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Attitudes to Mandarin Chinese Varieties in Singapore

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Abstract

This study aims to shed light on the attitudes of Chinese Singaporeans and Chinese nationals residing in Singapore to varieties of Mandarin Chinese. 64 Singaporean Chinese and Chinese national participants took matched and verbal-guise tests, evaluating recorded speakers of two varieties of Singapore Mandarin (standard and colloquial) and the variety spoken in the PRC on status and solidarity traits. These evaluations were followed by optional questionnaire items intended to probe for additional more insights into the participants' attitudes and perceptions of one another. Both Singaporean Chinese and Chinese national participants assigned higher status to the PRC's variety of Mandarin. Attitudes toward the two varieties of Singapore Mandarin, however, varied, with Singaporeans rating the standard variety higher than the colloquial variety on all traits and Chinese nationals favouring the colloquial variety. Interestingly, for all three varieties of Mandarin, solidarity traits were rated higher than status traits by all participants, suggesting that, in Singapore, Mandarin Chinese is now viewed more as a language of solidarity than status.

Keywords: language attitudes, matched-guise, Putonghua, Singapore Mandarin, verbal-guise

Introduction

After explaining that he makes a conscious effort to speak Mandarin Chinese according to mainland China 'standard' pronunciation norms, Singaporean blogger Limpeh recounts an experience he had in a Singapore clothing store:

Now the staff in there are very Chinese speaking (or Singlish speaking) - but it is distinctly Singaporean-Mandarin that they speak. One of the standard lines the shop assistants there use is this: "你可以 try!" Yeah, precisely in that combination. Like the word 'try' is always in English.

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Anyway, so when I replied in my Beijing Northern standard Mandarin, the attitude of the shop assistant changed. She had gone from friendly to quite cold in an instant and immediately, I switched to Singlish and she became friendly again. She then confided in me, "Actually I was a bit nervous lah, you know har, in this mall, recently got some PRCs come and shoplift one [...] So when we hear people speak like PRC, I become... more alert lah. Just being careful." (Limpeh, 2012, para. 15-16)

Limpeh's own rejection of Singaporean Mandarin Chinese and the shop assistant's clearly negative evaluation of his Beijing-accented Mandarin highlight the fact that even though the Singapore context may seem far removed from the highly combustible identity politics of Hong Kong and Taiwan, societal divisions are nevertheless ever-present, and in fact made quite evident by the indexical power of language. Indeed, just as the use of particular language varieties and linguistic features allow us to strategically project our identities, allegiances, and orientations, our interlocutors can be expected to have varied reactions to our use of the language varieties and linguistic features based on their own subjectivities. In this article, we report on a study that examined such subjectivities – the associations made by Chinese Singaporeans and People's Republic of China (PRC) nationals residing in Singapore when they hear various varieties of Mandarin Chinese spoken in Singapore.

Language Attitudes

As Cargile, Giles, Ryan, and Bradac (1994) remind us, "Our views of others – their supposed capabilities, beliefs and attributes – are determined, in part, by inferences we make from the language features they adopt" (p. 211). Over the years, various researchers (e.g., Dragojevic, Giles & Watson, 2013; Nesdale & Rooney, 1990; Ryan, Carranza, & Moffie, 1977; White & Li, 1991) have identified various language features that impact our evaluations of others. These include degree of accentedness, fluency of speech and the use of dialectical varieties. Of course, message content has also been found to be crucial to understanding how speakers with different accents are appraised (Giles, Coupland, Henwood, Harriman, & Coupland, 1992; Giles & Johnson, 1986; Johnson & Buttny, 1982). Furthermore, Cargile et al. (1994) identify several additional processes and variables as being influential in shaping hearers' attitudes. Some of these include cultural factors such as ethnolinguistic vitality, processes of language standardization, and sensitivity to stereotypes.

Research on language attitudes also grants us insights into language maintenance and change, language death and revival, cultural continuity, and issues of identity (Coupland, Williams, & Garrett, 1999). For example, in the Singapore context, Gupta and Siew (1995) and Tan and Ng (2010) found language attitudes of parents to play a substantial role in determining whether languages were transmitted to children – ultimately impacting language maintenance and shift. In areas where languages come into contact or are in competition with one another, research on language attitudes help us predict what the linguistic and cultural scene may look like in the future. In addition, because people react not to their real environment, but instead to their *perceptions* of this environment (Gould, 1977), language attitudes are extremely important determiners of whether language policies succeed or fail (Baker, 1992; Spolsky, 2004).

Methods used to investigate language attitudes can be classified as direct or indirect. Direct methods include data collection through questionnaires and interviews, asking participants directly about their opinions on the linguistic variables in question. Such direct methods have been used to study language attitudes in many contexts (e.g., Garrett, Williams, & Evans, 2005; Lai, 2001, 2005, 2012), including Singapore (e.g., Poedjosoedarmo, 2002; Xu, Chew, & Chen 1998). Indirect methods, on the other hand, reveal language attitudes through the measurement of subjective reactions towards accents, languages, and language varieties, in the form of matched-guise or verbal-guise tests. In a matched-guise test, participants listen to pre-recorded audio clips in two or more different accents, languages, or language varieties before rating the speaker in each recording on various semantic scales, unaware that it is actually the same speaker appearing in all of the recordings. Such a test ensures that speaker-related variables that could arise with the involvement of different speakers are eliminated, and that any differences in ratings given would be mainly due to the intended linguistic variable. However, in instances where a large or diverse range of accents, languages, or language varieties are involved, a verbal-guise test using different speakers is usually employed due to the difficulty of finding people who can render all the different accents/languages/varieties convincingly.

Some examples of studies that have used matched and verbal-guise methods in investigating language attitudes include those of Wilson and Bayard (1992), which compared New Zealand listeners' evaluations of New Zealand, Canadian, Australian, and British-accented English, and Paltridge and Giles (1984), which examined the perceptions of speakers of several different regional French accents. Such studies have revealed a generally consistent pattern in which 'standard' accents or language varieties are rated highly for status traits, such as 'educated' and 'intelligent,' while 'non-standard' accents and language varieties are rated highly for solidarity traits, such as 'friendly' and 'kind.' An exception is Cavallaro and Ng's (2009) study in which Singaporean and non-Singaporean participants both rated Singapore Standard English more favourably than Singapore Colloquial English for both status and solidarity traits. Interestingly, the non-Singaporean participants' ratings for both varieties were higher than those of Singaporean participants (see Cavallaro, Ng, & Seilhamer, 2014).

Language Attitudes towards Mandarin Chinese

While many researchers have investigated attitudes towards Singapore English, there have only been a few studies examining attitudes towards the Mandarin spoken in Singapore. In one questionnaire study by Xu et al. (1998), Singaporeans' attitudes towards Mandarin and English were examined. Mandarin was rated high in solidarity but low in prestige and power, while English was rated high in prestige and power but low in solidarity. Another study by Ong (2005) used questionnaires and interviews to investigate whether Singaporean Chinese youth regarded Mandarin as more of a 'tie' language, linking them to Chinese culture, or a 'tool' language, useful for practical, primarily economic, purposes. Based on this study's results, Ong concludes that Singaporean Chinese youth generally have a positive attitude towards Mandarin and have a dual orientation toward the language, regarding it as both a 'tie' and a 'tool' as they use it in a wide range of domains. Ong also suggests that Mandarin could become a class marker, labeling a

person as being educated and having a refined character. However, missing in this discussion is the debate about which variety of Mandarin Chinese we are talking about.

As in the case of Englishes, it is now quite recognized that we do not have a monolithic variety of Mandarin Chinese. Instead, the Chinese diaspora is so diffused, it is widely accepted that like Arabic, Spanish and English, Mandarin Chinese is a pluricentric language (Bradley, 1992). Li Wei (2016) describes the Chinese diaspora as one that is both “superdiverse” and yet has a common “imagined community” (p. 6). The proliferation of the new media has increasingly shown up diversity and uniqueness in the Chinese worlds outside mainland China. At the same time, researchers like Zhang (2006) have noticed a rising class of cosmopolitan speakers from Beijing which she labels as *wā⁴iqi³* 外企, who are Chinese professionals working for foreign businesses. They speak a variety of Putonghua which has reduced indexicality of ‘Beijingness’.

At a general level, the broadest distinction between the various users is the adoption of the written script. Taiwan, Hong Kong and Malaysia still used the traditional Chinese script and the People’s Republic of China and Singapore use the simplified script. Though this may appear to be inconsequential as most speakers are in fact ‘biscrptual’, it is an issue that often cuts at the core of language identity. Hong Kong and Taiwan have both clung resolutely to their traditional script while Singapore has adopted the simplified script. Hence, for Singaporeans, the spoken repertoire plays a more important role in indexing identity.

The nomenclature for the language itself demonstrates much of the Chinese diaspora’s diversity. ‘Mandarin Chinese’ as a term is used mainly by linguists to refer to a wide cluster of mutually intelligible varieties under this umbrella though speakers of Mandarin Chinese themselves though rarely use this term to describe their own language. Taiwanese, for example, refer to the language they speak as *Guoyu* 国语 ‘national language’ (literally, ‘country language’). This is often used in opposition to *Taiyu* 台语 ‘Taiwanese language’, the Southern Min variety spoken in Taiwan. Singapore and Malaysia refer to Mandarin Chinese as *Huayu* 华语 (literally ‘Mandarin language’). The People’s Republic of China refers to the same language as *Putonghua* 普通话 (literally, ‘common language’). In Hong Kong, the variety is just emerging and as yet, most Hong Kongers still use the term *Putonghua* to refer to Mandarin Chinese. The fact that the term for Cantonese in Hong Kong is *zhongmun* 中文 (literally ‘Chinese’) must create a very different and interesting space for the discussion of how they will name the new language in their midst.

The return of Hong Kong to China in 1997 and the continuous cross strait tension between Taiwan and the mainland has created deeply etched lines of loyalty and allegiance. Given this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that issues of belonging and identity have become a pressing topic in these regions and such issues are often played out in the arena of language use.

Language attitude studies involving Putonghua in the PRC have focused mainly on comparing attitudes toward Putonghua with those of languages used regionally (e.g., Gao, Su, & Zhou, 2000; Wang & Ladegaard, 2008; Zhang, 2005; Zhou, 2002). Attitudes toward Putonghua in Hong Kong has been a topic of considerable interest to many researchers, and studies looking at how Hong Kongers regard Putonghua in relation to English and Cantonese have motivated several studies (e.g., Gao, Su, & Zhou, 2000; Giles, 1998; Hyland, 1997; Lai, 2001, 2005, 2012;

Lu & Au-Yeung, 2000; Pierson 1992). In the years prior to and immediately following the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to the PRC, conclusions of scholars investigating attitudes toward Putonghua ranged from declaring it a language that elicits “a strong sense of ethnic consciousness” (Pierson, 1992, p. 194) to one of “minimal influence” (Hyland, 1997, p. 201). Over a decade after the handover, Lai (2012) reports that Hong Kongers are viewing Putonghua more positively, but notes a “resistance to mainlandization that undermines the positive attitude toward the language” (p. 104). In an analysis of online discourse between Hong Kong university students and students from the PRC studying at the same Hong Kong university, Ladegaard (2012) highlights the strained relations between these two groups. While language attitudes were not the focus of his article, the interconnectedness of group relations and language attitudes is illustrated in a quote by one Hong Kong student – “When we encounter immigrants from China [in Hong Kong], and they speak this heavily Putonghua-accented Cantonese, we almost always find this very ‘*ngun-yi*’ (i.e. unpleasant to our ears)” (Ladegaard, 2012, p. 74). This, of course, played out in a more dramatic manner in the ‘Umbrella Movement’ towards the end of 2014 and the earlier protest against the mandatory study of Putonghua in Hong Kong schools. The resistance to Putonghua was humorously captured in a placard (see Figure 1) which reads “I love Cantonese, I don’t know how to make winter melon soup”. In Cantonese, *potunggua* 煲冬瓜 ‘cook winter melon soup’ sounds like Putonghua 普通话 and is often used as a dysphemism for Putonghua.



Figure 1. “I love Cantonese, I don’t know how to cook winter melon soup” – 2010 Protest against the mandatory teaching of Putonghua in Hong Kong Schools. (Dickson, Antony (Photographer) / AFP / Getty Images 2010)

The Hong Kong and Singapore contexts, of course, differ in a number of ways. To start with, Singapore is a sovereign nation and not technically part of the PRC, as Hong Kong is.

However, the economic rise of mainland China has seen unprecedented Chinese travelling as well as migrating for business, education and work worldwide. Singapore has also seen a huge rise in the number of tourists, residents and workers from China. Typically, such an influx of new members creates an initial period of imbalance. Hence, similar negative attitudes and antagonism (albeit at a lower level) are also present in Singapore. This is reflected in the views of one Singaporean quoted in Jacobs (2012) – “Mainlanders may look like us, but they aren’t like us...Singaporeans look down on mainlanders as country bumpkins, and they look down on us because we can’t speak proper Chinese” (para. 5). These sentiments often flow in both directions with mainland Chinese seeing Singaporean Chinese as rootless or without any culture. These types of mutually unfriendly comments have unfortunately inflamed discourse in public space in the last decade and have damaged the intergroup relationship. Typical of these social fractures is the ‘Curry Incident’ in 2011¹. In this incident, a family who had recently moved from China objected to the strong smell of curry cooked by a Singaporean Indian neighbour. This dispute was eventually resolved with the Singaporean Indian neighbours agreeing to cook curries only when the Chinese neighbours are not at home. When news broke about this compromise, it went viral and netizens and Singaporeans from all walks of life rallied in support for ‘the right to cook curry’. A cook-a-curry Facebook page was set up in support of this movement. The way the incident played out was humorous in some respects, but it points to a seething tension within the community where ‘newcomers’ are seen as being disrespectful to the ‘multicultural norms’ of the host country. The discourse often has xenophobic undertones and the Internet is replete with examples of displays of verbal warfare between the two groups. Though this unfortunate fissure is not emblematic as it is in Hong Kong, it is still there, lurking below the surface. The irony, of course, is that such xenophobic attitudes are often coming from individuals whose not so distant ancestors were themselves immigrants to Singapore and Hong Kong. Time and time again, however, we see this same phenomenon in the U.S., Australia, Britain and other societies built on immigration. The observation of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of immigrants displaying intolerance for newcomers is not uncommon. When we take a historical perspective, we can see that these issues are, in fact nothing new but this is still something we have to grapple with at a practical level.

Mandarin Chinese in Singapore

Mandarin Chinese, or Putonghua, is not a language with long traditional roots in Singapore. At the time of the 1957 Census, in fact, only about 1% of the Chinese population in Singapore claimed Mandarin Chinese (Henceforth, ‘Mandarin’) to be their ‘mother tongue,’ while the rest spoke various other Chinese languages like Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainanese (Chua, 1964). All these languages are referred to as ‘dialects’ in the Singapore context, even though they are mostly not mutually intelligible. A large section of the Singaporean Chinese population saw creating a common language among the heterogeneous Chinese community in Singapore as essential to achieving their political aims and to oppose what was seen as an English-elitism. They thus worked with ‘dialect’-based clan associations to promote Mandarin as a unifying language in order to “propagate a sense of Chineseness” (Purushotam, 1998, p. 43). This led in the late 1950s to its adoption as the medium of instruction

in most Singapore Chinese schools alongside Malay-medium schools catering to Singaporean Malays and Tamil-medium schools for Indian Singaporeans. While Mandarin was declared one of the nation's four official languages – the others being Malay (also the National language), Tamil, and English, the Chinese languages with traditional roots in Singapore, such as Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese, still dominated among the city state's Chinese community up to the successful implementation of the Speak Mandarin Campaign. This government campaign, launched in 1979 and reoccurring annually to this day, has been directly responsible for the steady decrease in Chinese 'dialect' use over the course of the past few decades and a concomitant increase in the use of Mandarin (Bokhorst-Heng, 1999). This shift toward Mandarin is apparent in the census data. In 1980, 76.2% of the Chinese Singaporeans reported speaking Chinese 'dialects' in their homes and only 13.1% Mandarin. By 2010, 47.7% reported using Mandarin as the predominant household language as compared to only 19.2% using Chinese 'dialects' (Department of Statistics, 2011).

According to Wang (2002), Singapore Mandarin is a "regional variety of Putonghua nurtured in Singapore's soil" (p. 27) and should be treated as equal in status to Putonghua, instead of being seen as a non-standard variety. Such a stand is also echoed by Shang and Zhao (2012). Others, like Loo (1984), consider it a non-standard variety full of grammatical errors, and anecdotal accounts of Chinese nationals' attitudes toward Singapore Mandarin Chinese suggest similar attitudes. Unlike Taiwanese Mandarin, which has a stronger presence, much discussion about Singapore Mandarin still involves a normative approach, commonly with Putonghua as a reference point, and any deviation from Putonghua is viewed, especially by PRC Chinese, as deviant.

The attitudes of Chinese nationals are indeed highly relevant in present day Singaporean society, for the number of Chinese nationals now living in Singapore is considerable. While there have been no official statistics published on those without citizenship or permanent residency with a breakdown indicating country of origin, unofficial accounts have provided estimates of the number of Chinese nationals residing in Singapore. One such source is *China UnionPay*, the national bankcard association in China, which claimed in 2011 that there were then almost a million Chinese nationals living and working in Singapore (Singapore now home to 1 million PRCs, 2011). If this figure is indeed accurate, about one in every five people in Singapore would, in fact, be a Chinese national. This situation is largely a result of the Singapore government's efforts to ensure the continued economic viability of the city state despite its low birthrate and aging population. While other countries with similar demographic woes, such as Japan, have thus far resisted addressing the problem by accepting more immigrants, Singapore's government has taken a different tact. They view large-scale immigration as a panacea for its low birthrate predicament. Chia (2011) points out that the policies are also intended to avoid potential social conflicts and, therefore, privilege immigrant groups that "reflect the ethnic origin and composition of the population" (p. 8). See Table 1, which shows that Singapore's ethnic composition has been maintained over the decades.

Table 1. Ethnic composition of Singapore residents (%)

	Chinese	Malay	Indian	Others
1957	75.4	13.6	8.6	2.4
1990	77.8	14.0	7.1	1.1
2000	76.8	13.9	7.9	1.4
2010	74.1	13.4	9.2	3.3

Source: Department of Statistics, 2001, 2006, 2011; Kuo, 1980

The Chinese nationals that have settled in Singapore, however, have not all been accepted by the general Singaporean public. Chinese nationals are often stereotyped by Singaporeans as being loud and crude, unhygienic, and lacking in civic and moral consciousness. According to Leong, from the National University of Singapore’s Institute of Policy Studies (quoted in Lim, 2011), the large influx of immigration from China has resulted in a great deal of resentment and anxiety among Singaporeans, who view the newcomers as a threat to their space and identities. Given this situation, with large numbers of Putonghua-speaking Chinese nationals presently living in Singapore, the attitudes of this group towards the variety of Mandarin spoken by Singaporeans is a highly pertinent issue that has the potential to impact their relations and interactions with Singaporeans. In this study, we investigated not only the attitudes of Singaporeans towards Singapore Mandarin and the Putonghua spoken by Chinese nationals, but also the attitudes held by Chinese nationals living in Singapore towards these two varieties.

Putonghua and Singaporean Mandarin Chinese Compared

With Beijing being the political capital of the PRC, the Beijing dialect was selected as the national standard variety due to its prestige, as well as its relative similarity to many of the Chinese topolects, allowing it to serve well as a lingua franca (Saillard, 2004). It was dubbed Putonghua, and has been widely promoted nationwide through language policies and campaigns – promotion that Ladegaard (2012), highlighting its lack of effectiveness in Hong Kong, declares “highly successful in virtually all other parts of MLC [Mainland China]” (p. 74).

Mandarin in Singapore today is highly promoted not only as a language of cultural transmission and intra-cultural communication for the diverse Chinese community, but increasingly also for its economic benefits in view of China’s emerging and robust economy. A good mastery of the Chinese language is encouraged and promoted as an important resource for tapping into opportunities to do business with China (Bokhorst-Heng, 1999; Wee, 2003). And there does, in fact, appear to be a very real basis for this. In 2008, for example, Singapore’s foreign direct investment in China rose 40% from the previous year, making Singapore the PRC’s third biggest foreign investor (Wong-Anan, 2009). Such statistics point to bright economic prospects which do indeed make learning Mandarin quite attractive for Singaporeans. Despite economic incentives, the study of Mandarin is a struggle for many Chinese Singaporeans. According to Oon and Kor (2009), three out of every five students entering Singaporean primary schools now come from English-speaking households, and an increasing

number of Chinese Singaporeans, mostly those from English-speaking homes, are voicing resentment towards Mandarin, citing difficulty learning the language as the reason for their negative attitudes. Seeking to address this situation, various initiatives have been carried out to inculcate a positive attitude towards Mandarin and to reduce resentment toward it among Singaporean Chinese, especially the youth, such as the revamping the teaching of Mandarin in schools and the easing of requirements for university admission (Ong, 2005).

According to both Tan (1999) and Goh (2010), there are four varieties of Mandarin being spoken in Singapore – namely, Beijing Putonghua, Standard Mandarin, Colloquial Mandarin, and ‘Rojak’² Mandarin. Shang and Zhao (2012), pointing out that Beijing Putonghua is never spoken among Singaporean Chinese and Colloquial Mandarin and ‘Rojak’ Mandarin are hard to distinguish, propose a more feasible classification of Singapore Mandarin comprised of just two varieties: Standard Singapore Mandarin and Folk Singapore Mandarin. Moreover, the descriptor ‘Rojak’ is indicative more of an attitude which is both a denigrating and inaccurate label for codemixing – a phenomenon common in all multilingual communities. In the current study, we have adapted Shang and Zhao’s (2012) classification and propose two varieties of Singapore Mandarin – Singapore Standard Mandarin (SSM) and Singapore Colloquial Mandarin (SCM).

SSM is the prestige or the ‘high variety’ (Fishman, 1967) in Singapore, often used in formal contexts such as schools and in the mass media. On the other hand, SCM is the ‘colloquial variety’ used in informal contexts and daily communication. SCM is typically characterized by frequent code-mixing with English, Malay, and other Southern Chinese languages like Hokkien. The use of pragmatic discourse particles like *la*, *leh*, *lor*, and *meh*, derived from Southern Chinese languages, is also common in SCM (Shang & Zhao, 2012). Conversely, SSM does not involve any code-mixing or use of such pragmatic particles. It is generally very similar to the Putonghua spoken in the PRC, but does have some pronunciation, lexical and grammatical differences. While lexical differences have attracted some comments, much less is written about phonological, morphological and structural differences. These differences are well-documented in the literature (Chen, 1983, 1986; Goh 2010; Li & Chow, 2002; Lock 1989; Lu, Zhang, & Qian, 2002; Ng, 1985; Shang & Zhao, 2012; Wang, 2002; Xu & Wang, 2007). Therefore, this paper will not provide a detailed discussion of the differences, but some of the more obvious ones are summarized below.

The lexicon used in Singapore Mandarin differs from that of Putonghua to a considerable extent, mainly due to the influence of southern Chinese languages (Zhao, Liu, & Goh, 2007). For example, the term used to address one’s grandmother in Singapore Mandarin is a term derived from Hokkien – 阿嬤 *a¹ma⁴* ‘grandmother’ – for both maternal and paternal grandmothers, while in Putonghua, 姥 *lao¹* / 外祖母 *wai⁴zu²mu³* ‘maternal grandmother’ and 奶奶 *nai³nai¹* / 祖母 *zu³mu³* ‘paternal grandmother’ are used respectively. According to Zhao, Liu, and Goh (2007), the lexicon in Singapore Mandarin is also heavily influenced by other Chinese languages, English, Malay, and Tamil, with many words derived from transliterations (e.g., 德士 *de²shi⁴* for ‘taxi’, 巴士 *ba¹shi⁴* for ‘bus’). Other examples include 樂齡 *le⁴ling²* instead of 老齡 *lao³ling²* for

‘senior citizens’ or 塞车 *sai⁴che¹* instead of 堵车 *du³che¹* for ‘traffic jam’ etc. An additional reason for the lexical variation is that the Mandarin in Singapore has not undergone the same changes in usage as in the PRC. This is evident looking at the type of Mandarin that has been taught in the Singapore schools. Mandarin first began to be promoted in Singapore at a time when Putonghua was not yet standardized. Therefore, early textbooks in local schools taught a variety of Mandarin from the 1919 May 4th Movement, resulting in Singaporeans using certain words and expressions in ways that are no longer used in the PRC now.

In terms of phonology, Singapore Mandarin generally follows the pronunciation of Putonghua in the PRC, though the overall rhythm and prosody is markedly distinct. The absence of some tone sandhi rules in Singaporean Mandarin has been observed though not empirically attested. Certain phonetic differences do exist – for example, the absence of retroflexes [zh], [sh] and [ch] in Singapore Mandarin (Chen, 1986; Ng, 1985), the non-differentiation of the nasal sounds [n] and [ŋ], and a ‘fifth’ tone in Singapore Mandarin, compared to just four tones in Putonghua (Chen, 1983).

Structural differences between Singapore Mandarin and Putonghua are less studied. However, according to Shang and Zhao (2012), though there are very few global differences, Singapore Mandarin has a less rigid word order than Putonghua and there are also certain grammatical constructions that are used much more commonly in Singapore Mandarin than Putonghua. There is a tendency for Singaporeans to use more 被 *bei*, the passive marker, presumably due to the influence of English. The use of the word 过 *guo⁴* ‘over’ in the comparison construct in Singapore Mandarin is another example:

Singapore Mandarin:	他 高 过 我。
	<i>ta¹ gao¹ guo⁴ wo³. he</i>
	tall over me ‘He is taller than me.’

Putonghua:	他 比 我 高。
	<i>ta¹ bi³ wo³ gao¹. he</i>
	compare me tall ‘He is taller than me.’

Other examples that capture the differences between the two varieties include the use of 先 *xian* after the verb, as in 我先走 *wo xian zou* ‘I’ll go first’ (literally, ‘I go earlier’) instead of 我走先 *wo zou*

xian, (literally, ‘I go earlier’) the usual construction in Putonghua. Singapore Mandarin Chinese speakers prefer to place adverbs after the verb as in English and there are many more such examples (e.g. 转左 *zhuan zuo* ‘turn left’ instead of 左转 *zuo zhuan*.) Most of these examples show the influence of contact with English. The common use of 等一下 *deng yi xia* ‘wait a second’ as a marker of a conditional clause, as in 等一下，跌倒你才知道痛 *deng yi xia die dao ni cai zhi dao tong* ‘If you fall, you will really feel the pain’ is yet another example that is not found in Putonghua

Singapore Mandarin is widely recognized by linguists studying it as a unique and important variety (Chen, 1986; Lu, Zhang, & Qian, 2002; Wang, 2002). Despite this, its status is still debated and officially, Singapore continues to look to the PRC for exonormative references. For the purpose of this study, what is significant is that there are enough phonological, syntactic and lexical cues for Mandarin Chinese speakers to accurately identify the Singapore variety of Mandarin Chinese.

The present study

Based on previous studies finding speech evaluations to be sensitive to stereotypes (Cargile et al., 1994; Stewart, Ryan, & Giles, 1985), we hypothesized that for our indirect study of attitudes toward Putonghua, SSM, and SCM, Singaporeans would not view the Putonghua spoken by

Chinese nationals highly in terms of solidarity (traits which emphasize friendliness, connection and affinity). A recent verbal guise study by Chong and Tan (2013) investigating Singaporean attitudes toward the accents of Mandarin speakers from Singapore, Beijing, and Taiwan, however, gave us cause to question this hypothesis. Chong and Tan, contrary to their own expectations, found that their Singaporean university student participants rated Beijing Mandarin accents higher than those of Singaporean Mandarin speakers for all solidarity traits except ‘friendly’ and ‘humorous,’ “suggesting perhaps that accent has little to do with social discrimination” (p. 132). The participants for our study though would be reacting to guises that differed along more dimensions than just accent, with SSM and SCM guises featuring expressions and borrowings particular to these varieties. With these additional features serving to further differentiate SSM and SCM from Putonghua, we hypothesized that it would be more likely that Singaporeans would embrace their own homegrown varieties where solidarity traits were concerned – that our Singaporean participants would rate Putonghua speakers highly for solidarity traits, but rate SSM higher, and SCM higher still. This is based on previous studies generally showing colloquial varieties to be rated high in solidarity. For status traits, we predicted that our Singaporean participants, in keeping with the status results obtained by Chong and Tan, would rate Putonghua speakers highly.

In spite of many negative stereotypes, Chinese nationals, after all, are often stereotyped positively in the status arena as high achievers and seen as being hardworking, proactive, and smart. These positive status stereotypes, together with the Singapore government’s constant promotion of the PRC as a country full of economic opportunities and the fact that Putonghua is widely regarded as the quintessential ‘standard’ variety of Mandarin, led us to expect Singaporean status evaluations of Putonghua to be more positive than for SSM, and ratings for SCM to be well below both standard varieties where status traits are concerned.

As for Chinese nationals, we expected that they would rate their own variety highest for both status and solidarity, and that they would view both varieties of Singapore Mandarin Chinese as ‘bad or ‘broken,’ leading to negative evaluations in terms of status. In line with consistent results from matched-guise studies showing that the more a language variety deviates from the standard, the lower its status evaluations will be, we further hypothesised that SCM would be viewed as lower in status than SSM by the Chinese nationals. The Chinese nationals response to SCM in terms of solidarity is more unclear. If SCM is perceived as a language of an out-group, it could lead to negative evaluation for solidarity traits. Conversely, they might also rate SCM higher than SSM for solidarity traits, simply because of the associations with informality that it would have..

In relation to Singaporean attitudes, our prediction was that the Chinese nationals would view Putonghua more positively than Singaporeans, but the Singaporeans would view their own SSM more positively than the Chinese nationals.

Methodology

Given the difficulty in finding anyone who could speak both Singapore Mandarin and Putonghua convincingly, a combination of both verbal and matched-guise methodologies was used for this study. We used the matched-guise technique to investigate differences in attitudes towards the

two varieties of Singapore Mandarin – SSM and SCM – and the verbal-guise technique with different speakers to investigate differences in attitudes toward the two varieties of Singapore Mandarin and Putonghua.

A total of 64 participants, 34 Singaporean Chinese (17 males, 17 females) and 30 Chinese nationals from various PRC provinces (15 males, 15 females), took part in the study. All were undergraduate students at a Singapore university between the ages of 18 and 26. The Chinese national participants had all been living in Singapore for several years (2-4 years), and were, therefore, reasonably familiar with the Mandarin spoken in Singapore. The participants were invited to take part in the study through email and social networking sites, such as Facebook. They were asked to listen to the recordings online and to download and complete the questionnaire, which was in the form of a Microsoft Word document. All responses were recorded in the soft copy of the Word document and participants then returned their completed questionnaires anonymously and directly to the researcher via the researcher's dedicated GoFileDrop.

For the speech samples used in the matched and verbal-guise recordings, a total of six speakers were recruited. Since the perceived nationality and ethnicity of speakers has been found to influence listeners' ratings (Cargile et al., 1994; Gallois & Callan, 1989), speakers from both Singapore and the PRC were chosen. Studies have also found that perceived age and education level can influence evaluations, and thus, the speakers chosen were university undergraduates in the same age range as participants. These speakers were asked to talk about an incident when they had gotten lost (a topic deemed sufficiently neutral, so as to not influence ratings) without using a script, so that the recordings would sound spontaneous and natural. While the individual stories differed, the content was restricted to fairly common experiences that could in no way be construed as extreme or unusual, influencing participants' ratings. Also, as much as possible, the speech samples were kept uniform in tone, so that tone would not be an influencing factor. Thus, with care taken to ensure that all other variables were kept relatively constant, the main way in which the recordings differed was the language variety the speakers employed. For example, the SSM recordings were essentially Putonghua spoken with a uniquely Singaporean accent, while the SCM recordings included frequent code-mixing with English, Malay, and other Chinese languages (e.g., use of words like *but*, *then*, *holiday*, *pekcek³*), and the Putonghua recordings contained speech with an identifiably PRC accent and lexicon specific to Putonghua (e.g., 公交车 *gong¹jiao¹che¹* 'public bus').

Four speakers (one male and one female for SSM and SCM, one male and one female for Putonghua) made a total of 24 recordings. Of these, six were chosen for use in the study based on the feedback from test panels of ten Singaporeans and five Chinese nationals, who deemed these six recordings to be the most representative of Singaporean Mandarin/Putonghua speech, as well as the most natural and spontaneous. Two recordings by two additional Singaporean speakers, one male and one female, were also included in the study to distract participants, reducing the chance of them being able to identify the purpose of the study and for the participants to realize that the Singaporean guises were recorded by the same two people.

The instructions to the participants simply said that we were a team of university researchers and asked for their help in a survey. No mention was made of its linguistic nature. These were simple and vague enough not to alert them of its real purpose. After filling in their demographic details in the first section of the study questionnaire, participants listened to the eight recordings in random order, and after listening to each recording, rated each speaker on a 7point Likert scale in terms of the following ten traits: ‘Friendly,’ ‘Kind,’ ‘Honest,’ ‘Helpful,’ ‘Likeable,’ ‘Confident,’ ‘Hardworking,’ ‘Reliable,’ ‘Intelligent,’ and ‘Ambitious.’ After completing these ratings, participants were presented, at the end of the questionnaire, with a set of open-ended questions. These questions (7 for Singaporeans, 6 for Chinese nationals) sought to gain additional insights on participants’ attitudes towards Singaporean Mandarin Chinese and Putonghua, inquiring about their perceptions of Singapore and the PRC, the people of both countries, their perceived status of Mandarin/Putonghua, their past experiences learning Mandarin/Putonghua, and their intention to live and work in Singapore or China. Participants were also asked about the intelligibility of the recordings they had just heard. Out of all the participants, 37 answered these questions. The low number of responses in this section is perhaps due to having to write on an MSWord document and then submit the document to GoFileDrop.

Results

Because it cannot be assumed that the same traits will always be associated with solidarity and status, the first step of our analysis was to carry out a Principal Component Analysis, and Varimax with Kaiser normalisation as a rotation method, to see which of these dimensions the traits clustered with. On the first iteration, ‘Hardworking’ was found to clearly cluster with neither solidarity nor status (factor loadings for both were greater than 0.4). Thus, ‘Hardworking’ was removed and not subjected to further analysis. For the subsequent iteration, no complex variables were found, and all other requirements for a successful PCA were met, with the KaiserMeyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy for each individual variable as well as the set of variables ($=0.820$) being greater than 0.5, and the probability associated with the Barlett’s Test of Sphericity ($p=0.000$) being lesser than the level of significance of 0.001. The remaining nine traits clearly clustered with either the solidarity component or the status component, with factor loadings greater than 0.5 for either one or the other. These two components explain 66.4% of the total variance and factor loadings for these nine traits are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Varimax rotation of the two factors – Iteration 2

Rotated Component Matrix^a		
	Component	
	1 (SOLIDARITY)	2 (STATUS)
Friendly	.848	.212
Kind	.808	.194
Honest	.803	.065

Likeable	.797	.307
Reliable	.764	.215
Helpful	.321	.778
Confident	.241	.701
Ambitious	-.061	.867
Intelligent	.307	.634
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		

Although ‘Helpful’ is commonly viewed as a solidarity trait (Edwards, 1999), the participants of this study, interestingly, appeared to view it as a status trait, with factor loadings in line with well-established status traits like ‘Ambitious’ and ‘Intelligent.’ While the *willingness* to help would correspond to solidarity, the *ability* to help arguably corresponds more to status, and possibly, for these participants, someone can be seen as a helpful person only if he or she has the ability to help. Given that all the study participants were students at one of the highly competitive top Singapore universities, where help requested or received is often of an academic or work-related nature, this explanation seems reasonable.

Matched/Verbal-Guise Results

The results were collated in excel and then analysed with SPSS. A two-tailed paired samples t-test was conducted to check for statistical significance. Generally, Singaporean Chinese participants rated SSM higher than SCM for all traits. The two-tailed paired samples t-test revealed, however, that there was a significant difference between how Singaporean Chinese view SSM and SCM based on status ($p=0.002$), but not solidarity ($p=0.108$). Particularly significant were the differences between SSM and SCM ratings for ‘Helpful’ ($p=0.007$) and ‘Intelligent’ ($p=0.001$). Significant differences in how Singaporean Chinese participants viewed SSM and Putonghua, the two standard varieties in Singapore and the PRC respectively, were similarly found only for status ($p=0.000$) and not solidarity ($p=0.837$), with Putonghua rated higher (contrary to our expectations) in status. Further examination of the individual traits revealed significant differences specifically with ‘Confident’ ($p=0.001$) and ‘Ambitious’ ($p=0.000$). Figure 2 shows the Singaporean Chinese participants’ mean ratings for all three varieties: SSM, SCM, and Putonghua.

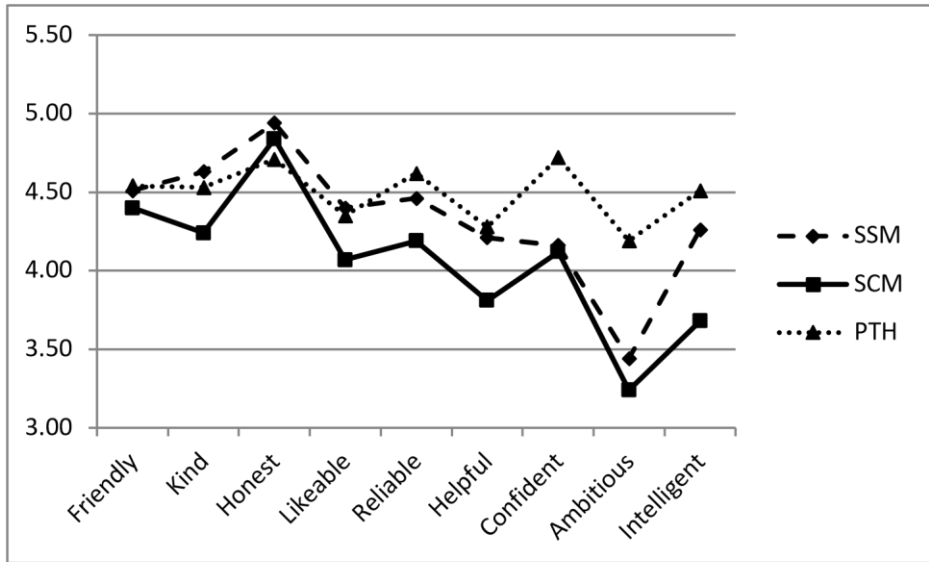


Figure 2. Mean ratings of SSM, SCM and PTH by trait (Singaporean Chinese)

In contrast to Singaporean Chinese evaluations of SSM as more favourable than SCM, Chinese national participants rated SCM higher than SSM on all traits except ‘Kind.’ While differences were again found to be significant only for status ($p=0.000$) and not solidarity ($p=0.084$), paired samples t-tests revealed significant differences in both dimensions for five individual traits: ‘Honest’ ($p=0.011$), ‘Reliable’ ($p=0.001$), ‘Helpful’ ($p=0.039$), ‘Confident’ ($p=0.000$), and ‘Ambitious’ ($p=0.006$). A borderline level of significant difference was also found for ‘Intelligent’ ($p=0.053$). As we suspected, the Chinese national participants rated Putonghua higher than both SSM and SCM for all traits. Figure 3 shows the Chinese national participants’ mean ratings for all three varieties.

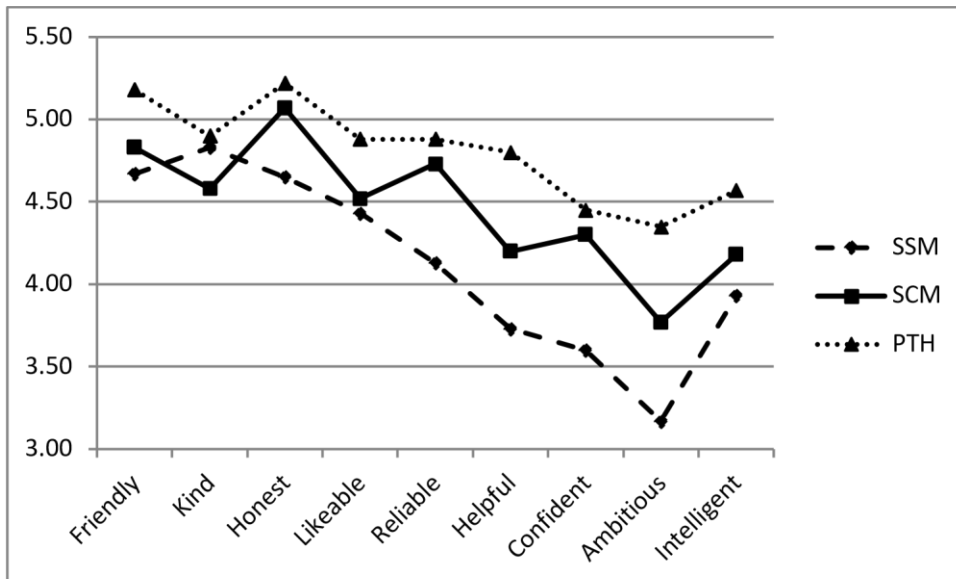


Figure 3. Mean ratings of SSM, SCM and PTH by trait (Chinese nationals)

Interestingly, the Chinese national participants rated SCM more favourably than Singaporeans themselves for all traits. This difference in perceptions between the two groups was found to be statistically significant for both status ($p=0.014$) and solidarity ($p=0.025$). Further analysis of the individual traits, however, revealed that the significant differences were only found for four traits: 'Friendly' ($p=0.034$), 'Reliable' ($p=0.025$), 'Ambitious' ($p=0.014$), and 'Intelligent' ($p=0.003$). The two groups' ratings for SSM were more similar, with Singaporean Chinese rating their standard variety higher than Chinese nationals for most, but not all, traits. Singaporean Chinese SSM ratings were significantly higher in terms of status ($p=0.014$), but not solidarity ($p=0.809$), and significantly higher for only two status traits: 'Helpful' ($p=0.050$) and 'Confident' ($p=0.020$). For Putonghua guises, Chinese nationals assigned higher ratings than Singaporean Chinese on all traits except for 'Confident.' T-tests revealed that the differences were significant only in terms of solidarity ($p=0.018$) and not status ($p=0.452$), but one status trait, 'Helpful,' also received significantly higher Chinese national ratings ($p=0.026$). Figures 4, 5, and 6 show mean SCM, SSM, and Putonghua ratings by both Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals.

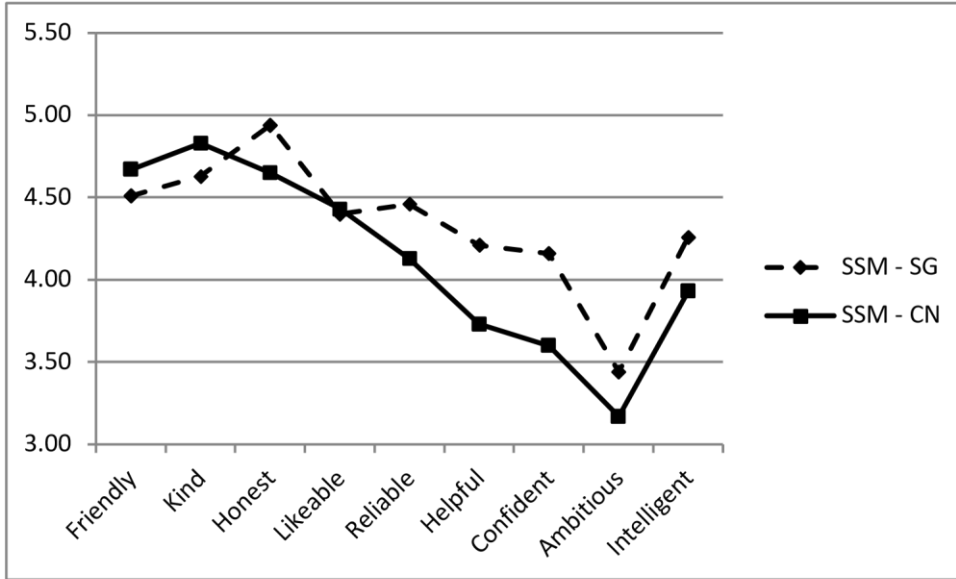


Figure 4. Mean ratings of SSM by Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals

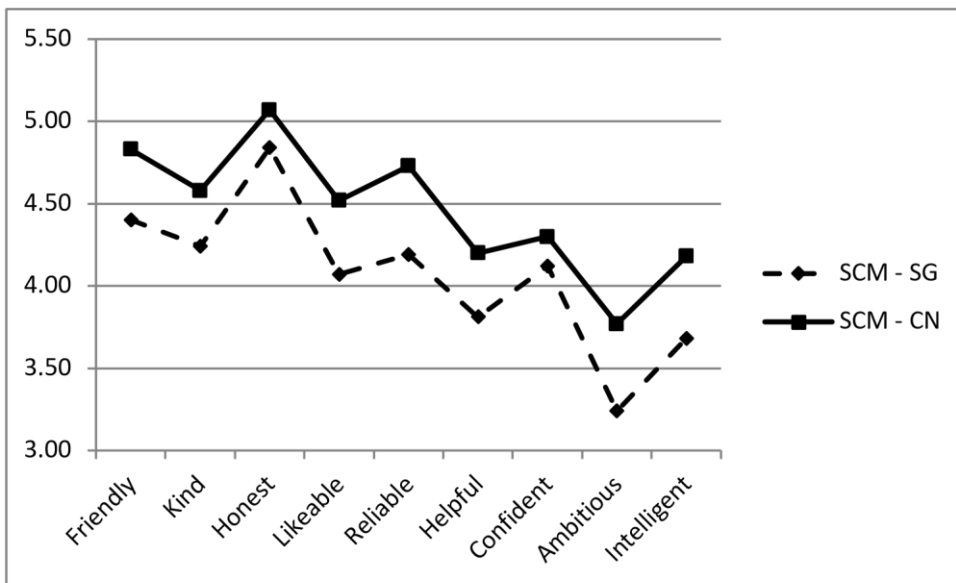


Figure 5. Mean ratings of SCM by Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals

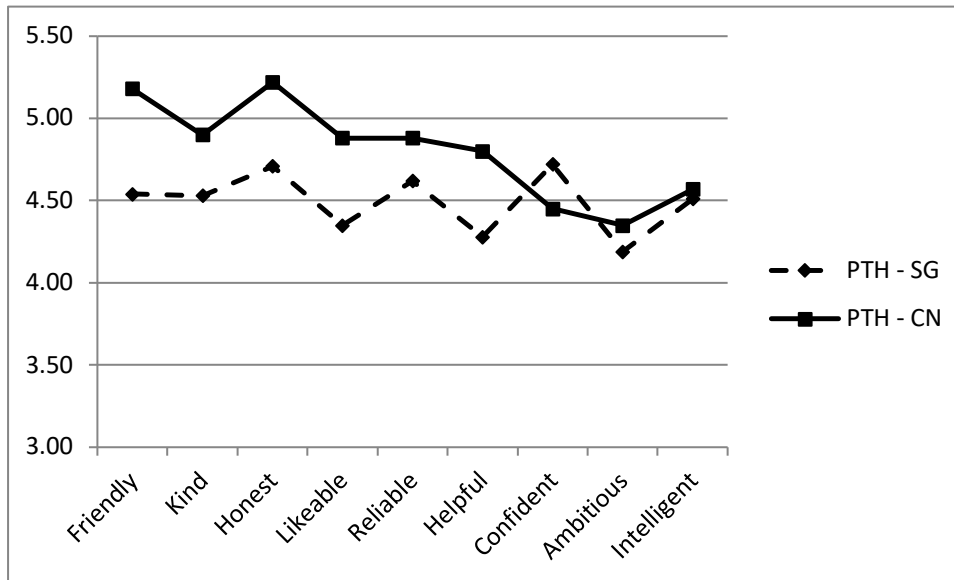


Figure 6. Mean ratings of PTH by Singaporean Chinese and Chinese nationals

Open-Ended Question Results

Out of the 64 participants, 37 completed the open-ended question section of the study questionnaire. Unfortunately, most of those who chose not to respond to these questions were the Chinese national participants, and those Chinese nationals that did respond generally provided very short answers. Our report of participant responses will, therefore, predominantly present the views of the Singaporean Chinese participants.

In response to the question asking if participants had difficulty understanding any of the recordings, there was only one participant who responded affirmatively. This Singaporean Chinese participant reported having difficulty understanding just one guise – the male Putonghua speaker – due to the “strong accent.”

Singaporean Chinese responses to questions regarding attitudes to Mandarin revealed the language generally to be held in high regard. 81% of them felt that it was important to have a good mastery of Mandarin. The main reasons cited include the role of Mandarin as a marker of their ethnic roots and the rise of China as an economic giant in the world. In contrast, only 7% of the Singaporean Chinese participants felt otherwise, expressing a belief that a very basic proficiency in Mandarin was sufficient as they can always rely on English. Additionally, a majority reported having positive experiences learning Mandarin. 26%, however, pointed out negative experiences associated with an excessive amount of memorisation, difficulty doing well in the subject, boredom, and unenthusiastic teachers.

In response to questions regarding their perceptions of Chinese nationals, Singaporean Chinese participants expressed mostly negative attitudes. 63% reported being irritated or annoyed with the increasing numbers of Chinese nationals in Singapore, and only 15% expressed positive attitudes towards them. The rest reported either mixed (19%) or neutral (4%) attitudes. The following are two examples of negative responses:

Annoyed – mostly due to their behaviour. They speak loudly, dress badly, and seem like country bumpkins. (Female, age 21)

Do not feel 100% comfortable with them around. They are changing the culture that Singapore used to have and messing up the place I call home. (Female, age 21)

I feel that they are crowding out Singaporeans and the Singaporean identity is quickly diminishing. (Male, age 24)

While the views expressed above seem to apply the negative stereotype to all Chinese nationals in Singapore, other Singaporean Chinese participants made a point of distinguishing educated Chinese nationals from those with less education. The following responses illustrate this differentiation, specifically targeting the “low educated” and “workers” (meaning construction and blue collar workers) and detailing some of the stereotypes associated with this group: The problem with Chinese nationals is that many of these Chinese are low educated and they bring their bad habits into the country. They spit on the ground, dirty the place, do not respect traffic rules and so on. The educated Chinese are generally fine as they are more cultured. (Female, age 24)

I do not really welcome the large influx of Chinese nationals, especially the workers. They bring their culture over to Singapore, like talking loudly, squatting by the roadsides. I find all these unacceptable. (Female, age 22)

Some views expressed tolerance rather than acceptance, but even this tolerance was qualified – contingent on some degree of acculturation or segregation:

I think it is fine as long as they are socially responsible. (Female, age 22)

Personally, I think that it is ok, as long as they don't do things that are against our values. (Male, age 22)

Alright with their presence, but prefer if they do not come close to me/speak to me. (Male, age 22)

Amidst all the negative sentiments, however, there were some Singaporean Chinese participants who did give responses that cast Chinese nationals in Singapore in a positive light: They are needed for the economy as Singaporeans tend to avoid the jobs they are doing. (Male, age 24)

Some of the Chinese nationals are still friendly and fun to have around. (Female, age 21)

Interactions with Chinese nationals may also help us understand and exhibit greater tolerance towards other cultures, and also widen our view of the world. (Female, age 21)

Lastly, in response to questions regarding Singaporean Chinese attitudes toward the PRC and someday working there, 41% stated that they would not want to work in the PRC at all, 30% said that they would like to work there for just a short while, 7% said they would like to work there for either a short or long-term assignment, and 22% said that they “would consider” working there. While these results show 59% at least willing to consider working in the PRC, the majority of Singaporean Chinese participants, including those who declared an intention to someday work there, viewed the PRC as an unfavourable place to live. The main reasons cited

for their negative attitudes include political instability, a significantly different culture from Singapore, unacceptable behaviour of the people, and unhygienic living conditions. Thus, we can deduce that those intending to work in the PRC were not exactly eager to do so, but were instead viewing a work assignment there as a potentially unpleasant experience they were willing to endure in the hopes of achieving economic gains or increased cultural capital. In contrast, the few Chinese national participants who responded to the open-ended questions expressed positive attitudes towards living and working in Singapore after university graduation, citing reasons such as the “clean and safe” environment in Singapore and the “nice” and “friendly” Singaporeans.

Discussion

One trend that can be observed is that all three varieties were rated higher for solidarity than status, even for the ‘standard’ varieties SSM and Putonghua. Although this finding contrasts with those of previous studies which have consistently found standard varieties to be rated higher for status than solidarity, this is perhaps understandable in the Singapore context, where English has been promoted as the language of power and the solidarity functions of Mandarin Chinese have been most forcibly promoted. Compared to English, Mandarin Chinese, in Singapore, is clearly regarded as lower in status. More interesting, however, is the fact that Putonghua was also rated higher for solidarity than status, especially by the PRC participants (see Figure 5). This is despite the fact that Putonghua is the first language of the Chinese nationals and the language of administration and work in the PRC. Zhang’s (2008) finding of an emerging ‘cosmopolitan professional identity’ indexed by the use of Putonghua by *waiqi* professionals is a prescient indicator for the observations in this study. Hence, for a segment of the Putonghua speakers who are directly involved in the ‘transnational linguistic market place’, either through working with foreigners or with travels and residence outside of mainland China, this development of ‘valuing’ is not surprising.

These findings corroborate Ndhlovu’s (2014) observation that even languages of wider communication do not have the same status for immigrants in linguistically diverse societies. For these immigrants, the status of a language is not dictated by language policies in the country of origin, but is dependent on the immigrants’ own “...pragmatic and ideological considerations of identity, belonging, social networking, gaining access and acceptance.” (Ndhlovu, 2014, p. 87). The Chinese national participants had been living in Singapore for a sufficient amount of time to have adopted the notion that English is the language that will give them access to higher status. If they intend to stay in Singapore to live or work after graduation, this would indeed be the situation they would need to contend with. The situation in the PRC though is arguably coming to resemble that of Singapore, with Chinese nationals placing English in a privileged status position over Putonghua (Gao, 2011). According to Gao (2011), the education system in the PRC is currently skewed towards English, which is a qualifying requirement for university admission, while Putonghua is merely an optional one. English is also a requirement, or at least a significant advantage, for gaining employment or job promotion. As can be deduced from the relatively neutral status ratings Chinese national participants gave Putonghua, having a good mastery of Putonghua in the PRC is merely a basic requirement – not an advantage. Putonghua serves solidarity functions between Chinese nationals, but it is proficiency in English that is regarded as

the key to higher power and status. As Wee (2003) observes, English is now widely perceived to be *the* language that provides “access to economic development and social mobility, while other languages are seen as either hindering such access, or to the extent that they are considered important, are treated mainly as repositories of ancient knowledge or cultural heritage” (p. 221). This observation is also in line with Li Wei and Zhu Hua’s (2010) findings on the changing language hierarchies in Chinese diasporas. We can, therefore, assume that the findings of this study are not unique to Singapore, but can perhaps be extended to other parts of the world where English is part of the linguistic repertoire of any population.

Singaporean Chinese participants rating SSM higher than SCM for both status and solidarity traits does not conform with the typical result of colloquial varieties being rated low in status, but high in solidarity. One possible explanation for this is that perhaps, in the Singapore context, certain status traits could be seen as indicative of certain solidarity traits. For example, someone who is better educated could be regarded as more likely to exhibit higher levels of social graciousness and traits like kindness, honesty and trustworthiness. Language varieties indexing higher education level and status would, thus, likely index higher solidarity as well.

The results were in accord with our revised hypothesis that Singaporean Chinese would view Putonghua positively in terms of solidarity. Despite 63% of our Singaporean participants expressing negative sentiments about Chinese nationals in their responses to the open-ended questionnaire items, their ratings for Putonghua in terms of the various solidarity traits were relatively high, conforming to Chong and Tan’s (2013) findings regarding Singaporean attitudes to Beijing accents. One possible reason for the discrepancy between participants’ negative statements about Chinese nationals and their positive solidarity evaluations of Putonghua could be that participants were not associating Putonghua exclusively with the Chinese nationals with lower levels of education who serve as the basis for their negative stereotypes. Since these participants were all university students, they were exposed on a regular basis to Putonghuaspeaking Chinese nationals in the university environment who did not conform at all to such stereotypes. The speech of the Putonghua speakers on the recordings, who were also, in fact, highly-educated university students, likely brought to mind images of their highly-educated Chinese national classmates.

As for status, the findings did confirm our hypothesis that Singaporeans would rate Putonghua higher than SCM for status traits, but not our prediction that SSM would receive higher status ratings than Putonghua. Our Singaporean participants, like those of Chong and Tan (2013) evaluating accents, rated Putonghua guises higher than SSM guises for status traits. Singaporeans still do seem to view Putonghua as the highest prestige standard variety of Mandarin – a variety with more status and power than Singapore Mandarin, and the one they believe they should strive to emulate. This attitude was evident in the open-ended question responses, where one participant expressed concern that Chinese nationals in Singapore might think Singaporeans “incapable of speaking good Mandarin”:

With the increase of Chinese nationals in Singapore, whether we like it or not, we should at least make sure we can communicate with them and not let them think we are incapable of speaking good Mandarin. (Adeline, age 21)

Singaporean participants did, however, rate SSM guises fairly high on all status traits except for 'Ambitious,' suggesting that SSM is gaining status locally and we expect this elevation to persist as the local identity becomes more defined.

It is not surprising that Chinese national participants rated their own variety, Putonghua, higher than the Singaporean varieties on all traits. It is, however, rather surprising that they viewed SCM more positively than SSM for all traits except for 'Kind.' One explanation for this could be that the presence in SCM of words and pragmatic particles from various Chinese languages like Hokkien reminded the Chinese Nationals of their own code-mixing between standard Putonghua and their local varieties back in the PRC. Furthermore, as indicated by Zhang (2006), the use of English in Putonghua is also perceived by her Chinese participants from Beijing as an indication of a more cosmopolitan identity which is desired and an index of modernity. While the English abilities of these Chinese national participants were sufficient for them to function in Singapore's English-medium universities, the English proficiency of Chinese national university students in Singapore is considerably lower than that of most tertiary educated Singaporeans. Our Chinese national participants might have been impressed by the ease with which Singaporeans are able to effortlessly mix English words into their Mandarin speech. Hence, the status ratings given to SCM speakers who did so in the recordings could reflect the high regard they held for such abilities, as well as the authenticity these practices represent in the Singaporean context. Or very simply, the Chinese Nationals were identifying with the Singaporeans' effort in identity formation and endorse this practice. SSM, meanwhile, could have been viewed as merely a failed attempt to emulate Putonghua.

Conclusion

This study provides insights on how Chinese nationals and Singaporeans living in Singapore view the varieties of Mandarin spoken in Singapore and Putonghua, the variety of Mandarin spoken in the PRC. From a methodological point of view, the difference between this study and Chong and Tan's (2013) shows that while accent has been widely used in matched-guise studies, the use of samples that are closer to natural language can yield substantially different results. These findings not only shed light on the dynamics of interactions between Singaporeans and Chinese nationals, but also help us understand the forces that drive language maintenance and shift in immigrant communities and in multilingual societies. We can also see that this research has relevance in other countries where new varieties of Mandarin are spoken or emerging, for attitudes to 'world Chineses' is a topic that is sure to increase in relevance as the ever-expanding Chinese diaspora gains greater influence (Jacques, 2008) and as "Mandarin fever" (Gao, 2011, p. 254) continues to sweep across the world.

Notes

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¹ <http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110816-294757.html>

² *Rojak* means 'mixture' in Malay. In Singapore and Malaysia, the term is often used to refer to any eclectic mix – particularly the multi-ethnic character of both countries and a traditional vegetable and fruit salad dish popular in the region.

³ *Pekcek* is a Hokkien term expressing frustration or exasperation. It has become a commonly used lexical item in Singapore Colloquial English.

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