ts<sup>h</sup>i*<sup>33</sup> ‘green’

Like other types of adjectives, color adjectives upon preceding nouns can constitute compound nouns. The meanings of the compounds vary in a continuum of being unchanged, being changed while still retaining certain features of the both unbound morphemes in the compounds to being changed without retaining any related meanings pertaining to the adjectives and nouns in the compounds. Each example of noun compounding is given in (13), (14) and (15) according to the alterations of meanings in order of mentioning.

(13) *an*<sup>21</sup> *ts<sup>h</sup>ya*<sup>33</sup>

red car

ADJ N

‘A car that is red.’

(14) *an*<sup>21</sup> *pit*<sup>21</sup>

red pen

ADJ N

‘A red inked pen.’

(15) *aŋ<sup>21</sup> mɔ<sup>24</sup> (laŋ<sup>24</sup>)*

red hair human

ADJ N N

‘A Caucasian.’

In (13) the new compound and the head noun are still the same entity in terms of meaning, being still a car. In (14), the head noun and the compound have related meanings instead of a one to one relationship as in the abovementioned example. The color adjective serves not to describe the pen in terms of color but rather describes the function of the pen, meaning that the pen writes in red and not a pen that is red in color.

In (15), the meaning of the compound becomes even less related to the adjective and noun uttered in isolation. This compound is actually a cultural description of a foreigner who may or may not possess the features as uttered in the sentence. During colonial times, foreigners who came to Singapore were mostly blond haired people from various parts of Europe. The people at that time might not know how to describe the color of the hair of the foreigners, thus using the color red to describe blond. The result is a coined word *aŋ<sup>21</sup> mɔ<sup>24</sup> (laŋ<sup>24</sup>)* literally meaning ‘red haired’ which is used as a reference to all foreigners even though not all of them have blond hair.

### 2.1.3.5 Physical Characteristic Adjectives: *teŋ<sup>21</sup>* ‘hard’, *ku<sup>t</sup><sup>44</sup>* ‘smooth’

Adjectives pertaining to physical characteristics in Singaporean Hokkien are less likely to modify the noun phrase by preceding it. Rather, they are more predicative in nature as illustrated in (16):

(16) *t<sup>h</sup>aw<sup>21</sup> k<sup>h</sup>a<sup>33</sup> ku<sup>t</sup><sup>44</sup>*

floor smooth

N ADJ

‘The floor is slippery.’

As the free translation suggests, it is more natural for the adjective *kut*<sup>44</sup> ‘smooth’ or ‘slippery’ to follow the noun phrase *t<sup>h</sup>aw*<sup>21</sup> *k<sup>h</sup>a*<sup>33</sup> ‘floor’. It is observed that the adjective *kut*<sup>44</sup> ‘smooth’ or ‘slippery’ functions as a predicate following the subject *t<sup>h</sup>aw*<sup>21</sup> *k<sup>h</sup>a*<sup>33</sup> ‘floor’. For the expression ‘the slippery/ smooth floor’, it is more appropriate to use the ADJ *ʔe*<sup>21</sup> N construction and thus yielding the following expression: *kut*<sup>44</sup> *ʔe*<sup>21</sup> *t<sup>h</sup>aw*<sup>21</sup> *k<sup>h</sup>a*<sup>33</sup>.

### 2.1.3.6 Shape Adjectives: *ʔi*<sup>24</sup> ‘round’

Adjectives of this type follow noun phrases like their physical characteristic counterparts. An example sentence is given in (17).

(17) *kyu*<sup>24</sup> *si*<sup>21</sup> *ʔi*<sup>24</sup> *ʔe*<sup>24</sup>

ball	is	round	Of
N	V	ADJ	NOM

‘A ball is round.’

Note that the adjective in (17) is followed by the nominalizer particle *ʔe*<sup>21</sup> ‘of’. This particle normally denotes possession in a genitive noun phrase as in (18).

(18) *gwa*<sup>42</sup> *ʔe*<sup>21</sup> *kyu*<sup>24</sup>

I	of	ball
1P	GEN	N

‘My ball.’

In the case of (17), the particle *ʔe*<sup>212</sup> ‘of’ indicates nominalization instead of possession due to the fact that the subject noun phrase *kyu*<sup>24</sup> ‘ball’ is predicated by the copula *si*<sup>21</sup> ‘is’ and therefore requires a nominal construction in the object position. The shape adjective *ʔi*<sup>24</sup> ‘round’ in this case is more predicative than nominative. To comply with the aforementioned constraint, the nominalizer *ʔe*<sup>21</sup> ‘of’ is suffixed to the adjective. In order to come up with the expression ‘a/ the round ball’, consider the example given in (19).

<sup>2</sup> The items *ʔe*<sup>21</sup> and *ʔe*<sup>24</sup> both refer to the nominalizer particle. They exhibit different tones due to the influence of tone sandhi.

(19) *ʔi<sup>24</sup> ʔe<sup>21</sup> kyu<sup>24</sup>*

round of ball

ADJ NOM N

'a/ the round ball'

Token (19) complies with the ADJ *ʔe<sup>21</sup>* N construction to yield the free translation 'a/ the round ball'. I have assigned the grammatical label of *ʔe<sup>21</sup>* 'of' as a nominalizer due to the reason that I analyzed the shape adjective being more predicative than nominative in nature. For the shape adjective to fit in the noun phrase construction, the nominalizer particle *ʔe<sup>21</sup>* 'of' has to be attached following the adjective before modifying the head noun. If I were to assign *ʔe<sup>21</sup>* 'of' a genitive, it would be ungrammatical because two noun phrases are required to demonstrate possession as shown in (18). The example given in (19) is composed of an adjective and a noun.

#### 2.1.3.7 Human Propensity Adjectives: *kek<sup>45</sup> sim<sup>33</sup>* 'sad', *hwā<sup>21</sup> hī<sup>42</sup>* 'happy'

Adjectives belonging to this class also cannot modify a noun phrase by preceding it. They behave more like physical characteristic adjectives as illustrated in (16).

An example of human propensity adjectives is as follows:

(20) *ʔi<sup>33</sup> kek<sup>42</sup> sim<sup>33</sup>*

he (she) tense heart

3P V N

'He (she) is sad.'

In (20), the adjective *kek<sup>42</sup> sim<sup>33</sup>* 'sad' is a compound noun comprised of a verb and a noun. The verb *kek<sup>21</sup>* is better described as an action of voluntary muscle tightening either in moving bowels or as an action of getting ready to be physically assaulted. This action is associated with negative feelings. These two concepts, having difficulties in defecating and feeling tense in physical confrontations, share a radial structure (Lakoff 1987). The core meaning of the verb *kek<sup>21</sup>* is having difficulty. For the noun *sim<sup>33</sup>* 'heart', it is an example of structural metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) which involves the structuring of one concept along the parameters by which another is structured. In this case the noun *sim<sup>33</sup>* 'heart' is conceptualized according

to this idea: HEART IS A MENTAL STATE. In prefixing the verb *kek*<sup>42</sup> ‘to be tense’ with the noun *sim*<sup>33</sup> ‘heart’, the compound noun is translated as ‘having difficulties mentally’ which means ‘sad’. Like its physical characteristic and shape counterparts, human propensity adjectives need to be followed by the nominalizer *ʔe*<sup>21</sup> ‘of’ before modifying a head noun. Thus, to come up with the expression ‘a/ the sad person’, the construction is as follows: *kek*<sup>42</sup> *sim*<sup>33</sup> *ʔe*<sup>21</sup> *laŋ*<sup>24</sup>.

### 2.1.3.8 Speed Adjectives: *ban*<sup>21</sup> ‘slow’, *kin*<sup>42</sup> ‘fast’

These adjectives, like their physical characteristic, shape and human propensity counterparts, are predicative in nature. They do not modify noun phrases by precedence. Conversely, they follow noun phrases. An example of a speed adjective is given in (21).

(21)     *ʔi*<sup>33</sup>     *ban*<sup>21</sup>

he (she)   Slow

3P         ADJ

‘He (She) is slow.’

Example (21) resembles examples (16), (17) and (20) in that the adjective occurs in the predicate slot. The adjective *ban*<sup>21</sup> ‘slow’ is more predicative than nominative like its physical characteristic, shape and human propensity counterparts. Therefore, these adjectives need to be nominalized to become less predicative in order to function grammatically as noun modifiers. In other words, adjectives that are more predicative in nature need to be nominalized before they can precede nouns and modify them.

According to the abovementioned data examples, it is observed that Singaporean Hokkien adjectives can be categorized into two groups: 1) adjectives that can directly precede the noun and 2) adjectives that cannot directly precede the noun as illustrated in Table 4.

**Table 4. Singaporean Hokkien Adjective Classification according to Grammatical and Semantic Features**

	ADJ N	ADJ $\text{?e}^{21}$ N
Age:	+	+
Dimension:	+	+
Value:	+	+
Color:	+	+
Physical Characteristic:	-	+
Shape:	-	+
Human Propensity:	-	+
Speed:	-	+

In Singaporean Hokkien, adjectives can be classified according to their occurrences preceding the head noun in the noun phrase. There are two types of constructions in which the adjectives can be grouped into: 1) the ADJ N construction and 2) the ADJ  $\text{?e}^{21}$  N construction as illustrated in Table 4.

Adjectives that can take on both the ADJ N and ADJ  $\text{?e}^{21}$  N constructions are those that exhibit age, dimension, value and color. On the other hand, adjectives that can only take on the ADJ  $\text{?e}^{21}$  N construction are those that exhibit physical characteristic, shape, human propensity and speed.

The former types of adjectives that can take on both kinds of constructions exhibit characteristics that incline more to the nominative side of the word class scale. On the other hand, the latter types of adjective that can only take on one kind of construction exhibit characteristics that incline more to the predicative side of the word class scale.

From the evidence posited in abovementioned examples, it is found that Singaporean Hokkien adjectives portray characteristics belonging to both nouns and

verbs depending on what types of characteristics they portray. Nevertheless, they are more predicate-like than nominal-like. Section 2.2 supports the claim.

#### **2.1.4 The Adverb**

In identification of adverbs, I adhere to a general description which is presented below. Payne (1997:69) terms adverbs as a “catch all” category as they cannot be classified as a noun, a verb or an adjective. The semantic content of an adverb may or may not cover the following characteristics: manner, time, direction/ location, evidentiality, etc.

In this study of Singaporean Hokkien, adverbs are observed to the limit of how they modify the adjectives in terms of degree. Grammatically, Singaporean Hokkien adverbs precede adjectives. One of the functions of adverbs is that they express degree and therefore are analyzed as a part of the degree expression which Chapter 3 has been devoted to.

### **2.2 Distinguishing Adjectives from Verbs**

As observed in 2.1.3, Singaporean Hokkien adjectives are found to be of two types. The first type is adjectives that can modify a noun by preceding it without any intermediate constituent or constituents occurring in between. The second type is adjectives that cannot occur in front of a noun and therefore have to follow the noun in the predicative position.

In general, Singaporean Hokkien adjectives can be set in the predicative position of a sentence, In other words, adjectives are actually verbs. I support this argument with two kinds of evidences: 1) Adjectives and verbs are able to occur in the predicative slot of a sentence without the presence of a copula. 2) Adjectives and verbs can be negated. Examples of these evidences are given in (22), (23), (24) and (25) respectively.



(22)     $\eta i^{33}$              $swi^{42}$

he (she)    good looking

3P            ADJ

‘He (She) is good looking.’

(23)     $\eta i^{33}$      $k^h un^{21}$

he (she)    sleep

3P            V

‘He (She) sleeps’    or    ‘He (She) is sleeping.’

As illustrated in (22) and (23), the adjective  $swi^{42}$  ‘good looking’ and the verb  $k^h un^{21}$  ‘sleep’ both occur in the predicative slot following the subject noun phrase  $\eta i^{33}$  ‘third person pronoun’. Furthermore, they both can also take on negation as illustrated in (24) and (25) respectively.

(24)     $\eta i^{33}$      $bo^{21}$              $swi^{42}$

he (she)    not    good looking

3P            NEG    ADJ

‘He (She) is not good looking.’

(25)     $\eta i^{33}$              $bo^{21}$      $k^h un^{21}$

he (she)    not    sleep

3P            NEG    V

‘He (She) does (did) not sleep.’    or    ‘He (She) is (was) not sleeping.’

Examples (24) and (25), are the negative counterparts of (22) and (23). Negation in Singaporean Hokkien is exhibited by inserting the negative particle before the adjective or the verb.

From the evidence illustrated in the abovementioned examples, I conclude that adjectives and verbs share the following identical grammatical features: 1) They can occur in the predicative position of an utterance and 2) they can be preceded by a negative particle.

From an empirical point of view, one may assume that adjectives and verbs in Singaporean Hokkien belong in the same word class. However, I would differ from this viewpoint by looking at these two word classes again from another perspective. I deem it more appropriate to distinguish adjectives from verbs by utilizing Role and Reference Grammar. Van Valin (2005:31) classifies verbs based on a Vendlerian Aktionsart approach. His methodology was applied to studies of verbs in various other languages, specifically Thai, which was carried out by Philips and Thiengburanathum (n.d). Thai verbs behave similarly to Singaporean Hokkien verbs and it has been observed that verbs in a lot of languages especially in the Southeast Asian peninsula share the same phenomenon.

Philips and Thiengburanathum designed a syntactic test to classify Thai verbs and identified seven verb classes: 1) Adjectival states, 2) verbal states, 3) achievements, 4) semelfactives, 5) accomplishments, 6) activities and 7) active accomplishments. Each verb class was tested according to the presence or absence of four conceptual properties: [ $\pm$  static], [ $\pm$  dynamic], [ $\pm$  telic] and [ $\pm$  punctual]. Adjectival and verbal states exhibit the [+static] property; they encode a condition which is opposed to an event (Philips and Thiengburanathum n.d:169). It is this feature that explains the similarity between adjectives and verbs in Singaporean Hokkien.

In order to come up with a clear cut distinction between an adjective and a verb, the comparative marker test was conducted in Philips and Thiengburanathum's study of Thai verbs. The result was that the adjective can take on the comparative marker as a modifier whereas the verb cannot do so. I base my methodology on theirs to identify the difference between an adjective and a verb for Singaporean Hokkien. Other than utilizing a comparative marker, I have modified the test by utilizing a degree expression instead and therefore the test is a degree expression test.

As stated above, I proposed that in Singaporean Hokkien adjectives and verbs are not of the same word class. The argument I provide is exemplified in the following claim: Singaporean Hokkien adjectives have the ability to take on degree expressions

whereas verbs do not. This statement is further supported by example sentences given below:

(26)     $\eta i^{33}$      $tsin^{33}$      $swi^{42}$   
  
he (she)    real    good looking  
3P        ADV    ADJ  
  
'He (She) is very good looking.'

(27) \*     $\eta i^{33}$      $tsin^{33}$      $k^{h}un^{21}$   
  
he (she)    real    sleep  
3P        ADV    V  
  
'He (She) very sleeps.'    or    'He (She) is very sleeping.'

Example (27) substantiates the abovementioned assertion that adjectives and verbs are different. The verb  $k^{h}un^{21}$  'sleep' cannot take on the intensifier particle  $tsin^{33}$  and therefore fails the degree expression test. On the other hand, example (26) in which the sentence has an adjective  $swi^{42}$  'good looking' passes the degree expression test as the adjective can take on the intensifier particle.

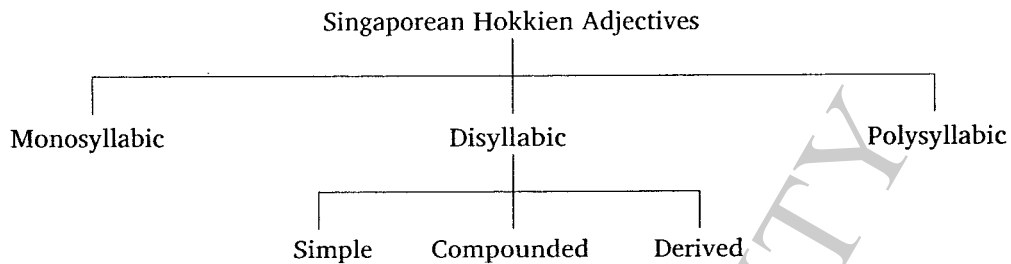
So far, a concise observation of relevant word classes has been carried out in order to provide the reader with a basic background of understanding Singaporean Hokkien adjectives along with other word classes that are relevant to the analyses conducted throughout the study. The remainder of this chapter deals with the classification of adjectives according to the following criteria: Morphology and phonology.

Morphology concerns the number of morphemes that make up a syllable in an adjective. According to morphological criteria, adjectives can be categorized into two types: simple and complex.

Phonology deals with phonemic features of the adjective such as syllabicity, alliteration and rhyming. According to phonological criteria, adjectives can be of monosyllabic, disyllabic and polysyllabic types. A general overview of Singaporean

Hokkien Adjective classification according to morphological and phonological features is presented in Table 2 as follows:

**Table 5. Singaporean Hokkien Adjective Classification according to phonological and Morphological Features (Adapted from Cheng 1979:17)**



### 2.3 Monosyllabic Adjectives

In Singaporean Hokkien, a monosyllabic adjective is an adjective that is composed of one morpheme. Its ability to occur in isolation meaningfully accentuates its characteristic in being a free morpheme. Monosyllabic adjectives can undergo reduplication to become XX forms. An example of a monosyllabic adjective is given in Figure 3 as follows:

ADJ	→	ADJ ADJ
<i>swi</i> <sup>42</sup>		<i>swi</i> <sup>24</sup> <i>swi</i> <sup>42</sup>
‘good looking’		‘very good looking’ or ‘rather good looking’

**Figure 3. Reduplication of a Monosyllabic Adjective in Singaporean Hokkien**

An interesting observation in Figure 3 above is the free translation of the reduplicated adjective. The reduplicated adjective *swi*<sup>24</sup> *swi*<sup>42</sup> can be either translated as ‘very good looking’ or ‘rather good looking’. The meaning is dependent on the context.

Another observation is the tone alternation in the first syllable of the reduplicated adjective, which is different from the second. This phenomenon is tone sandhi, of which the tone of one syllable is being altered due to the influence of another nearby.

Even though tone sandhi in Singaporean Hokkien is not discussed in any detail, I recognize the occurrence of this phenomenon and acknowledge any consequences it may convey to the data presented in this thesis due to the fact that the examples collected in this study do not constitute the entire tonal context of this language. Further elaboration on reduplication will be discussed in section 3.5.

## 2.4 Disyllabic Adjectives

Singaporean Hokkien disyllabic adjectives are adjectives that comprise of two syllables. Disyllabic adjectives can be categorized into three types: 1) simple disyllabic adjectives 2) compounded disyllabic adjectives and 3) derived disyllabic adjectives. Each type of disyllabic adjective can be identified according to their morphological formation.

The simple disyllabic adjective is distinguished from the other two by its unique morphological feature in that the entire adjective cannot be further divided into two words as they do not have the ability to function meaningfully when occurring in isolation.

The compounded disyllabic adjective is analyzed as being formed by a combination of two words which are free morphemes. Each composite element can function meaningfully when occurring in isolation.

The derived disyllabic adjective differs from the two formerly mentioned in the way it is formed. Of the two composite elements in this type of disyllabic adjective, either the preceding or the following element is a bound morpheme while the other one is a free morpheme. The bound morpheme, unlike its free counterpart, needs to be attached to the free morpheme of the disyllabic adjective despite the fact that it has a meaningful function of its own. Furthermore, transposing the order of each syllable will not yield a meaningful function as well.

The meaning of a disyllabic adjective can be realized only when the syllables of the adjective is uttered in correct sequence. Additional elaboration of each type of disyllabic adjective in Singaporean Hokkien is carried out in sections 2.4.1, 2.4.2 and 2.4.3.

### 2.4.1 Simple Disyllabic Adjectives

This category of disyllabic adjectives is analyzed as a single morpheme due to the fact that both syllables of the adjective contain no meaning when occurring in isolation. They cannot stand on their own to function meaningfully or in other words they are bound morphemes. An example of simple disyllabic adjectives in Singaporean Hokkien is given as follows:

(28) *pin<sup>21</sup> twa<sup>21</sup>*

lazy

ADJ

'lazy'

In (28), the adjective *pin<sup>21</sup> twa<sup>21</sup>* 'lazy' cannot be separated further into the words *pin<sup>21</sup>* and *twa<sup>21</sup>* because both of these bound morphemes have no meaningful function at all when occurring in isolation. Their meaning can be understood only on the condition that they are both uttered consequently as a single disyllabic unit.

### 2.4.2 Compounded Disyllabic Adjectives

In the Singaporean variety of Hokkien, a compounded disyllabic adjective can be identified by its composite elements. The preceding element, the first syllable, is a free morpheme or a root word and so is the following element. The composite elements of the disyllabic adjective, either the preceding or the following syllable, when occurring in isolation often carry meanings that relate to the compound in one way or another. However, this generalization is not always necessarily true as there are cases where the meanings of the roots upon being combined do not equate to that of the compound. Examples of compounded disyllabic adjectives are given as follows:

(29)	ɔ <sup>33</sup>	ts <sup>h</sup> ɿ <sup>44</sup>
	black	green
	ADJ	ADJ
	'bruised' or 'black and blue'	

In (29), the free morphemes ɔ<sup>33</sup> 'black' and ts<sup>h</sup>ɿ<sup>44</sup> 'green' both have meaningful functions when occurring in isolation. They are adjectives which belong to the color domain. When these monosyllabic adjectives are uttered in this sequence, they form a compound disyllabic adjective according to the following equation: black + green = black and blue. The resulting compound contains a meaning which is somewhat related to the color domain of the composite monosyllabic adjectives. The compound meaning is a realization which is derived from visual impact.

In Singaporean Hokkien, when a person gets bruised either as a result of self-inflicted or non self-inflicted action, this compound disyllabic adjective is used to describe the abovementioned state. A bruise for a Singaporean Hokkien speaker is recognized as a visual color triggered concept 'black and blue'. In order to utter the state of being bruised, the compound disyllabic adjective ɔ<sup>33</sup> ts<sup>h</sup>ɿ<sup>44</sup> 'bruised' is used.

### 2.4.3 Derived Disyllabic Adjectives

The derived disyllabic adjectives in Singaporean Hokkien are comprised of two morphemes where one of them is a bound morpheme. Though the bound morpheme contains semantic content, it cannot occur on its own and therefore has to attach itself morphologically to a free morpheme. The bound morpheme when preceding the root is a prefix whereas when following the root is a suffix.

Derived disyllabic adjectives can be further categorized into two types: 1) prefixed derived disyllabic adjectives and 2) suffixed derived disyllabic adjectives. These subtypes of derived disyllabic adjectives are discussed in details in sections 2.4.3.1 and 2.4.3.2 respectively.

### 2.4.3.1 Prefixed Derived Disyllabic Adjectives

In Singaporean Hokkien, a certain word class can be converted into another by undergoing derivation. The derivational process discussed in this section is the adding of a prefix. There are three kinds of prefixes that can be added to a word: 1) the *ho*<sup>42</sup>/*p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>42</sup> 'good/ bad' prefixes, 2) the *gaw*<sup>21</sup> 'good at and 3) the *ŋu*<sup>21</sup>/*bo*<sup>24</sup> 'have/ not have' prefixes. These prefixes are discussed further as follows:

#### 2.4.3.1.1 The *ho*<sup>42</sup>/*p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>42</sup> 'good/ bad' prefixes

This pair of prefixes can modify both verbs and nouns. The constructions are exemplified as follows:

a) *ho*<sup>42</sup>/*p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>42</sup> + V

b) *ho*<sup>42</sup>/*p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>42</sup> + N

In the former construction, the derivation process is productive which means that new adjectives can be formed by adhering to this construction. On the other hand, the latter construction is not productive as new adjectives cannot always be formed by this construction. Furthermore, certain root nouns may only be a member of one prefix that is a root noun may only be prefixed by either *ho*<sup>42</sup> 'good' or *p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>42</sup> 'bad'.

A Singaporean Hokkien verb can change its word class by undergoing the derivation process of attaching an adjectival prefix onto the verb itself. The formation pattern of this class of adjectives is predictable as the adjectival prefixes that can be attached to certain verbs in Singaporean Hokkien are limited to only two which are *ho*<sup>42</sup> 'good' and *p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>42</sup> 'bad'. This morphological process of derivation is productive in that a great number of verbs are able to take on these adjectival prefixes and become derived adjectives. Several examples of prefixed derived disyllabic adjectives are given as follows:

(30) *ho*<sup>24</sup> *tsya*<sup>21</sup>

good eat

ADJ PFX V

'good to eat'



(31) *p<sup>h</sup>ay<sup>24</sup>* *tsya<sup>21</sup>*

bad eat

ADJ PFX V

'bad to eat'

In (30) and (31), the verb *tsya<sup>21</sup>* 'eat' can be prefixed by the adjectives *ho<sup>42</sup>* 'good' and *p<sup>h</sup>ay<sup>42</sup>* 'bad' and change word class into an adjective meaning 'good to eat' and 'bad to eat' respectively. Most verbs can be preceded by these two adjectival prefixes to yield antonymic adjectives. In consideration of the occurrence of derived disyllabic adjectives which take on the positive prefix *ho<sup>42</sup>* 'good', it is speculated that this construction may be a result of Mandarin Chinese influence as an identical construction is found as illustrated below:

(M-01) *haw<sup>21</sup>* *tʃ<sup>h</sup>i<sup>33</sup>*

good eat

ADJ PFX V

'good to eat'

As observed in (M-01), the Mandarin adjective for the notion 'good to eat' corresponds to the Singaporean Hokkien adjective in (30). One might assume that the morphological formation of prefixed derived disyllabic adjectives in Singaporean Hokkien could be due to superstratal influence of Mandarin Chinese, the politically dominant language in Singapore. However, Cheng's (1979) study of Taiwanese Hokkien adjectives also exemplifies prefixed derived disyllabic adjectives which share identical constructions as Singaporean Hokkien and Mandarin Chinese as well.

An alternative assumption is that the construction of the prefixed derived disyllabic adjective in Hokkien, either being Singaporean or Taiwanese, may be the one that influenced the prefixed derived disyllabic adjective in Mandarin. One reason is that comparative linguistic evidence that Hokkien is more conservative than Mandarin, of which the former retained most of its consonant endings whereas the latter lost most of them. There is not enough substantial evidence whether this phenomenon is of Mandarin influence or of shared common origins of Mandarin and Hokkien.

Given below are examples of the prefix-noun construction.

(32) *ho*<sup>24</sup> *sim*<sup>33</sup>

good heart

ADJ PFX N

‘good-hearted’

(33) *p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>24</sup> *sim*<sup>33</sup>

bad heart

ADJ PFX N

‘ill-hearted’

For (32) and (33), these two examples are instances of nouns that are able to take on both the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ prefixes.

2.4.3.1.2 The *gaw*<sup>21</sup> ‘adept at doing an action’ prefix

This prefix can only modify verbs, unlike the *ho*<sup>42</sup>/*p<sup>h</sup>ay* prefixes. It not only modifies the verb, but also changes the word class of the verb into an adjective. The verbs that can take on the *gaw*<sup>21</sup> prefix are as follows: *tsaw*<sup>42</sup> ‘to run’, *syo*<sup>21</sup> *p<sup>h</sup>a?*<sup>21</sup> ‘to fight’ or *ka*<sup>21</sup> *lay*<sup>24</sup> ‘to bite people’, etc. Upon taking the *gaw*<sup>21</sup> prefix, the action verb changes its word class into an adjective. Moreover, the semantic content of the action verb changes from ‘to do that action’ into ‘being adept at conducting that action’. As illustrated in example (27) of Section 2.2, action verbs cannot take on degree expressions. However, they can do so by taking on the *gaw*<sup>21</sup> prefix as the prefix alters their word class from verb to adjective. Consider the following sentences:

(34) *?*<sup>33</sup> *tsaw*<sup>42</sup>

he (she) run

3P V

‘He (She) runs’

(35)  $\text{ʔi}^{33}$   $\text{tsin}^{33}$  ( $\text{tsya}^4$ )<sup>2</sup>  $\text{tsaw}^{42}$

he (she) real run

3P ADV V

'He (She) really runs'

(36)  $\text{ʔi}^{33}$   $\text{tsin}^{33}$  ( $\text{tsya}^4$ )<sup>2</sup>  $\text{gaw}^{21}$   $\text{tsaw}^{42}$

he (she) real adept run

3P ADV ADJ PFX V

'He (She) is really adept at running'

In Singaporean Hokkien, the action verb  $\text{tsaw}^{42}$  'to run' can occur by itself as illustrated in (34). However, ungrammaticality occurs when the degree expression  $\text{tsin}^{33}$  ( $\text{tsya}^{42}$ ) 'really' precedes the action verb as illustrated in (35). To achieve grammaticality, the action verb has to take on the derivational prefix  $\text{gaw}^{21}$  'adept' as illustrated in (36).

#### 2.4.3.1.3 The $\text{ʔu}^{21}$ / $\text{bo}^{24}$ 'have/ not have' prefixes

This pair of derivational prefixes can modify a variety of word classes. The word classes that can take on the  $\text{ʔu}^{21}$ /  $\text{bo}^{24}$  prefixes are the noun, the verb and the adjective. The prefixes  $\text{ʔu}^{21}$  and  $\text{bo}^{24}$  are actually verbs denoting possession and the lack of possession respectively. As a result, the attachment of the prefixes changes the word class of the noun and verb into an adjective and alters the semantic content of all the modified word classes to 'having or not having the features of the noun, verb or adjective'. Consider the following examples:

(37)  $\lambda i^{33}$   $\lambda u^{21}$   $luy^{33}$

he (she) have money

3P V N

'He (She) has money'

As seen in (37), the sentence conveys a literal meaning: 'a person is in possession of money'. Nonetheless, this sentence can be reanalyzed as follows"

(38)  $\lambda i^{33}$   $\lambda u^{21}$   $luy^{33}$

he (she) have money

3P ADJ PFX N

'He (She) is rich'

In (38), the sentence is seen in a new light and now conveys a metaphoric meaning: 'a person has features of one who has wealth'. The verb phrase  $\lambda u^{21} luy^{33}$  'to have money' has been changed into an adjective phrase 'to be rich'. Grammatical evidence can support this claim by adding a degree expression  $tsin^{33}$  ( $tsya^{42}$ ) 'really' in front of the adjective phrase and grammaticality is valid in doing so. Similarly, the  $bo^{24}$  'not have' prefix functions grammatically like its positive counterpart to bring about the antonym of either having money or being rich.

Special notice should also be paid to the noun  $luy^{33}$  'money'. This noun is not of Hokkien language but of Malay. Due to language proximity, the Hokkien word for money, which is actually  $tsi^{21}$ , has been replaced in the Singaporean variety by its Malay counterpart.

(39) *tsit*<sup>44</sup> *le*<sup>21</sup> *mi*<sup>21</sup> *kya*<sup>24</sup> *ʔu*<sup>21</sup> *ɣɔŋ*<sup>21</sup>

this object have use

DEM CLF N ADJ PFX V

‘this object is useful’

Token (39) is an example of an adjectival prefix modifying a verb. The verb *ɣɔŋ*<sup>21</sup> ‘to use’ upon taking on *ʔu*<sup>21</sup> ‘to have’ as an adjectival derivational prefix gets altered in meaning to become ‘having features of usefulness’. To come up with the antonym, the prefix *bo*<sup>24</sup> ‘not have’ can be attached to the verb. Like example (38), verbs taking on the prefixes *ʔu*<sup>21</sup> and *bo*<sup>24</sup> can be further modified by a degree expression, thus supporting the claim that they function as adjectives.

(40) *li*<sup>42</sup> *ʔu*<sup>21</sup> *ʔeŋ*<sup>24</sup> *bo*<sup>24</sup>

you have free time NEG

2P V N QPRT

‘Are you busy?’

Example (40) is a type of Yes/ No question. The positive response to this question is simply a sentence that begins with the verb *ʔu*<sup>24</sup> ‘to have’. On the other hand, the negative response is a sentence in which the verb is negated by the negative particle *bo*<sup>24</sup> ‘no’. Upon occurring together, these two words undergo tone sandhi and therefore resulting in the sentence: *bo*<sup>21</sup> *ʔeŋ*<sup>24</sup> ‘(I) do not have the free time.’

It is observed that the word ‘free time’ has been glossed as a noun. I have chosen to analyze it as a noun due to the fact that I deem this word as an object of the verb *ʔu*<sup>24</sup> ‘to have’. This noun *ʔeŋ*<sup>24</sup> ‘free time’ when modified by the prefix *ʔu*<sup>24</sup> ‘to have’ changes word class into an adjective, enabling it to take on a degree expression. It is

interesting to note that the word  $\text{ʔeŋ}^{24}$  when occurring in isolation can be analyzed as an adjective. Consider the following example:

(41)  $\text{li}^{42}$   $\text{tsin}^{33}$   $\text{ʔeŋ}^{24}$   $\text{si}^{21}$   $\text{bo}^{24}$

you real free is no

2P ADV ADJ COP QPRT

‘You are very free, are you?’

In (41), the word  $\text{ʔeŋ}^{24}$  is analyzed as an adjective. I support this claim by pointing out the preceding degree expression adverb  $\text{tsin}^{33}$  ‘really’ that can modify adjectival constructions as evidence. However,  $\text{ʔeŋ}^{24}$  can also be analyzed as a verb because adjectives by grammatical evidence posited in Section 2.2 (Distinguishing Adjectives from Verbs) do share verblike characteristics.

As for the negative prefixed derived disyllabic adjectives, not only  $\text{p}^{\text{h}}\text{ay}^{42}$  ‘bad’ can be attached in front of the verb but the negative particles  $\text{bwe}^{21}$  ‘not able’,  $\text{bo}^{24}$  ‘not have’ and  $\text{m}^{21}$   $\text{si}^{21}$  ‘not be’ can also be attached to either to monosyllabic or disyllabic adjectives to form disyllabic or polysyllabic adjectives. Negation will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

#### 2.4.3.2 Suffixed Derived Disyllabic Adjectives

In Singaporean Hokkien, suffixed derived disyllabic adjectives are uncommon. In fact, there is only one suffix that can be attached to an adjective. The composition of this disyllabic adjective is as follows:

ADJ +  $\text{k}^{\text{h}}\text{wan}^{42}$

As mentioned above, an adjective in Singaporean Hokkien can take on the  $\text{k}^{\text{h}}\text{wan}^{42}$  suffix. This suffix approximates the meaning of ‘having the manner of’. It modifies an adjective by following the adjective. The resulting construction still retains its

word class as an adjective and this claim can be supported by grammatical evidence that this construction can take on degree expressions as illustrated in (42) below.

(42) *tsin*<sup>33</sup> *ho*<sup>24</sup> *k<sup>h</sup>wan*<sup>42</sup>

real good manner

ADV ADJ ADJ SFX

'really well mannered'

As in (42), the disyllabic adjective *ho*<sup>24</sup> *k<sup>h</sup>wan*<sup>42</sup> 'well mannered' is being modified by the degree expression *tsin*<sup>33</sup> 'really'. The outcome is the adjectival phrase *tsin*<sup>33</sup> *ho*<sup>24</sup> *k<sup>h</sup>wan*<sup>42</sup> 'really well mannered'. Apart from the adjective *ho*<sup>42</sup> 'good', there are only two more adjectives that can take on the adjectival suffix *k<sup>h</sup>wan*<sup>42</sup> to form a disyllabic adjective; *p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>42</sup> 'bad' and *ts<sup>h</sup>aw*<sup>21</sup> 'foul'. Upon taking on the adjectival suffix, they become disyllabic adjectives with their respective meanings as follows: *p<sup>h</sup>ay*<sup>24</sup> *k<sup>h</sup>wan*<sup>42</sup> 'ill mannered' and *ts<sup>h</sup>aw*<sup>42</sup> *k<sup>h</sup>wan*<sup>42</sup> 'selfish'. The derivational process of this adjectival suffix affects the semantic content of an adjective. It does not result in the alteration of word class.

#### 2.4.4 Disyllabic Adjectives: An Alternative Analysis

Disyllabic adjectives have been analyzed in sections 2.4.1, 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 on the basis of morphology. This section aims at analyzing adjectives of the disyllabic category by another method; semantics. This alternative way of analyzing disyllabic adjectives focuses on the semantic structure of a disyllabic adjective.

The analysis is conducted by looking at how a word can be modified while still retaining a central semantic content. By looking at the different ways of how a word is modified to become an adjectival construction, explanations are suggested according to the understanding of the researcher. For the sake of clarity, I give an example of an analysis of an adjectival construction that centers on the concept of strength *lat*<sup>44</sup>. This word when occurring in isolation belongs to the noun word class. Upon looking at the morphological make-up of this word, it can be derivated into becoming a disyllabic adjective by prefixing different types of morphemes in front of the bound morpheme *lat*<sup>44</sup> as follows:

a) *Tsya*<sup>21</sup> *lat*<sup>44</sup>

Eat strength

V N

‘troublesome’

b) *Twa*<sup>21</sup> *lat*<sup>44</sup>

Big strength

ADJ PFX N

‘forceful’

c) *swey*<sup>42</sup> *lat*<sup>44</sup>

small strength

ADJ PFX N

‘gentle’

d) *ʔu*<sup>21</sup> *lat*<sup>44</sup>

have strength

V N

‘strong’

e) *bo*<sup>21</sup> *lat*<sup>44</sup>

not have strength

NEG N

‘feeble’

Examples a) to e) are all disyllabic adjectives pertaining to strength. They can take on the intensifier degree expression *tsin*<sup>33</sup> *tsya*<sup>42</sup> ‘really’. Example a) is a combination



of a verb and noun to form an adjective. It is a metaphorical expression for an event that is difficult to deal with. The metaphor for this example is that 'TROUBLE IS STRENGTH CONSUMING' and thus earning the expression 'to eat strength' to figuratively mean 'troublesome'. Examples b) and c) are binary opposites due to the adjectival prefixes *twa*<sup>21</sup> 'big' and *swey*<sup>21</sup> 'small'. The outcomes of these prefixes oppose each other in terms of using a lot of force and using little force respectively. Examples d) and e) are binary opposites as well because of the verb *ʔu*<sup>21</sup> 'to have' and its negative counterpart *bo*<sup>24</sup> 'to not have' resulting in the adjectives 'having strength' and 'not having strength' respectively. Regardless of how the noun *lat*<sup>44</sup> 'strength' is modified by verbs, affixes or negatives, the radial feature of all these adjectival constructions points to a single entity 'strength'.

## 2.5 Polysyllabic Adjectives

In this section, adjectives that are polysyllabic in construction are discussed. In Singaporean Hokkien, there are a limited number of adjectives which are composed of more than two syllables in a morpheme. The majority of adjectives are derived ones which take on prefixes and suffixes to become meaningful and their occurrence is often predictable. However, there are other types of adjectives whose pattern of formation cannot be predicted so easily. This section accounts for adjectives that fall outside the category of being monosyllabic or disyllabic.

A polysyllabic adjectival construction is a morpheme composed of more than two syllables. This can be achieved by reduplication and the result will be a polysyllabic construction, which contains more than two syllables. In fact, the polysyllabic construction is more than a trisyllabic one. Hence, a quadrisyllabic construction or in other words a four syllable construction results. The process of coming to that construction is neither that of compounding nor derivation.

In the process of producing a quadrisyllabic adjective in Singaporean Hokkien, phonological rendering and semantic reduplication serve as the main processes. The former and latter function in unison and their functions cannot be individually segregated for analysis. As a result, the polysyllabic construction is considered an instance of reduplication. Reduplication is not discussed in this section, but in section 3.5 instead.