

Chapter 4

Negation of the Adjective in Various Contexts

This chapter is concerned with the negation of the Singaporean Hokkien adjective in contextual environments. Negation is discussed in detail in terms of categories and their usages in various contexts. The purpose of discussing negation is to confirm the similarities of the adjective and verb in Singaporean Hokkien.

4.1 Comparison of Negation across Mandarin and

Singaporean Hokkien

In Mandarin, negativity can be expressed in two possible ways depending on the verb that occurs in the sentence. The first way is to insert the negative word *pu*⁴² ‘not’ in front of the verb *shi*⁴² ‘be’. The second way is to insert the negative word *mei*²⁴ ‘not’ in front of the verb *you*²¹ ‘have’. Singaporean Hokkien differs from Mandarin in that it renders negation in three different ways. As an introduction, I shall describe the different types of negation by establishing three modal auxiliary verbs that evoke three different types of negation.

4.1.1 The Modal Auxiliary Verb *ʔe*²¹ ‘can’ and Its Negative

Counterpart *bwe*²¹ ‘can not’

In Singaporean Hokkien, there is a modal auxiliary verb that expresses ability called *ʔe*²¹ ‘can’. It precedes a verb in a question sentence in order to ask whether an action can be performed or not. Consider the token given as follows:

(78) *tsit*⁴⁴ *ten*⁴² *ts^hya*³³ *ʔe*²¹ *tsaw*⁴² *bwe*²¹

this car can run not

DEM CLF N AUX V NEG

‘Can this car run or not?’

In (78), the auxiliary modal verb ʔe^{21} 'can' is accompanied by its negative counterpart bwe^{21} 'cannot' to form a question. The expected response is either the positive answer ʔe^{21} 'can' or bwe^{21} 'cannot'. The auxiliary modal verb ʔe^{21} 'can' can also be followed by other words to form other variants of ability.

a) $\text{ʔe}^{21} \text{ say}^{42}$ $\text{bwe}^{21} \text{ say}^{42}$

'can' 'cannot'

b) $\text{ʔe}^{21} \text{ hyaw}^{42}$ $\text{bwe}^{21} \text{ hyaw}^{42}$

'know' 'not know'

As suggested in a) and b), the modal auxiliary verb ʔe^{21} 'can' along with its negative counterpart bwe^{42} 'cannot' can be followed by the words say^{42} and hyaw^{42} to form variants of abilities. Literally, $\text{ʔe}^{21} \text{ say}^{42}$ in a) should be translated as 'able to do so' as in permission and $\text{ʔe}^{21} \text{ hyaw}^{42}$ in b) should be rendered as 'able to know'. Of all of the abovementioned modal auxiliaries, the latter couple are used exclusively for verbs whereas the former can be used for adjectives as well. Below is an example of the auxiliary modal verb ʔe^{21} 'can' preceding an adjective.

(79) tsuy^{42} ʔe^{21} syo^{33} bwe^{21}

water can hot not

N AUX ADJ NEG

'Is the water hot (or not)? ANSWER: ʔe^{21} 'yes' or bwe^{21} 'no'

In (79), the modal auxiliary verb ʔe^{21} 'can' is used in conjunction with its negative counterpart bwe^{21} to form a polar question. The negative bwe^{21} can be transliterated as 'not' or 'no' depending on the context in which it occurs.

4.1.2 The Modal Auxiliary Verb ʔu^{21} 'have' and Its Negative

Counterpart bo^{24} 'not have'

The second modal auxiliary verb which is being discussed in this section is ʔu^{21} 'have'. It occurs before nouns, verbs and adjectives. The purpose of this modal auxiliary verb is to determine whether the noun, the verb or the adjective following it is

existent or not. The following examples (80), (83) and (84) are given to demonstrate the abovementioned environments in which the modal auxiliary verb λu^{21} 'have' occurs:

(80) li^{42} λu^{21} luy^{33} bo^{24}

you have money Not
 2P V N NEG

'Do you have money (or not)?'

ANSWER: λu^{21} 'have' or bo^{24} 'not have'

In (80), λu^{21} 'have' is analysed as a main verb instead of being a modal auxiliary verb. This example can be explained by referring to (37), which the verb phrase $\lambda u^{21} luy^{33}$ 'have money' can be analysed as an adjectival construction due to the reason that the phrase can take on the intensifying degree expression $tsin^{33} tya^{42}$ 'very'. The inclusion of bo^{24} 'not', the negative counterpart of the verb λu^{21} 'have' results in a polar question which inquires about the existence of the verb phrase.

(81) li^{42} λu^{21} k^hwa^{42} $tyo\lambda^{21}$ li^{33} bo^{24}

you have see reach he (her) not
 2P AUX V LOC 3P NEG

'Did you see him (her) (or not)?'

ANSWER: λu^{21} 'yes' or bo^{24} 'no'

In (81), λu^{21} 'have' is analysed as a modal auxiliary verb. This modal auxiliary λu^{21} 'have' is different from the one explained in (80) because it precedes another verb k^hwa^{42} 'see', which is the main verb of the sentence. The verb λu^{21} 'have' therefore undergoes semantic bleaching and gets demoted to a modal auxiliary verb demonstrating a grammatical function instead of a lexical one. The insertion of bo^{24} 'not', the negative counterpart of the verb λu^{21} 'have' leads to the product of a polar question which inquires about the existence of the verb.

It is particularly worthwhile to notice the response included for the two examples; in (80), the answer to the question sentence is glossed as 'have' or 'not have' whereas in (81) the answer is either 'yes' or 'no'. Despite the fact that the anticipated response is identically λu^{21} or bo^{24} in both examples, they are realized differently

because of the grammatical functions of the verb ʔu^{21} 'have' in (80) and (81) do not match. The former is a main verb whereas the latter is a modal auxiliary verb.

(82) ʔa^{33} hwa^{44} ʔu^{21} swi^{42} bo^{24}

ah Hua have good looking not

DIM N_{PROP} AUX ADJ NEG

'Is Ah Hua good looking (or not)?'

ANSWER: ʔu^{21} 'yes' or bo^{24} 'no'

In (82), the modal auxiliary verb ʔu^{21} 'have' precedes the adjective swi^{42} 'good looking' in order to confirm the existence of the descriptive quality of the subject of the sentence. The inclusion of the negative counterpart of the modal auxiliary at the terminal position of the sentence formulates a question inquiring the existence of the adjective. Identical to (81), the expected response to the abovementioned question is glossed either as 'yes' or 'no' due to the fact that the Singaporean Hokkien adjective resembles its verbal counterpart in terms of grammatical properties as described earlier in section 2.2.

4.1.3 The Modal Auxiliary Verb si^{21} 'be' and Its Negative

Counterpart ʔm^{21} si^{21} 'not be'

The third auxiliary verb that is worthy of discussion is si^{21} 'be'. It occurs before a noun or a nominalized adjective in order to confirm whether a state is valid or not. Consider the example given below:

(83) ʔi^{33} si^{21} gwa^{42} ʔe^{21} peŋ^{21} yu^{42}

he (she) be I of Friend

3P COP 1P GEN N

'He (She) is my friend'

The modal auxiliary verb si^{21} 'be' in (83) is grammatically glossed as a copula. The reason for this analysis is due to the similarities of the grammatical functions of Singaporean Hokkien si^{21} 'be' and the English copula verb 'be'. The Singaporean Hokkien modal auxiliary verb si^{21} 'be' resembles the English copula 'be' in that they

both are utilized to describe noun-like words. Though the Singaporean Hokkien adjective functions similarly to a verb in that it does not need to have a copula to occur before it after it follows the subject, it can undergo nominalization by preceding a nominalizer ʔe^{21} 'of'. The outcome is that the adjective becomes more noun-like and can take on the copula si^{21} 'be'. Token (84) given below is an example that supports the abovementioned claim:

(84) *hit*⁴⁴ *lyap*²¹ *tsim*²⁴ *taw*²⁴ *si*²¹ *ʔaŋ*²⁴ (*sek*²¹) *ʔe*²⁴

that		pillow head	<u>be</u>	<u>red</u>	color	<u>of</u>
DEM	CLF	N	<u>COP</u>	<u>ADJ</u>	N	<u>NOM</u>

'that pillow is red (colored)'

The copula si^{21} 'be' in (84) precedes the adjective ʔaŋ^{24} 'red' which in turn is followed by the nominalizer ʔe^{21} 'of'. Whether the adjective ʔaŋ^{24} 'red' is followed by the noun sek^{21} 'color' or not yields the same result; the nominalizer ʔe^{21} 'of' is still required to complete the sentence. In a polar question, the modal auxiliary si^{21} 'be' co-occurs with its negative counterpart $\text{ʔm}^{21} \text{si}^{21}$ 'not be' as portrayed in example (85) below:

(85) *tsit*⁴⁴ *tsya*²¹ *kāw*²⁴ *ʔi*⁴² *si*²¹ *ʔm*²¹ *si*²¹ *li*⁴² *ʔe*²⁴

this		chair	<u>be</u>	<u>Not be</u>	you	of
DEM	CLF	N	<u>COP</u>	<u>NEG</u>	2P	GEN

'Is this chair yours or not?'

As observed in (85), the position of occurrence of $\text{ʔm}^{21} \text{si}^{21}$ 'not be' which is the negative counterpart of the modal auxiliary verb si^{21} 'be' immediately follows its positive counterpart in order to constitute a polar question.

4.2 Negation of the Adjectival Phrase

In Singaporean Hokkien, there are three possible methods to negate an adjectival phrase depending on the modal auxiliary verbs that precede the adjectival phrase.

a) If the modal auxiliary verb that occurs before the adjectival phrase is ʔe^{21} 'can', the negative equivalent bwe^{21} 'can not' is used to negate the adjectival phrase.

b) If the adjectival phrase follows the modal auxiliary verb ʔu^{21} 'have', it is negated by bo^{24} 'not have'.

c) When the modal auxiliary verb that precedes the adjectival phrase is si^{21} 'be', the negative counterpart $\text{ʔm}^{21} \text{si}^{21}$ 'not be' is employed to negate the adjectival phrase.

Examples (86), (87) and (88) are given below to demonstrate these three different types of negation:

(86) $\text{tsit}^{44} \text{ k}^{\text{h}\text{ɔ}^{42}} \text{ hak}^{21} \text{ seŋ}^{44} \text{ bwe}^{21} \text{ k}^{\text{h}\text{yan}}^{21}$

this student not clever

DEM CLF N NEG ADJ

'This student is not clever'

(87) $\text{tsit}^{44} \text{ k}^{\text{h}\text{ɔ}^{42}} \text{ hak}^{21} \text{ seŋ}^{44} \text{ bo}^{21} \text{ k}^{\text{h}\text{yan}}^{21}$

this student not clever

DEM CLF N NEG ADJ

'This student is not clever'

(88) $\text{tsit}^{44} \text{ ki}^{44} \text{ pit}^{21} \text{ ʔm}^{21} \text{ si}^{21} \text{ ho}^{24} \text{ ʔe}^{24}$

this pen not good one

DEM CLF N NEG ADJ NOM

'This pen is not a good one'

Consider tokens (86) and (87) which are negated using the different negatives bwe^{21} 'can not' and bo^{24} 'not have'. They are perceived by native Singaporean Hokkien speakers to be the same as the translations of both tokens suggest. Cheng's study of Taiwanese Adjectives (1979: 76-78) concludes that both kinds of negatives are different in the view that the former is correlated to pejorative qualities whereas the latter is associated with ameliorative or neutral qualities.

In Singaporean Hokkien, there seems to be no such judgmental analysis noticeable to the native speaker and thus both types of negatives are identical and equally effective in demonstrating the lack of a quality of a certain entity regardless of the quality being desirable or not. The sentence illustrated in example (88) differs from the two mentioned above in that the negative precedes a more noun-like construction. Even though the negative $\text{ʔm}^{21} \text{si}^{21}$ ‘not be’ immediately precedes an adjective ho^{42} ‘good’, the adjective is merely a part of the noun phrase $\text{ho}^{42} \text{ʔe}^{24}$ ‘good one’ in which the adjective is being nominalized by ʔe^{24} ‘of’. Nevertheless, this negative $\text{ʔm}^{21} \text{si}^{21}$ ‘not be’ can occur before an adjectival construction as well. Consider example (89) given below:

(89)	tsit^{44}	$\text{k}^{\text{h}}\text{ɔ}^{42}$	hak^{21}	seŋ^{44}	$\text{ʔm}^{21} \text{si}^{21}$	tsin^{33}	$\text{k}^{\text{h}}\text{yɑŋ}^{21}$
	this		student	<u>not</u>	real	clever	
	DEM	CLF	N	<u>NEG</u>	ADV	ADJ	
	‘This student is not very clever’						

As shown in (89), the negative $\text{ʔm}^{21} \text{si}^{21}$ ‘not be’ is followed by an adjectival phrase $\text{tsin}^{33} \text{k}^{\text{h}}\text{yɑŋ}^{21}$ ‘really clever’. The adjective $\text{k}^{\text{h}}\text{yɑŋ}^{21}$ ‘clever’ is modified by the intensifying adverb tsin^{33} ‘real’ which accentuates the fact that the construction is of an adjectival one.

In this chapter, it has been shown that the adjective can be negated. The adjective can take on three kinds of negation depending on what type of modal auxiliary verb occurs in the sentence. The modal auxiliary verb denotes one of the following functions: 1) ability, 2) possession or 3) validity of a state. Although there are three types of negation to deal with, they all serve a single purpose; they negate the adjective. The fact that not only verbs but also adjectives can take on negation provides suggestive evidence that they may be of the same word class.