

Title: Singanore Mandarin as a new dialect: the case of beneficiary usage of *gen*

Grace Chong

National University of Singapore

Most early Chinese immigrants came from southern China, and spoke a variety of different southern Chinese languages, more widely known as “dialects” in Singapore, including Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, and Hainanese (Freedman 1960: 26). Notably, these early settlers did not speak Mandarin, which originated from the north. The Speak Mandarin Campaign was launched in 1979 as part of the education plan, with the aim of unifying Chinese Singaporeans through Mandarin (Bokhorst-Heng 1999: 244), which had been established as the national language of China. Thus, today’s Singapore Mandarin (SgM) is a contact variety resulting from Standard Mandarin (StM), introduced as a second language, and the pre-existing “dialects”, which previously had first language status. As a result, SgM has developed into a unique variety exhibiting different features from StM. This paper investigates one of the unique features of SgM, namely, the beneficiary usage of the word *gen* (跟). Using Lefebvre and Lumsden’s (1994) model of relexification based on Haitian Creole, a French lexifier contact variety with substrate inputs from African languages, I examine relexification processes found in SgM by splitting the *gen* benefactives into (i) plain, (ii) deputative, and (iii) recipient benefactives (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997: 384). Then, I compare its corresponding morphemes in Cantonese and Hokkien to highlight their influences on SgM. My data demonstrate that relexification can explain contact linguistic phenomena resulting from typologically similar languages, such as that exhibited by SgM, where the novel usage of *gen* can be traced to the local “dialects”. After all, language and identity are often inseparable entities, and I suggest that there are sociolinguistically valid reasons why SgM is distinctive from StM. In sum, this study hopes to illustrate that systematically recognising and explaining SgM’s unique features such as *gen*, enriches its current lack of literature as compared to Singlish.