

# THE REDUPLICATION OF CHINESE NAMES IN SINGAPORE ENGLISH

by  
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In Singapore English, one finds a range of culture-specific address forms that are not found in any other culturally Anglo variety of English. These forms of address are loaded with meanings and can tell us a lot about the evolving Singapore culture and the cultural grounding of Singapore English. Such knowledge benefits a cultural outsider because it facilitates a better understanding of and integration with the Singapore English speech community. This study looks into one such form of address used in Singapore English – the reduplication of Chinese names. The study shows that this grammatical construction is meaningful, and captures its meaning in the form of a reductive paraphrase using Natural Semantic Metalanguage. The use of this address form can be shown to be motivated by a Chinese cultural attitude, which speakers are now able to express in Singapore English.

## *1. Introduction*

Speakers of Anglo cultural varieties of English, or Anglo English,<sup>1</sup> have at their disposal a host of pragmatic linguistic devices to define or build personal relationships with fellow speakers. These include first full names, nicknames, short forms, and other forms of 'expressive derivation' (Wierzbicka 1992:225). These forms of address are heavily loaded with meanings, and play a crucial role in the integrity and cohesion of the speech community.

However, although these Anglo English personal nicknames and expressive derivation serve certain cultural needs for Anglo English speakers, one cannot assume that they do the same for the speech communities of other dialects of English. Take the Singapore English speech community for example. Although 'English' is widely used as the language of government administration, education, and cross-cultural communication in the multiethnic society of Singapore (cf. Singapore Facts and Pictures 2001), the pragmatic meanings of Anglo English names and other address forms seem not be culturally salient to Singapore English speakers. In fact, the meanings of English personal names, nicknames, short forms, and family relation terms

(which Wierzbicka (1992) has rigorously described) appear to be unfamiliar to many Singapore English speakers.

On the other hand, in Singapore English, one finds a host of culture-specific relationship building devices such as the calques *aunty* and *uncle*, the clitic *Ab* (e.g. *Ab Meng*, the celebrity Sumatran orangutan at the Singapore Zoological Gardens), and the reduplication of Chinese names which are not available in any variety of Anglo English. These forms of address, many of which originate in the Chinese languages, play an important role in the construction of social identities and hierarchical relationships among Singapore English speakers in accordance with their cultural expectations. These expressions carry pragmatic meanings which define the kind of interaction that should take place between the speakers in question. In this respect, they can be culturally revealing, if studied rigorously. They can tell us a lot about how Singapore English speakers see themselves in relation to one another, their values, attitudes, and interpersonal obligations.

Unfortunately, researchers and writers on this cultural dialect of English, a notion to which I shall return later, have hitherto remained largely silent on the topic. The semantics and pragmatics of names and other forms of address in Singapore English are basically 'no man's land'. Considering the fact that there are over 800,000 non-locals (e.g. expatriates, foreign students) living in Singapore (cf. Singapore Facts and Pictures 2001:7), constituting approximately 20% of the total population, the need to define the various forms of address in Singapore English becomes crucial, if only because such cultural knowledge can help cultural outsiders gain a better understanding of the speech community and avoid cultural misunderstanding.

To this end, this paper seeks to provide a semantic and cultural interpretation of one address form used in Singapore English – the reduplication of names, an address form derived from a Chinese grammatical process that is not uncommon among the Chinese speaking community in Singapore (cf. Lim and Wee 2001) and, presumably, elsewhere. I will state the meaning of this grammatical construction in the form of a paraphrase, stated in the first person mode, comprising words that are simple and culture-independent. The formula would allow any cultural outsider to step into the shoes of an insider and see meaning from the insider's perspective. Extrapolating

from the proposed semantic explication, I will show that the use of this reduplication is associated with a cultural attitude or value that is characteristic of the Singapore English speech community.

## *2. A Semantic Approach to Reduplication*

Mey (2001:6) defines pragmatics as the study of 'the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society'. The study of the reduplication of names in Singapore English naturally falls into this branch of linguistics. However, at the same time, I agree with Wierzbicka (1991) that it should also be about semantics, in that meaning ought to be looked into as well; pragmatics is best not seen as a field separate from semantics, but as a branch of semantics, insofar as pragmatic meaning is to be described in the same way as other kinds of meaning. After all, without first understanding meaning expressed in speech, how can anyone hope to fully understand human interaction mediated by speech (cf. Wierzbicka 1991, 1992)? The truth of the matter is that as long as meaning has not been made clear, our understanding of any human expression can never be complete.

Unfortunately, traditional approaches to meaning are plagued with a host of shortcomings which obscure meaning (Goddard 1998). Because of this, meaning has eluded many linguists working in the fields of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Since the object of this study is a reduplication process, in what follows, I shall highlight two major shortcomings in word definition with examples from studies of reduplication. In the subsequent section (3), I shall advocate the use of a semantic analytical tool that will allow us to overcome these shortcomings.

### 2.1. Meaning as 'abstract labels' and 'functions'

It seems to be the norm for many linguists, in studies of reduplication, to rely on abstract labels (cf. Wierzbicka 1986) as semantic explanations. By 'abstract labels', I refer to metalinguistic words like

*continuity, intensification, plurality, repetition*, etc, as the following examples demonstrate (my italics everywhere in the quotes below):

The process is generally employed, with self-evident symbolism, to indicate such concepts as *distribution, plurality, repetition, customary activity, increase in size, added intensity, continuance*. (Sapir 1921:79)

Reduplication is a common phonological process in which part or all of a lexical item is duplicated, usually to express some notion such as *plurality, repetition, duration, or intensity*. (Langacker 1973:175)

...within the small set of meanings that most reduplications convey in various languages there are some meanings that appear to be opposite. Such are, for instance, *augmentation* and *diminution*... (Moravcsik 1978:317)

Often reduplication has an augmentative meaning. It signals an *increase in size, frequency or intensity*. (...) Conversely, reduplication may have a *diminutive* effect, often with connotations of *endearment*... or simply of *attenuation*... (Katamba 1993:182, original emphasis)

When a single copy is involved, the meaning is that of *attenuation*. When two copies are involved, the meaning is that of *continuity*. (Lim and Wee 2001:91, on the reduplication of verbs in Singapore English)

These linguists appear to treat such esoteric labels as adequate and sufficient for the description of meaning. However, it ought to be recognized that the use of such metalinguistic terms is problematic for at least two important reasons. Firstly, these terms are obscure words, even though linguists who rely on such words may have assumed that their meanings are clear to all. In fact, it appears to me that the meaning of these technical labels is even more obscure than the reduplication process itself. Given that a person's understanding of a word under study is contingent upon his or her understanding of the metalanguage used, how can one hope to clarify meaning by using obscure metalanguage? Secondly, linguists may not have been

consistent in the use of such labels, as different linguists could have used the same word to refer to different meanings. While labels like, say, *intensification* have often been used in the semantic description of reduplication processes in different languages, it is not at all clear that all these reduplications mean the same thing.

The use of labels as a semantic explanatory tool obscures meaning. Therefore, they ought not to be treated as adequate and sufficient for semantic purposes. To define a reduplication process, or any other kind of expression for that matter, there is no escape from a genuine semantic analysis based on a large set of authentic examples of use, and it is only through an in-depth semantic analysis of a word or an expression that its meaning can be revealed.

## 2.2. Ethnocentrism

Another major obstacle to the study of meaning concerns the use of language-specific words of one language to describe language-specific words of another. When a linguist describes the meaning of a word in this way, the outcome is a distorted, ethnocentric representation of meaning. Unfortunately, many linguists do not seem to recognize the dangers of this approach.

As Wierzbicka (1999:35) has pointed out, 'Most words in any language are specific to this particular language or to a group of languages, and are not universal'. Therefore, it follows that each language, or even each dialect of a language, represents a semantic system like no other. When a linguist uses complex words of one language to describe an expression from another, this linguist unwittingly and unfairly imposes the semantic system of the former on to the latter. To demonstrate my point, let us look at a study on Ponapean reduplication (McCarthy and Prince 1995:334). The writers present their data as follows:

<u>Base</u>	<u>Prefixing Reduplication</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
duup	<u>du</u> -duup	'dive'
mand	<u>ma</u> -mand	'tame'
laud	<u>la</u> -laud	'big, old'
kens	<u>ke</u> -kens	'ulcerate'
pa	<u>paa</u> -pa	'weave'
pap	<u>pam</u> -pap	'swim'
lal	<u>lal</u> -lal	'make a sound'
par	<u>par</u> -a-par	'cut'

Clearly, each of the Ponapean-specific expressions and its English gloss does not match exactly, given that Ponapean and English are two different semantic systems. It would be a curiosity that Ponapean, an Eastern Austronesian language spoken in Micronesia (Crystal 2001), should have expressions that find perfect semantic matches in complex English words like *dive*, *tame*, *ulcerate*, and *weave*.<sup>2</sup> Such cases are not isolated instances; this approach is very much favoured in formal studies of reduplication (and in many other areas in linguistics as well). Let us look at some more examples:

Chichewa (Mchombo 1998:514, 515):

<i>mwamúna</i>	'man, male'
<i>mwamúnámuna</i>	'real or macho man'
<i>m-kázi</i>	'woman, female'
<i>mkázíkazi</i>	'cute and cultured woman'
<i>kond-a</i>	'love'
<i>chi-kond-an-o</i>	'mutual love'
<i>d-a</i>	'hate'
<i>m-d-án-i</i>	'enemy'
<i>kodz-a</i>	'urinate'
<i>kodz-er-a</i>	'urinate with'

Tagalog (Spencer 1991:13):

<i>bumasa</i>	'read' (infinitive)
<i>bumasabasa</i>	'to read intermittenly'

Clearly, the expressions in each pair do not match exactly, because metalinguistic words like *real*, *macho*, *cute*, *cultured*, *love*, *mutual*, *bate*, *enemy*, *urinate*, *intermittently* are complex, language-specific, and ethnocentric in that semantic equivalents are not found in most, if not all, other natural languages. It is certainly a strange notion that complex expressions in (say) Tagalog, an Austronesian language (Crystal 2001) should have semantic equivalents in English, a Germanic language. When one uses complex words from one language (usually English) to describe complex words from another, one imposes the semantic system of one language on the other. Consequently, one gets an inaccurate, ethnocentric view of the meaning under study. To quote Goddard (2002a:8):

It is a truism of linguistics – and rightly so – that languages should be described in their own terms, and that one should avoid projecting or imposing the categories of one's native language upon other languages.

In fact, it does not even take a linguist to recognise the inadequacy of an ethnocentric metalanguage, for 'it is a common conviction of bilingual and bicultural people all over the world that they lead a "double life", and that the meanings they express in one language differ from those expressed in the other' (Wierzbicka 1992:7). Therefore, to avoid an ethnocentric view of another speech community's semantic system and cultural experience, linguists ought to refrain from using complex, language- and culture-specific words as metalanguage.

### *3. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage*

To describe the meaning of a reduplication process, we would need a metalanguage that can allow us to overcome the usual pitfalls of defining (cf. Goddard 1998), like the ones mentioned above. In this section, I will discuss the criteria that this metalanguage must fulfil, where to find this metalanguage, and how it can help us to overcome the usual obstacles to linguistic and, presumably, other areas of human understanding.

### 3.1. Intelligibility

Obviously, to facilitate the understanding of the meaning of a word, the first property we ought to look out for in a metalanguage is comprehensibility. In other words, to describe the meaning of an expression, we need to rely on a metalanguage that is, first and foremost, intelligible to the ordinary speaker. This is because, as Wierzbicka explains (1996:11):

Semantics is a search for understanding, and to understand anything we must reduce the unknown to the known, the obscure to the clear, the abstruse to the self-explanatory.

This begets the question: Where do we look for words that are intelligible to all? To answer this question, let me first quote from Goddard (1998:57):

Once we adopt the principle of reductive paraphrase it follows that there ought to be a set of expressions – a kind of semantically minimal 'core' – that remains even after a completely exhaustive semantic analysis has been carried out. These are semantically primitive expressions, which cannot be defined any further. The compelling logic that leads to this conclusion has been recognised through the ages by thinkers of many different persuasions. In the seventeenth century, Pascal, Descartes, Arnauld, and Leibniz all saw the need for semantic primitives.

According to Goddard, in any language, one would expect to find a set of everyday words that are so simple in meaning that they resist definition, in that these words cannot be expressed in simpler terms (cf. Wierzbicka 1996). These words represent the simplest of meanings, and may thus be referred to *semantic primitives* or *primes* (cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka (eds.) 1994; Wierzbicka 1996; Goddard 1998).

To illustrate, one may consider the English first and second person singular pronouns *I* and *you*. No paraphrase, no abstract label, no technical term can make the meaning of either of these words clearer



to an English speaker than it already is. It is impossible to express these words in simpler terms; they are indefinable. To explain such a word to an outsider, it seems that the easiest way is to refer to the same expression in this person's own language. Because of this, these two words are considered instances of semantic primes.

### 3.2. Universality

To describe meaning, besides intelligibility, something more would be required of the metalanguage. As I have indicated previously, we need an 'insider' metalanguage to avoid ethnocentrism. However, an insider metalanguage would, by the same token, be ethnocentric to the outsider. Therefore, to truly overcome ethnocentrism, what we need is an insider *and* outsider metalanguage, or, in other words, a language-independent, culture-free metalanguage that can serve as common ground for *all* languages.

The methodology presented in this paper proposes that words that are indefinable are not expected to be language-specific, for it seems safe to assume that words which are indefinable in one language will also turn out to be indefinable in other natural languages, and that other natural languages will have words or morphemes to express these concepts. The argument behind this assumption is this. The semantic primes in every language are the building blocks upon which all other meanings may be built, and if the set of semantic primes were different in different languages, cross-cultural communication would become a highly insurmountable task. However, our cross-cultural experiences tell us otherwise. Wierzbicka (1996:14) writes:

Since the indefinable concepts – the primitives – are the fundament on which the semantic system of a language is built, if this fundament were in each case different, speakers of different languages would be imprisoned in different and incommensurable conceptual systems, without any possibility of ever reaching anyone outside one's own prison. This is contrary to human experience, which points, rather, to the existence of both differences and similarities in human conceptualization of the world; and which

tells us that while cross-cultural communication is difficult, and has its limitations, it is not altogether impossible.

The assumption that all languages, however different, are based on isomorphic sets of semantic primitives is consistent with that experience.

The assumption underlying this study is that semantic primes are universals, or that the set of semantic primes in every natural language matches. For example, Finegan and Besnier (1989:254) have noted that 'all known languages, without any exception, have pronouns for at least the speaker and the addressee: the first person (*I, me*) and the second person (*you*)'. This is to say, the meanings embodied by the English words *I* (which has the syntactically conditioned allomorph *me*) and *you* (singular), or the semantically matching Mandarin '我' [wǒ] and '你' [nǐ], or the Malay *aku* and *kau* (Goddard 2002b:89), and so on, are universal, in that these two meanings are lexicalized or expressed in every single language. These two words are, of course, not the only semantic primes; painstaking empirical studies on a diverse selection of languages have in fact suggested that there are over sixty of them<sup>3</sup> (cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka (eds.) 1994, 2002).

### 3.3. An intelligible, culture-free metalanguage

Having a set of words with the objective of describing meaning is, obviously, not enough, for we need a set of rules, or a 'grammar', to put these words together into meaningful sentences (Wierzbicka 1996; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002). However, this 'grammar' does not refer to formal, syntactic rules. Instead, it refers to rules of 'combinability', which determines 'possible combinations of primitive concepts' (Wierzbicka 1996:19).

The search for universal combinations of semantic primes has been on-going, and studies on a wide selection of languages have suggested the existence of such a set of rules (see Wierzbicka 1996; Goddard and Wierzbicka (eds.) 2002). As an example, it is expected that every language will have the language-specific morpho-syntactic means to 'combine' the semantic primes *I*, *know*, and *something* to

construct a sentence with exactly the same meaning as the English sentence *I know something*. In other words, this sentence or combination in English can be directly translated into any language without any change in meaning.

Governed by this universal grammar of combinability, the semantic primes form a kind of culture-free 'mini-language', called the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM). NSM is not language-specific, in the sense that an NSM sentence can be directly translated into any language without any change in meaning, and is in this sense a language universal. However, I hasten to add here that NSM represents semantic universals, not formal universals. In other words, NSM meaning is universal to the extent that it can be precisely expressed in any language, but the form with which this meaning is expressed is not universal, as it depends on the language-specific syntactic configurations of individual languages.

The benefits of the NSM approach to studying language meaning are many. First of all, by stating meaning in simple terms, the obscurity and circularity that have plagued most other attempts at semantic definition can be avoided. Secondly, by using a semantic system that is common ground to all languages, ethnocentrism can be circumvented; NSM is both insider *and* outsider metalanguage. Thirdly, because NSM allows meaning to be stated in a paraphrase, it can be subjected to the test of substitution, for it is a requirement that the NSM explication or formula be substitutable for the expression under study in all instances of use (cf. Wierzbicka 1986; Goddard 2002a). Lastly, as we shall see later, the reduplication of names in Singapore English concerns the speaker and the addressee. In this sense, it is interactive and its meaning necessarily involves the concepts of *I* and *you*. This makes its meaning 'pragmatic' (cf. Wierzbicka 1991:5). NSM captures pragmatic meaning by allowing it to be formulated in the first person mode. Because of this, meaning can be described from the speaker's perspective, not the researcher's.

#### 4. *Singapore English: A Cultural Notion?*

The Singapore English speech community is a multiethnic and primarily Asian one. As anyone who has lived or stayed in Singapore will know, its speakers are conversant in at least two locally spoken languages. This is because of the multiethnic and multilingual social setting, as well as the bilingual public education policy, which requires pupils to learn at least two languages in schools – the formal varieties of English and their 'mother tongue'<sup>4</sup> (Singapore Facts and Pictures 2001:117; cf. Kwan-Terry 2000). Besides languages that they have learned in schools, many Singaporeans also speak one or more other home languages which are not taught in the public education system. Depending on the ethnicity and subcultural group of the person, this could be Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, Bazaar Malay, etc.

Since Singapore English speakers are bilingual, they are naturally 'bicultural', in the sense that they are familiar with (at least) two sets of cultural ways of thinking associated with the two (or more) languages that they speak. Not surprisingly therefore, in everyday Singapore English discourse, they often experience the need to express meanings and values from the various local subcultures (e.g. Cantonese, Hokkien, Malay, etc) that are not lexicalized or grammaticalized in any traditional or Anglo variety of English like Australian English or British English. To express these meanings in Singapore English, speakers need to borrow and calque the associated lexical or grammatical forms from their home-spoken Asian languages (e.g. Cantonese, Hokkien, Malay). As a result, one finds in Singapore English a host of linguistic features which have their origins in Chinese languages and Malay to meet the total expressive needs of its speakers. Thus, this variety of English has been aptly described by Gupta (1994:6) as a 'contact variety which arose in a situation of extreme multilingualism and has many traces in it of influence from [Southern varieties of Chinese and Malay]'.<sup>5</sup>

However, saying that Singapore English is merely a 'contact' variety does not sufficiently reveal its true character. As Wierzbicka (e.g. 1991, 1992, 1997, 1999, 2001) has pointed out, a language or a language variety reflects deep-rooted cultural concerns and embodies ways of thinking characteristic of a given speech community. The same can, of

course, be said of Singapore English. It embodies not only multicultural meanings that its speakers need to express every day, but also multicultural ways of thinking that are characteristic of the Singapore English speech community.<sup>6</sup> To describe such a multicultural aspect of Singapore English, I find Ho's (2001:111) words particularly useful:

From such a language-in-culture perspective, the use of Singapore English in Singapore's cosmopolitan, multicultural context can be characterised as reflecting certain Western (mainly American /British) ways of thought and behaviour... At the same time, Singapore English allows for the construction and expression of Singapore's own conceptual and experiential realities: the Singapore identity, with its essence of 'interculturalness'.

Language and culture are inextricably linked, and therefore a language may be described as an embodiment of culture-specific meanings and ways of thinking. We see that, on the one hand, Anglo English reflects the Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition (Wierzbicka 1991), and, on the other hand, Singapore English expresses Singaporeans' experiential realities and ways of thinking (cf. Wierzbicka, in press; Wong, in press). It therefore follows that the differences between these two varieties of English lie beyond the form at a much deeper, cultural level. Given this cultural interpretation of language, American English, British English, Australian Aboriginal English, Jamaican English, Nigerian English, Singapore English, etc, are thus cultural notions, and any dialect of English may hence be more appropriately described as a cultural dialect of English.

##### *5. Reduplication vs. Repetition*

Before we proceed to the topic of study, I find it necessary to draw a distinction between reduplication and repetition, so as to avoid confusion. Names in Singapore English can be either reduplicated or repeated. In reduplication, the whole word is duplicated to form a fused semantic unit and this is accompanied by a qualitative semantic

change. On the other hand, repetition is like saying the same thing twice or more. Repetition is, of course, meaningful as well and can be rigorously described.

The formal differences between the two are quite easy to discern. (For the present purposes, I will separate reduplicated words with a hyphen and repeated words with a comma to visually differentiate the two processes.) Firstly, reduplication in Singapore English produces only *two* instances of the same word (i.e. *one* reduplicated copy), not more:

Where is *Min-Min*/*\*Min-Min-Min*?

On the other hand, repetition can result in one or two reduplicated copies of the name:

*Edmund, Edmund*/*Anne, Anne, Anne*, I want to talk to you.

Secondly, while both processes can be used like a vocative, only reduplication can be used to refer to a third party, not repetition:

Where is *Min-Min*/*\*Anne, Anne, Anne*?

I saw *Min-Min*/*\*Anne, Anne, Anne* yesterday.

Reduplication applies only to monosyllables or one-syllable words while any name, including reduplicated ones, can be repeated:

Where is *Min-Min*/*\*Shumin-Shumin*/*\*David-David*?

*David, David*/*Min-Min, Min-Min*, I want to talk to you.

Lastly, reduplicated names often occur as a tonal compound expression and each of the two words in the compound has a fixed tonal structure.<sup>7</sup> Take *boy boy* for example. The first 'boy' is always pronounced in a pitch equivalent to that of tone 3 of Singapore Mandarin, while the second 'boy', tone 2. In other words, *boy boy* cannot be pronounced without the tones, or in another tonal structure. Adopting Yip's (1990:30, 79) convention of using numerals to represent pitch contours, the tones of the two words in the compound

*boy boy* may be described as 'low' 21 and 'rising' 35 respectively (see Yip 1990:30, 79). Diacritics may also be used: *bǒy bǒy*, *Chuǎn Chuán*, *Wěi Wěi* (see Yip 1990:79). My informants' examples, *Keong Keong*, *Min Min*, *Nee Nee* etc, are all pronounced in this manner.

While it is useful to be able to tell the reduplication and the repetition of names apart on formal grounds, this in itself will not reveal their difference in use. For this purpose, we need to look at meaning. In a later section (6.5), I will also describe the meaning of the repetition of names, so as to make known the semantic difference between the two processes.

### 6. Reduplication of Names in Singapore English

In this section, examples of use will be studied; I will look for common semantic denominators from the examples and propose semantic components to describe the meaning of this reduplication. Unless otherwise stated, all examples studied are instances which I have noted down or have been provided by my informants.

#### 6.1. Uses of the reduplication of names

According to Lim and Wee (2001:90), 'the reduplicated forms mark affection or intimacy'. If we look at the use of Chinese languages within the Chinese community in Singapore, the reduplication of names happens frequently in exchanges involving a child, as a show of affection. For example, many of my immediate family members and aunts would call my baby nephew *bǒy bǒy* (tonal), instead of his personal name 'Adam', while speaking to him in either Cantonese or Singapore English. The same speakers can also use the same expression to refer to him as a third person. The following examples come from his parents' emails to me (2002, emphasis added). At the time of writing, my nephew was around one and a half years old:

Have [sic] a tired day, not because of work but because of keeping an eye on *boy boy* for the whole day.

As Edmund has informed you, *boy boy* knows how to walk for a few steps.

Adam *boy boy* has grown a fair bit now...

*Boy Boy* has added a few more spoken words to his existing ones.

The reduplication of names in Singapore English involves a simple morphological process. To understand the process, a brief discussion of the morphological make-up of a Chinese name is in order. A full Chinese name comprises two parts. The first part is the family name. (Thus, the English expression 'last name' is not always appropriate for describing a Chinese surname because in Chinese, the family name comes first.) The second part is the personal name and in Singapore, this typically consists of two characters. The first character usually reflects gender and generation within the paternal side of the extended family; this word is often represented in the personal names of siblings and paternal cousins of the same gender. Speakers normally select the second character and in any case only one of the two characters to reduplicate. As Lim and Wee (2001:90) put it, 'names of individuals...are shortened to a single syllable' and the 'monosyllabic form then acts as a base for reduplication'. The word is reduplicated to give a fused semantic unit comprising only *two* instances of the same word. My informants have provided me with a list of Chinese names and their reduplicated forms:

Bee Pheng = *Peng Peng*  
Chee Wei = *Wei Wei*  
Kah Yang = *Yang Yang*  
Kah Mun = *Mun Mun*  
Lay Nee = *Nee Nee*  
Shumin = *Min Min*  
Wee Chuan = *Chuan Chuan*  
Wee Keong = *Keong Keong*

Admittedly, the term *boy*, used for addressing or referring to a small child, is not a personal name as such. The expression *Adam boy boy* in



one of my examples presumably comes from *Adam boy*, where *boy* is not part of the person's full name. Such an expression is sometimes used in Singapore English to refer to a small boy. Possibly, the word *boy* used in this way represents a calque from the Cantonese '仔' [t<sup>h</sup>saɪ] (which may be reduplicated to give *tsǎi tsái*), roughly meaning 'son' (cf. Lim and Wee 2001:90). Even though *boy* is not a personal name, I have included *bǒy bǒy* as an example, like Lim and Wee (2001:89) do, because it appears to me that this is derived by the same process that reduplicates Chinese names. In other words, *bǒy bǒy* functions like a reduplicated name and expresses the same pragmatic attitude as, say, *Mǐn Mǐn*.<sup>8</sup> (At this stage, I would hesitate to comment on the female counterpart *girl* for want of relevant data.)

I would like to mention here that there are some reduplicated Chinese expressions sometimes used in Singapore English, usually by children, to address or refer to siblings and people likened to one's siblings: [meɪ meɪ] (younger sister), [dɪ dɪ] (younger brother), [t<sup>h</sup>se t<sup>h</sup>se] (elder sister), and [gɔ̃ gɔ̃] (elder brother). It is unlikely that these reduplicated kinship terms are derived by the same semantic process as the reduplication of Chinese names, if only because, unlike reduplicated names, these kinship expressions are generally not found in the verbal repertoire of adult speakers. The present study does not look into this reduplication process.

Syntactically, the reduplicated name is used in the same way as one would use a name. It could be used either as a form of address or as a reference to a third person in speech. The interesting thing is, since most, if not all, ethnically Chinese Singapore English speakers are bilingual in Singapore English and another, usually Chinese language, the reduplication of names can be used when the speakers are conversing in any one or more of these languages. In other words, when a speaker addresses or refers to someone using a reduplicated name, this speaker could do so when speaking in Singapore English or in a Chinese language variety, or in code-mixing. However, for the purposes of this study, the examples studied are all from Singapore English:

*Mǐn Mǐn*, come here. (Form of address)

*Wěi Wěi*, do you want this? (Form of address)

*Keōng Keóng* not back yet? (Third person)  
*Keōng Keóng* said he cannot make it. (Third person)  
Where is *Chuǎn Chuán*? (Third person)  
*Něe Née* not going? (Third person)  
Where did *Něe Née* go? (Third person)

## 6.2. Child orientation

The reduplication of names has a child orientation. Many of my informants attest to this. For example, informant Jane tells me that the more junior members of her extended family have their names reduplicated. She (email, April 2002) writes, 'The young ones in my family are called by repeating their last character of our Chinese names: Peng Peng, Yang Yang, even Lu Lu, boys and girls alike'. The people who address her and her siblings using reduplicated names include members of an older generation and their contemporaries: 'Parents, aunts & uncles, grandparents, friends of all the above if they have been "introduced" that way'. Another informant, 20-year old Singaporean Shumin, tells me that her mother calls her *Mǐn Mǐn* much of the time. She (p.c., March 2002) agrees with me that the reduplication of names involves the concept of a child. Because of this, I ask her why she thinks her mother calls her by that name even though she is not a child. She instinctively replies, 'Because to her I'm always a kid'. On the other hand, her social friends address her by her English name 'Karen'.

Because reduplicated names are child-oriented, adults can be embarrassed when addressed by reduplication. Informant Jiawei shares his experience with me (March 2002). Jiawei, who is in his early twenties, is a Malaysian.<sup>9</sup> He had lived in Singapore for about five years. His parents, uncles, aunts, close family friends, and a former girlfriend called him *Wěi Wěi*. This was the only name by which he had been called by family members and relatives until he reached fifteen or sixteen, when he decidedly asked them to stop. According to him:

I'm grown up already and they still call me that name. How old am I when I'm sixteen? It's embarrassing man.

He adds, 'If I'm young, you call me like that, it's OK. But when I grow older, I mind people calling me that'. When asked why he feels embarrassed by that reduplicated name, he replies, 'It's sort of like, I haven't grown up. Makes me feel like I'm a small boy. (...) It just makes me feel like a small boy'. How small? 'Very small', he emphasizes. Similarly, Jane (email, April 2002) feels embarrassed when being identified as *Pěng Péng* in public places. She writes, 'Can you imagine how embarrass [*sic*] I can be when I call my aunty (my dad's sister) on my hand phone on the train and have to say that I am Peng Peng (Pheng) when other commuters can hear me?' Informant Weiling, a Singaporean in her mid twenties, is glad that no one calls her *Lǐng Líng*. When asked (p.c., 2002) if her mother or anyone else reduplicates her name, she laughs and immediately remarks, 'So childish!' She continues, 'Imagine when you grow older she still call [*sic*] you like that. (...) Sounds like you're calling a baby or toddler'.

This child orientation is further evidenced in the observation that the reduplicated name can be used to facilitate communication between the adult and the child. The personal name of a Chinese Singapore English speaker typically consists of two different characters and hence two different sounds (e.g. *Shumin, Jiawei*). The reduplicated name, on the other hand, comprises two instances of the same character and therefore represents two instances of the same sound. This reduction in the number of different sounds (from two to one) presumably makes it easier for the toddler to process and remember. As a result, the reduplicated name may be seen as a somewhat simplified version of a personal name. In this way, it functions like baby talk.<sup>10</sup>

To explicate the child-oriented meaning of the reduplication of Chinese names in Singapore English, I shall need to borrow a term from Wierzbicka (1991:55) to describe a child, which is 'someone small'. The component in question would look something like this:

I think about you like this:

you are someone very small because you have not lived  
for a long time

The advantage of a component like this lies in the fact that it can be seen as applicable to both children and adults who are seen as

someone small in the eyes of the speaker. Even as an adult, the person can still be a child in the eyes of her parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, and their contemporaries. Because of this, the reduplication of names in Singapore English is not unlike the so-called 'affectionate nicknames, such as *Bobby* or *Timmy*' in Anglo English, which are 'child-oriented' and signify 'an affection associated with the adult-child style of interaction' (Wierzbicka 1991:106). Therefore, I will draw on the reader's understanding of such affectionate nicknames in the present study.

### 6.3. Family orientation

Prototypically, reduplicated names are used to address or refer to children within the family, which gives this reduplication a family orientation. Informant Jane is one who thinks that the reduplication of names gives 'a family feeling' (email, April 2002). Most of the examples provided by my informants come from family members and family friends. In Jane's examples, reduplicated names are used by extended family members who are at least one generation older than the addressees (e.g. parents, parents' siblings, grandparents etc). This familial character will, of course, have to be accounted for in the meaning.

Even though this reduplication is family-oriented, its use is by no means restricted to nuclear or extended family members. Its use can be extended to outside the family, so as to allow the speaker (e.g. a family friend) to forge a kind of family-like relationship with the younger addressee.

### 6.4. Extension of use

As my informant Jiawei's example show, one can reduplicate the name of one's boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>11</sup> Lim and Wee (2001:89) have also attested the use of reduplication with romantic partners:

Where is your boy boy [= boyfriend/son]?

According to them (2001:90), 'when *boy* reduplicates, we get the meaning of "boyfriend" or "son"'. This implies that the expression is polysemous. However, I would argue that while *bǒy bǒy* can be used for addressing and referring to one's boyfriend and one's son because of its pragmatic value, the expression neither means 'boyfriend' nor 'son'; it has a unitary pragmatic meaning that allows itself to apply to both a boyfriend and a son. The following hypothetical examples, which show that *bǒy bǒy* and *boyfriend/son* are not substitutable for each other across all instances of use, demonstrate that they do not mean the same thing. For a start, Singapore English speakers do not normally address their boyfriends as 'boyfriend' or sons as 'son'. Further, unlike the nominal words *boyfriend* and *son*, *boy boy* does not take any plural inflection, which suggests that *boy boy* is conceptually different from either *boyfriend* or *son*. Consider these examples:

Where is *bǒy bǒy*/\*boyfriend/\*son?  
 He is my \*ex-*bǒy bǒy*/ex-boyfriend.  
 She has many \**boy boys*/boyfriends/sons.  
 He'll make a very good !*bǒy bǒy* /boyfriend/son.  
 Who needs a !*boy boy*/boyfriend?

Even though in some instances, they may share the same referent, these examples clearly show that *bǒy bǒy* neither means 'boyfriend' nor 'son', since they are syntactically distinct and not substitutable for each other in all instances of use. As we shall see, *bǒy bǒy* has a pragmatic component involving the concepts *I* and *you*, and this effectively sets it apart from *boyfriend* and *son*.

Even though one can reduplicate the names of one's boyfriend or girlfriend, or adults who are younger than the speaker, I maintain that it is prototypically a name by which adults, usually the mother, female relatives and family friends, call or refer to small children. I would even hypothesize that the prototype speaker-addressee relationship could be found in a mother and her small child on the assumption that, traditionally, the mother is the family member who interacts most frequently with the child.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the familial affection implied by the use of reduplicated names allows such names to be

extended to people outside the family whom the speaker sees as younger, and one's boyfriend or girlfriend.

### 6.5. The meaning of the reduplication of names

Ethnically Chinese speakers of Singapore English can address babies, older children, boyfriends and girlfriends using the reduplication of names as a term of endearment. Lim and Wee (2001:90, 91) say that 'the reduplication forms mark affection or intimacy' and that the 'meaning associated with the reduplicated form is that of affection'. They further say, 'Because the reduplication of nominals serves to indicate affection or intimacy, it is not surprising that names, too, can reduplicate so long as the names are those of close friends' (2001:90).

The notion that reduplication is associated with the concepts *affection* and *closeness* is shared by some of my informants. Giving her comments over the email (February, 2002), informant Constance writes (emphasis added):

'Boy boy' is in keeping with the habit of duplicating a person's last name<sup>13</sup> (e.g. Ling Ling for Ching Ling) as a sign of *affection*. (...) I'd attribute the phenomenon to the imaginary need for adults to duplicate basic domestic terms for (a) emphasis and (b) rhythm... when communicating with toddlers.

Another informant, Lay Tin, (email, May 2002, emphasis added) writes that 'reduplication is only used in *close* relationships'.

However, while reduplication of names does seem to reflect affection, intimacy, or closeness in many instances, I would maintain that relying on these concepts to explain meaning is in fact misleading. Many expressions in Singapore English, and in many other languages for that matter, can be used to show affection or intimacy, but obviously they do not all mean the same thing. For example, Humphreys (2001:29) has noted that 'the term ["auntie" or "uncle"] is used out of affection and respect', but clearly the reduplication of names does not mean the same as *aunty* or *uncle*. Similarly, a person who reduplicates the name of a child, such as a distant relative or a

neighbour whom one meets irregularly at the playground, need not be someone who is considered 'close'. The obvious problem with using such abstract labels, like *affection* or *closeness*, etc, is that each of them can be used to refer to very different relationships. For example, a maternal uncle who reduplicates the name of his nephew or niece is someone who is 'close' by family ties, but he may be someone whom the child sees only once a year during the Chinese New Year period. On the other hand, a schoolmate, whom the child sees every day and knows very well, may become a 'close' friend without being otherwise related. The concept of 'close' could refer either to family relatedness or to social distance. Therefore, I would prefer not to use such abstract labels in my definition.

However, since Lim and Wee (2001) and some of my informants have associated the meaning of the reduplication of names with intimacy and closeness, let us take a look at Wierzbicka's (1991) discussion on these two concepts to see what we can find. She (1991:105) defines *intimacy* in this way:

X thinks:

I feel something  
 I want to say it to someone  
 I can say it to Y  
 I feel something good towards Y  
 Y feels something good towards me  
 I can say it to Y because of this  
 I can't say it to other people

X says it to Y because of this

As for 'closeness', Wierzbicka (1991:109) emphasizes that it is based on 'mutual good feelings', and provides the following tentative definition of the concept:<sup>14</sup>

X and Y know:

we feel something good towards one another  
 because of this each of them thinks of the other:  
 I want to know what this person feels/thinks/wants  
 I want this person to know what I feel/think/want

because of this, each of them can know what the other  
feels/thinks/wants when other people can't

I might add that reduplication of names is in some ways similar to diminutives, some of which, like *birdie*, *fishie*, or *doggie*, Wierzbicka (1991:55) refers to as 'baby words'. Diminutives seem to be Anglo English speakers' way of expressing affection to a child. Wierzbicka (1991:55) represents the meaning of such diminutives in this way:

I think: this is something small like you are someone small  
I feel something good towards you  
because of this, when I say something about this to you  
I feel something good towards it

Lastly, let us also take a look at the meaning of child-oriented nicknames, such as *Jimmy* or *Timmy* (Wierzbicka 1992:230):

I want to speak to you the way people speak to children whom they  
know well and toward whom they feel something good

All these explications are useful for our present study in several ways. Firstly, we see that the reduplication of names in Singapore English does not always mark 'intimacy' as Lim and Wee (2001:90) claim. This is because intimacy

refers to a readiness to reveal to some particular persons some aspects of one's personality and of one's inner world that one conceals from other people; a readiness based on personal trust and on personal 'good feelings'. (Wierzbicka 1991:105)

While it is true that intimate, romantic couples can reduplicate each other's names, the fact is that a speaker need not be in a relationship that is intimate in nature with the addressee to reduplicate his or her name. For example, while a mother can reduplicate the name of her child, it can hardly be said that the mother wants to reveal her inner world to the child, as members of an intimate couple apparently would; the fact is that close familial ties are not necessarily intimate in



nature. Similarly, when the parent's contemporary or a family friend addresses a child in this way, the speaker need not be making an attempt to establish intimacy with the addressee. Therefore, it may be concluded that 'intimacy' is not an inherent part of the meaning of the reduplication of names.

Presumably, by associating reduplicated names with *intimacy* and *affection*, Lim and Wee (2001) have in mind this component:

I feel something good towards you<sup>15</sup>

This, in my opinion, is one component we need for the meaning of the reduplication of names in Singapore English. The speaker has to feel something good towards the addressee to reduplicate his or her name, and this is why parents, relatives of the same and older generations, and other contemporaries can reduplicate the name of a child, and romantic partners can reduplicate each other's names; the speaker has to feel something good towards the addressee before the reduplication of names can take place. As Lim and Wee (2001:90) note, the speaker would not reduplicate the name of the addressee 'if the relationship between them was a hostile one'. Similarly, informant Shumin tells me that her mother would not call her *Mǐn Mǐn* when she (the mother) is angry with her.

Extrapolating from the discussions and analyses by Lim and Wee, and by Wierzbicka, and from the inputs provided by my informants, I propose the following explication to paraphrase the reduplication of Chinese names as it is used in Singapore English:

- (1) sometimes, when a person says something to another person,  
     this person thinks about this other person like this:  
         this person is someone very small  
             because this person has not lived for a long time  
         this person cannot say words well  
         because of this, this person is not like me
- (2) when this person thinks about this other person like this,  
     (2a) this person feels something good towards this other person  
         like a mother of someone very small  
         feels something good towards this someone

- (2b) this person wants to speak to this other person the way  
           someone like this other person can speak
- (3) I think like this about you now
- (4) I feel like this towards you now
- (5) I want to speak to you in this way now

This explication uses the adult-child model as the prototype scenario. To avoid an unnecessarily lengthy explication, I have relied on the complex concept *mother* (but see Wierzbicka (1996:154) for the meaning of *mother*). Component (1) describes the prototype addressee, who is a young child, that is, a toddler or a baby. He or she is someone 'very small' and cannot articulate properly. When the speaker sees the addressee in this light, the difference between the two interlocutors is stressed. Component (2a) is an important one. It likens the bond between speaker and addressee to that of a mother or motherly caregiver, who is relatively much older, and the young child. This component gives the expression a familial orientation and, presumably because of this, the reduplication of names is not uncommonly used by extended family members and family friends. At the same time, the prototype mother-speaker could also explain why reduplication seems to be used more frequently by women than by men. Component (2b) spells out this reduplication's proto-function of facilitating communication with a child; the adult speaker can use reduplication to catch the child's attention, and to facilitate or encourage a two-way communication between adult and child. Finally, the last three components liken the interaction between the speaker and the addressee to that of the prototype.

As mentioned, this reduplication of name can be extended to adults. This represents an extension from the mother-child prototype. The mother-speaker and child-addressee represent age and generation differences within the family. Therefore, by extension, a person of an older generation (e.g. parent, relative of parents' generation and before, parents' friend) can reduplicate the name of an adult of a younger generation if he or she wants to create a family-like relationship. At the same time, the prototype motherly figure, to a certain extent, also allows older people (e.g. an elder sibling, an older friend) who want to

play a familial care-giver kind of role, to reduplicate the names of the younger addressee.

To summarize, when a speaker reduplicates the name of an addressee, one would expect that the speaker:

1. Sees the addressee as someone small;
2. Feels something good towards the addressee;
3. Wants to show that he/she, as someone who is older and perhaps more mature, cares for the addressee;
4. Wants to interact with the addressee like a family member, or at least not like a familial outsider.

In other words, anyone in the speech community who fits this 'bill' could reduplicate the name of the addressee, even if the latter were an adult. Of course, it does not necessarily follow that the adult speaker would like to be addressed as such.

Now that we have the explication in place, we are perhaps in a better position to understand why some adults are embarrassed when their names are reduplicated, especially in the presence of outsiders. This reduplication not only implies that the addressee is in some ways childlike, but that he/she is being doted upon, and is receiving the kind of attention and care that one would normally reserve for a child. It could give the impression that he/she is still emotionally or otherwise dependent on the speaker, and needs to be 'looked after' by the person in some way. As a result, his/her status as an autonomous, independent adult could be severely undermined.

#### 6.6. The reduplication of names and other child-oriented names: A comparison

The reduplication of names in Singapore is, of course, semantically different from other child-oriented names like *Jimmy* or *Bobby* in Anglo English (cf. Wierzbicka 1992). The proposed explication of the reduplication of names above suggests several ways in which they may be different.

Firstly, when using the reduplication of Chinese names, the Singapore English speaker actually sees the addressee as someone small and young. Therefore, it can be used by the speaker in the following speaker-addressee relationship: grandparent-grandchild; parent-child; aunt/uncle-nephew/niece; adult-child of a family friend etc. The reduplicated name implies that the addressee is not only small, but very small, in the eyes of the speaker. For example, my family members referred to my nephew as *bǒy bǒy* in a matter of months after his birth. Informant Jane (email, April 2002) also says that her extended family members have used reduplicated names to address her siblings from 'the time they are born, and it always stick [*sic*] with them'. This explains why a small child would not address another small child as *bǒy bǒy*.<sup>16</sup> While reduplicated names are prototypically used to address and refer to toddlers and infants, the Anglo child-oriented names can be used as standard pragmatically unmarked forms of address and reference on much older children. For example, pragmatically marked reduplicated names like *Mǐn Mǐn* or *bǒy bǒy* would not be used by teachers in Singapore, but names like *Jimmy* are routinely used by teachers in the Anglo English speech communities.

Further, the reduplication of Chinese names is seen in the light of a caregiver-child prototype in that the interaction between the speaker and the address is likened to that of a mother and a small child, even if it were a momentary attitude. This familial kind of orientation is notably absent in Anglo child-oriented forms.

Thirdly, names like *Jimmy* are standard forms; a person who is called *Jimmy* will always be called *Jimmy*. Reduplicated names, on the other hand, are not standard because speakers can opt not to use the reduplicated form (e.g. *Mǐn Mǐn*) by reverting to the original personal name (e.g. *Shumin*) instead.

Lastly, while the Anglo child-oriented form is used by everyone, the Singapore English reduplicated names tend to be used mainly by extended family members and family friends.

### 7. *Expression of Cultural Value in Reduplicated Names*

On the basis of our discussion so far, the reduplication of Chinese names suggests a culture-specific mode of interaction in which a relatively much older Singapore English speaker implicitly highlights the difference in age between him or her and a relatively much younger person. In doing so, the older speaker may have expressed certain cultural expectations regarding the interaction, perhaps even committing the younger addressee to some kind of interpersonal obligation. This kind of speaker attitude is therefore suggestive of a culture that accords seniority in age a certain significance. It also suggests a speech community in which age difference plays an important role in relationship building, in that age difference to a significant extent determines the kind of interaction taking place between two speakers.

Additionally, when used to address an adult, this reduplication suggests a speech community in which people of an older generation have a tendency to treat their adult sons and daughters in some ways as children, rather than as autonomous, independent individuals. It may well indicate an unwillingness on the part of these speakers to completely relinquish the parental or care-giver role that they had played at the time when the addressees were young, dependent children. In a most subtle way, this reduplication may reflect a certain tension between the older and the younger generations. People of the older generations, when interacting with younger adults, may prefer to maintain their status as seniors (cf. Ho 2001), as indicated by the use of the reduplication of names or otherwise. On the other hand, adults of the younger generations may not like that, considering that they are generally more Anglicized, and therefore would prefer to be treated as an equal, and as an autonomous individual.

The older-younger paradigm that characterizes the use of reduplicated names seems common in the Chinese way of speaking, especially among family members. Chinese languages possess an elaborate kinship system, in which relationships between members of different generations are explicitly marked. To quote Freedman (1957:55, *my italics*), 'When Chinese kinship is thought of as enshrining patriarchy, the domination of women by men and *younger by*

*older generation* comes to the fore'. Members of this cultural group are acutely aware of the seniority and generation difference between fellow speakers within and, by extension, outside the family. As a result of this cultural attitude, speech exchanges between speakers of different generations can appear very different from those among peers.

To a certain extent, this Chinese cultural value is now expressed in Singapore English through linguistic devices that have been carried over from the host languages by speakers who feel the need to express it. One finds that when Singapore English speakers of different generations interact, they are more inclined than their Anglo English counterparts to mark this difference with borrowed or calqued forms of address. The reduplication of names is one example. It comes from the Chinese languages (cf. Lim and Wee 2001) and Singapore English speakers have borrowed it to express this perception of seniority or generation difference among speakers. This attitude can be seen in other social address terms used in Singapore English like *aunty* and *uncle* as well, which allow a speaker to show 'affection and respect' (Humphreys 2001:29) to the addressee on account of his or her seniority.

#### *8. Repetition of Address Forms in Singapore English*

As discussed, it is not difficult to differentiate reduplication from repetition in Singapore English on syntactic grounds. However, since any difference between the two syntactic structures is often semantically motivated, I would like to devote a small section to highlighting their semantic differences.

There are significant semantic differences between the use of reduplication and repetition of names. Repetition does not assume any specific relationship between the speaker and the addressee, because it can often be applied to just about anyone, even a stranger. It can only be used as a vocative and cannot be used to refer to a third party. Also, repetition, unlike reduplication, is not limited to personal names or expressions that function like names (e.g. *bǒy bǒy*), but can also apply to other forms of address:

#### THE REDUPLICATION OF CHINESE NAMES IN SINGAPORE ENGLISH

Speaker (to an unrelated middle-aged woman at a food stall of a food centre):

Aunty, Aunty

Hubby, Hubby, come here! (Platt et al. 1984:151)

In repetition, the repeated terms are uttered without a pause in between, which appears to beget a sense of urgency. This repetition of names in Singapore English seems to serve a similar function as the repetition of imperatives in Anglo English, which Wierzbicka (1991:260) exemplifies with the following examples:

Come in, come in!

Stop it, stop it!

Wait, wait!

Look, look!

Quickly, quickly!

According to Wierzbicka, this kind of repetition 'introduces a note of urgency' (1991:261) and the message here can be paraphrased as 'I want you to do something NOW' (1991:260, original emphasis). Although Wierzbicka is speaking about repetition in Anglo English, her formula seems relevant to the present discussion.

I now propose the following explication for the meaning of this linguistic process:

I want to say something to you at this moment

Repetition signals that the speaker wants prompt attention; it can be used when the addressee is thought to be engaged in something and would not have otherwise attended to the speaker immediately. The speaker has something to say to the addressee and she wants to say it without delay. Here are some authentic examples:

Anne, Anne, Anne

Edmund, Edmund

David, David

Aunty, Aunty

The context of the examples given above should make this clear. In the first example (i.e. 'Anne, Anne, Anne'), the addressee Anne is engaged in something at her desk in the office. To distract her and get a prompt response, the speaker repeats her name. In the second example (i.e. 'Edmund, Edmund'), the addressee Edmund is walking away from the speaker to do something. The speaker runs after him and repeats his name to get his attention. In the third example (i.e. 'David, David'), the speaker is trying to get the addressee's attention at a dining table where a lot of people are talking. The speaker wants to engage in a one-to-one conversation with the addressee (i.e. David), who is talking to a few people at that time. In the final example (i.e. 'Aunty, Aunty'), the speaker tries to get the attention of a hawker stall operator at a public food centre who is busy serving patrons. In all these cases, the repetition of names reflects the component of immediacy 'at this moment' quite clearly.

### *9. Conclusion*

Forms of address are heavily loaded with meanings and play a very important role in a speech community because speakers can use them to define and construct relationships, and, in the case of Singapore English, to mark generation difference or seniority. The meanings of address terms are therefore crucial to the understanding of the cultural and social make-up of the speech community. Such studies benefit outsiders because they concern 'the "knowhow" that a person must possess to get through the task of daily living' in a society (cf. Wardhaugh 1998:215). On the basis of the pragmatic meanings described, the outsiders will be able to understand and use reduplication of names and other forms of address to construct specific social relationships with insiders. Additionally, such knowledge allows us to understand differences across cultures, and avoid cultural misunderstandings.

However, research into the semantics and pragmatics of the reduplication of names and other forms of address in Singapore English has not been forthcoming. For example, Jones' (1984) book on the use of Chinese names in Singapore and Malaysia makes no



mention of reduplication at all. Lim and Wee's (2001) study has not led to identifying an invariant meaning for this construction.

In this study, I have described the meaning of the reduplication of Chinese names in Singapore English, using NSM. The meaning is stated in the form of a paraphrase using semantic primes or near-primes in the first person mode. On the basis of the meaning posited, we may say that this reduplication process defines the interaction in terms of a mother-child prototype, although the model could be extended to children and adults outside the family as well. To this extent, this reduplication points to a speech community the members of which have a much greater tendency than do Anglo English speakers to mark differences in age, generation, and seniority between interlocutors.

The use of reduplication also reflects another cultural characteristic of Singapore English speakers – linguistic resourcefulness. Anglo English has no means of defining this kind of culture-specific relationship. Therefore, when a speaker wants to define or construct such a relationship with a fellow speaker in Singapore English, this speaker may purposefully borrow a grammatical device from the Chinese languages to meet this goal. Thus, we could say that Singapore English has evolved to satisfy its speaker's everyday expressive needs and, to use Halliday's (1985:xiii) words, 'the way it is organized is functional with respect to these needs – it is not arbitrary'.

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**Notes**

1. By the cultural notion 'Anglo English', I refer collectively to the varieties of English spoken by 'a white person from a traditionally English-speaking country' (cf. Gupta 1994:14-15). These include American English, Australian English, British English, Canadian English, and New Zealand English. More specifically, though, I refer to the common core of all these varieties of English.
2. Of course, this is not to say that Ponapean cannot express complex English concepts. The truth of the matter is that any language, through circumlocution or otherwise, is capable of expressing any meaning. However, it remains that, since Ponapean and English are very different semantic systems, the meanings of most words from these two languages do not have semantic equivalents in the other. Therefore, the use of an English word to gloss a Ponapean expression would spell Anglo-centrism.
3. The set of proposed semantic primes may be represented in the form of the following table (cf. Wierzbicka 2001:465-466; Goddard 2002a:14):
  - Substantives: I, you, someone/person, people, something/thing, body
  - Determiners: this, the same, other
  - Quantifiers: one, two, some, all, much/many
  - Evaluators & descriptors: good, bad, big, small
  - Mental predicates: think, know, want, feel, see, hear
  - Speech: say, words, true
  - Actions, events & movement: do, happen, move
  - Existence & possession: there is, have
  - Life & death: live, die
  - Time: when/time, now, before, after, a long time, a short time, for some time
  - Space: where/place, here, above, below, far, near, side, inside
  - Logical concepts: not, maybe, can, because, if
  - Intensifier & augmentor: very, more
  - Taxonomy & partonomy: kind of, part of
  - Similarity: like/how
4. The expression 'mother tongue' as it is used here does not refer to the linguistic sense of 'first language'. Rather, it refers to the formal or classroom variety of an Asian language that is representative of the ethnicity of the pupil. The three main 'mother tongues' taught in public schools are the formal varieties of Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil, which, together with formal English, constitute the four official languages of Singapore (cf. Singapore Facts and Pictures, 2001).

5. I would, however, disagree with linguists like Gupta on the choice of the word 'influence' to describe a so-called 'contact' language variety. In my view, it is inaccurate to say that languages influence one another, in an unspecified, mysterious way, through contact. Rather, it is a situation in which speakers proactively draw on whatever linguistic resources they have for their expressive purposes that gives rise to a 'contact' variety. In other words, it is the speech community that is responsible for the development of a language variety.
6. These Singaporean meanings and ways of thinking are multicultural in the sense that they originate from several different cultures, namely Anglo, Chinese, and Malay.
7. It is not fully understood at this stage why reduplicated names have a fixed tonal structure, but there is one possible explanation. Speakers need to distinguish reduplicated names from those that are not derived by this semantic process. Chinese people can have names like Teng Teng or Min Min which are not the result of the reduplication process under discussion. These are their official names given at birth. Presumably, when people want to refer to them in Singapore English without the pragmatic value given by the linguistic reduplication of names, they say these names either without tones or, as the anonymous reviewer of this article points out, with other tonal structures. However, if speakers want to express this pragmatic meaning, all they have to do is to add the relevant tones to it.
8. Although I have assumed that *bǒy bǒy* is derived from the same reduplication process as other personal names (e.g. *Mǐn Mǐn*), and hence expresses the same pragmatic meaning given by the reduplication, it nevertheless reflects certain social attitudes that are not found in proper names. However, this being another matter of enquiry, I will not go into it in this paper.
9. Malaysian English is very similar to Singapore English; the two share a lot of common features. In Ooi's (2001) book 'Evolving identities: The English language in Singapore and Malaysia', the two varieties are treated as one. In the introduction, Ooi (2001:ix) justifies this decision as follows: 'The volume is entitled *Evolving Identities* because there is the continual mediation between the various multilingual and multicultural forces that shape the linguistic identity of a Singapore-Malaysian English speaker'. Additionally, the 'term "SME" is taken to mean the variety of English used in Singapore and Malaysia, concurrently consisting of both a convergence with and a noticeable divergence from other varieties of English' (Ooi 2001:x). In this light, it seems reasonable to consider English data from a Malaysian English speaker, especially given that this person had lived in Singapore for about 5 years.

10. It is noted that almost all forms of baby talk contain 'some reduplicated structures' (Abbi 1992:156) and infants go through a 'reduplicated babbling stage' (cf. e.g. Locke 1993:176) in their language development. It is therefore hypothesized here that one of the proto-functions of the reduplication of names in Singapore English is to facilitate communication with a small child.
11. The use of reduplication of names by adults when addressing children and persons in whom one is romantically interested seems characteristic of Chinese communities in general. For example, a Chinese Canadian (p.c. 2002), who is in his early twenties, tells me that he has been called Meng Meng by Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese, when they were speaking to him in Mandarin and Cantonese respectively. The interesting thing is that only two types of people call him by that name: older women and women flirting with him. From his experience, male acquaintances generally do not address him as such.
12. In this study, I hypothesize that the proto-user of the reduplication of names is a mother when talking to her small child. I support this with my personal observation that users of this reduplication tend to be, but not restricted to, women (cf. Footnote 11). For example, one of my informants tells me that while her mother would routinely call her Min Min, her father never reduplicates her name. If my observation that the use of this reduplication is associated more with women is correct, the question arises as to why this is so. Unfortunately, I am unable to provide a definitive answer at this stage, and can only speculate that it has to do with the presumably stronger maternal (than paternal) bond that is usually forged between the two parents and their child.
13. By 'last name', the informant refers to the last character of a Chinese name, in which the surname is normally written first.
14. In earlier literature on NSM (e.g. Wierzbicka 1991, 1992), many non-primes, like 'we', 'and', 'speak' etc. were used in semantic explications. However, in more recent publications (e.g. Wierzbicka 2001; Goddard and Wierzbicka (eds.) 2002), the authors adhere more strictly to the postulated set of semantic primes.
15. It is also noted that a component like this is found in diminutives, child-oriented names, and the concept of closeness, as Wierzbicka (1991, 1992) has explicated.
16. It is, however, possible that a child addresses another child with a reduplicated form as a standard name (i.e. without the pragmatic meaning). In such a case, the child will always address the other child, using this reduplicated form as this other child's standard name. Adult speakers, on the other hand, can choose between the reduplicated name (e.g. *Mín Mín*), with its pragmatic meaning, and the standard name (e.g. *Shumin*), depending on the situation.

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