Dialect acquisition and exogamy in a Zhuang minority village in southern China

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Overall Project: 
Clan exogamy and dialect acquisition

- Clan exogamy
  - Smith & Johnson (1986); Stanford (2008, 2009)

- Compare: Linguistic exogamy
  - Aikhenvald (2002); Jackson (1974)
Overall project: Three settings

1. Sui of southwest China (Stanford 2008a-b, 2009)


3. Zhuang of southern China (the present study)
Dialects in contact due to in-marriage

Research questions:

• Do in-marrying women acquire the local dialect of the husband’s village?
  • Why or why not?
  • How much is acquired? What features are acquired?

• Children of in-marrying women: How, when, and why do they acquire the local dialect?
Theoretical issues

- Dialect acquisition by in-migrants (Chambers 1992; Munro, Derwing & Flege 1999; Trudgill 1986)

- Dialect contact ~ dialect change
  - Density of interaction? (Trudgill 2004, 2008a-b)
  - Culture? Individual choices?

- Transmission and diffusion (Labov 2007)
• Western models of the self as used in sociolinguistics
  • A “discreet bounded self”, G.H. Mead’s “binary” approach to self (Mao 2006:91)
  • Self versus Other (Fought 2006)

• Chinese notion of self as “irreducibly social, as forever intertwined with other selves…a network of interdependence and interrelatedness”
  • Luming Mao (2006:91-3)
• “Communities of Descent” (Stanford 2009)
  • Clans and other relatively small lineage-based groups: lifelong community obligations, loyalty, and interdependency
  • Compare: Communities of Practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, Eckert 1988, Meyerhoff 2002)

• “Acts of Loyalty” (Stanford 2009)
  • Stable, long-term loyalty to clan social relationships and clan-level dialect features, regardless of mobility and contact
  • Compare: Acts of Identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985)
Sui loyalty to clan dialects

- “Our clan ideology is strong. Even though a woman marries into another place, she is still a member of her father’s place. Because people back in her father’s place speak this kind of dialect, she continues on.”
Interviewer: Now that you’ve been in Ljong a long time, have you changed [your dialect]?

Pan-surnamed woman, married 20 years: No. …Not even a single word… The Zhang surname people don’t speak like the Pan surname people. If a mother is a Pan person, she won’t speak the same [as her husband and children].
“These are the Lu people, so they say ej [1st Sg.]. We are the Pan people, so we say ju. Each surname speaks its own way... The Lu people speak like the Lu place. We Pan people speak like Pan people.”
Children

• “If [a child] speaks like her mother, the people in our village will laugh at her [or him]. They’d say that the child isn’t a member of this village. Then the child would feel very broken-hearted.”

-- A parent in a Sui village
Children

- Parent influence versus peer influence(?)

- “Local clan” versus “outsider in-marrying women”

- Contact within households
  - In-marrying women raising children who eventually acquire the patrilect, not the matrilect
  - The children’s “mother tongue” is not their mother’s tongue
Quantitative analysis:

Sui in-marrying women maintain their original dialects to a very high degree (Stanford 2008a, 2009)

Sui children acquire the local dialect/patrilect (Stanford 2008b)
  - Very young children show some influence of the matrilect
  - By age 7-9, most features are patrilectal
  - Teenagers almost fully patrilectal
Example:

**FIGURE 10.** Slopes of individual T1 tokens of South nonmobile speakers and South married women. Organized by speaker number on the horizontal axis.
Hmong in the U.S.
Opposite expectations

- Sui: In-marrying women traditionally expected to maintain their original dialects

- Hmong: In-marrying women traditionally expected to acquire the husband’s dialect
Two main branches of U.S. Hmong

Hmong Daw: “White Hmong”

Mong Leng: “Green Mong”

Photo: Faith Nibbs
• Interviews in 10 Hmong households in Dallas/Fort Worth area (Stanford 2010; Stanford & Nibbs 2009)
• White Hmong/Green Mong marriages
Hmong result: Variability

**Figure 2:** Lexical variables in word-list style for Hmong women in mixed marriages (N represents the total number of tokens of lexical variables for each speaker)

**Figure 3:** Phonetic variables in word-list style for Hmong women in mixed marriages (N represents the total number of tokens of phonetic variables for each speaker)
Influence of husband’s family

Individual choices in negotiating identities:
  Green vs. White
  and
  Hmong vs. “American”
The Present Study: Zhuang

- Ethnic minority of southern China
- Centered in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
• Cross-cultural collaboration

• Yanhong Pan
  • Indigenous Zhuang researcher (University of Hong Kong)
  • Raised in Butou village

• Recordings transferred online by secure file-sharing
• Zhuang wives usually acquire the dialect of the husband’s village
  • Like Hmong
  • Unlike Sui
• “Zhuang”: a wide geographic and linguistic range
  • A Tai-Kadai language
  • Tonal, largely monosyllabic
    • (Diller, Edmondson & Luo 2008; Wei & Qin 1979)
Prior research includes

- Grammatical features (e.g., Wei & Qin 1979; Luo 2008; Pan 2009; Q. Wei 1985)
- Dialect distinctions (J. Zhang et al. 1999; Yan 1994; Zhang & Wei 1997; Edmondson 1994; Luo 2008; Castro & Hansen 2010)
- But quantitative sociolinguistics is underrepresented
Our project: a Zhuang dialect comparison of locals and in-married women

- Lifelong residents of the Southern Zhuang village of Butou
  - Changtan Township, Qinbei District, Qinzhou

- Women who married into Butou from two Northern Zhuang regions
  - Youjiang ~220 km from Butou
  - Wuming ~100 km from Butou
Original home regions of in-marrying Northern wives

Husbands’ village (Butou)

(map: Wurm et al. 1987)
Language situation

- Some parts of Guangxi province: Chinese replacing Zhuang

- However, for Butou village:
  - Daily village conversation is in Zhuang
  - Village children are raised speaking Zhuang
  - Local Butou school language: mainly Chinese
• Zhuang practice clan exogamy and in-marrying
• The wife moves permanently to the husband’s village at marriage (Bodomo 2007:11)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples:</th>
<th>Butou village</th>
<th>In-marrying women’s original dialect (Tiandong shown here)</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. n/ʔd</td>
<td>naŋ⁴⁴</td>
<td>ʔdanj³¹</td>
<td>‘nose’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. u/uu</td>
<td>fuŋ³³</td>
<td>fuŋ³¹</td>
<td>‘hand’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. u/o</td>
<td>luk²²</td>
<td>lok³¹</td>
<td>‘bird’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. k/tɕ</td>
<td>kau²⁴</td>
<td>tɕau⁵⁵</td>
<td>‘head’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Aspiration</td>
<td>tʰuŋ²²</td>
<td>tuŋ³³</td>
<td>‘belly’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Tone: 22 vs. 55</td>
<td>hau²²</td>
<td>hau⁵⁵</td>
<td>‘paddy rice’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Tone: 33 vs. 31</td>
<td>wari³³</td>
<td>wari³¹</td>
<td>‘ox’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Syllable ordering</td>
<td>pa²⁴-ŋap¹¹</td>
<td>ŋap³³-pe:⁵⁵</td>
<td>‘lightning’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few examples of lexical variation (cognate and non-cognate):</td>
<td>tʰuŋ²²-heŋ⁵³</td>
<td>pi:¹¹-ka:¹¹</td>
<td>‘leg’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fan³³</td>
<td>heu⁵⁵</td>
<td>‘tooth’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pa:u⁴⁴-luk³³</td>
<td>hau⁵⁵-ʔdanj²⁴</td>
<td>‘corn’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
25 monolingual Zhuang interviews in Butou village (January 2010)

• 15 lifelong Butou residents (southern Zhuang)
  • 7 women, 8 men
  • Ages 13-32 plus one 58 year-old

• 10 in-marrying northern Zhuang women (7 from Youjiang region, 3 from Yongbei region)
  • Ages 42-73
  • Living in Butou 23-50 years (married at ages 18-27)

• Marriage in the 1960s-70s: Southern Zhuang regions were more economically prosperous than Northern Zhuang
Interviews

- 73-word picture list
- Common everyday objects and animals
cf. Chambers (1992)
Results

- Results for all variables except aspiration:

  Non-mobile Butou residents: **97.4%** average accuracy compared to the two Butou control speakers

  In-marrying northern women: **93.7%** average accuracy compared to the two Butou control speakers
Number of divergent pronunciations out of 73 total words:

In-married women

Non-mobile Butou residents

$p = 0.00023$
• One especially prominent variable: Aspirated stops

• No aspirated stops in Northern Zhuang phonology
  • Compare with Flege, Munro & MacKay (1996): VOT in Italian English-learners
  • Flege (2006), Flege (1999:124-5)
Voice Onset Time (VOT) in [t-]

a non-mobile Butou resident:

an in-married woman:
Speech style: Word list
(Di Paolo & Yaeger-Dror 2011:64; Theodore, Miller & DeSteno 2009)

VOT for each token of [tu] (a classifier)
VOT ratios

- “VOT systematically increases as speaking rate decreases and syllables become longer” Theodore et al. (2009: 3975)

- “VOT ratio”:
  VOT divided by duration of the remainder of the syllable [-u]
VOT analyzed for:
- 9 in-married women
- 8 local residents
- 638 tokens (~20-40 tokens per speaker)
Results for word-list style

Average VOT ratio for non-mobile residents:
\[0.345992\] (std dev: 0.060)

Average VOT ratio for in-married women:
\[0.185335\] (std dev: 0.039)

Repeated-measures ANOVA (using R)

Statistically significant difference in VOT ratio

between non-mobile residents and in-marrying women

\[p < 0.00000001\]
\[F = 450.44\]
Average VOT ratios for each speaker (638 tokens, word-list style)

In-married Women

Non-mobile Butou Residents
A continuum of proficiency:
Italian immigrants learning English in Canada: Flege (1999)
Speech Styles

- “Q&A” style:
  Ethnographic questions
  VOT analyzed for [t-]
Average VOT ratios in two speech styles:

In-married women in **Q&A style** and **word-list style**

Avg VOT ratio: 0.128863 (std dev: 0.044)

Avg VOT ratio: 0.185335 (std dev: 0.039)
Ethnographic questions

• Importance of “fine-grained” ethnographic insights (e.g., Johnstone et al. 2006; Johnstone 2004:76)
• Especially crucial when conducting cross-cultural research
• Prestige differences? No distinction in terms of ‘less/more educated’
• “Standard” = Northern Zhuang in academic literature/TV, but not experienced at local level
Women recalling their arrival in Butou

- “We couldn’t communicate with each other in Zhuang. I kept listening and gradually I could understand a bit of it. I tried to say a few words if I could understand what they said. Otherwise, I kept quiet.”

- “Sometimes we could understand each other when I was just here. The two Zhuang dialects are not very much different.”

- “The local people couldn’t understand my mother tongue. I could figure out a bit of the local Zhuang at the very beginning.”
• “We couldn’t communicate with each other. One time when my sister-in-law said to me au⁴⁴ ni:²⁴, I totally got lost. What she meant was ‘to get a pair of bamboo baskets’ au⁴⁴ lo:⁴⁴”

• “I felt I was like a mute if I didn’t acquire the local Zhuang”

• “I learned [local dialect] because I came to this place. Some people said to me that my Zhuang is different from theirs and it would be easier for them if I could speak the local Zhuang.”
• “Because I live here and I wanted to talk to and teach my kids the local Zhuang. Nobody asked me to learn the local dialect.”

• “I learned it because I got married and moved here.”

• “If not, people would tease me, saying that I still couldn’t speak the local Zhuang after being here for such a long time.”
How difficult was dialect acquisition?

- “It was difficult at the beginning. I acquired the local Zhuang three months after my arrival. My husband’s younger sister taught me.”

- “It was not difficult. The local Zhuang is quite similar to my mother tongue. I acquired it after six months. Nobody taught me or corrected me because it seems that I didn’t make mistakes (laughs)”

- “It took me a few months to a year. They didn’t teach me or correct me. We just kept talking.”
• “It’s difficult to learn. It took me one or two years. Even now, my local Zhuang is influenced by my mother tongue”

• “It’s not difficult. It took me about four to five years. My husband taught me.”

• “It was not difficult. I acquired it after six months. Some people joked with me and some corrected me when I didn’t say it correctly.”
The case of “TMR”

- “TMR’s pronunciation of the local Zhuang is not very pure.”

- “Most of the immigrant women can speak the local Zhuang fluently. Only few of them, like TMR, don’t get the right pronunciation. Maybe they are weak in learning a different language.”

- “MS and TMR mix up local Zhuang and their mother tongues.”
What happens if an in-marrying woman doesn’t learn the local dialect?

- “Some people in the village may tease her by saying that she doesn’t even know how to fluently speak the local Zhuang at such an old age, after staying here for such a long time.”

- “Nobody would tease her or say anything about it.”

- “People will tease her if she hasn’t acquired the local Zhuang after a long stay here.”
Awareness of dialect contrasts

- Lexical items: most commonly noted as dialect features (cf. Chambers 1992)

- Some locals noted aspiration:
  Ex: 1st plural \( to.:i^53 \ ku.:^33 \) versus \( t^h.o.:i^53 \ ku.:^33 \)

- When asked the most difficult features, some women mentioned the aspirated consonants

- Other in-married women were not aware of their unaspirated consonants
Zhuang children and dialect acquisition
Three mothers and their adult children

TMR (age 58)
TMR’s daughter (age 32)

WQL (age 42)
WQL’s son (age 23)

WMX (age 55)
WMX’s son (age 29)
Mothers’ comments

• “I taught my son a bit of my mother tongue, but he didn’t catch it. He speaks local Zhuang [southern Zhuang]. His pronunciation does not sound like my mother tongue at all [northern Zhuang].”

• “I didn’t teach my kids my mother tongue. My kids speak local Zhuang.”

• “I sometimes teach my kids one or two sentences of my mother tongue. [But] they speak local Zhuang. My kids’ Zhuang does not sound like my mother tongue.”
VOT results for a whole family:

In-married mother (age 52)
Father (age 58)
Daughter (age 25)
Son #1 (age 27)
Son #2 (age 25)
A grown child’s perspective

• He didn’t remember the early stages of his dialect acquisition

• He is sure that he learned local Zhuang instead of his mother’s dialect

• In his early memory, his mother had already acquired local Zhuang

• He didn’t know of any young children who speak the mother’s dialect
Conclusion

Return to the research questions:

- Do in-marrying women acquire the local dialect of the husband’s village?
  - Why or why not?
  - How much is acquired? What features are acquired?

- Children of in-marrying women: How, when, and why do they acquire the local dialect?
Zhuang Summary

- In-married Northern Zhuang women acquired most local Butou features quite accurately (Southern Zhuang)
  - Motivated by communication
  - Motivated by local acceptance(?)

- Incomplete acquisition of aspirated stops by in-married women
  - VOT as a gradient across native speakers and in-married women
  - No aspirated stops in native Northern Zhuang phonology
    cf. Flege, Munro & MacKay (1996) inter alia

- Children of the in-married women: Acquired the patrilect accurately
Overall project summary

• In-married women’s acquisition not predictable by simple density of interaction or duration/amount of contact
  • Cultural contrasts in acquisition: Sui, Hmong, Zhuang
    • Differing cultural expectations - “Communities of Descent”
  • Other factors: linguistic distance/geographic distance, intelligibility, clan loyalty

• Children acquiring the dialect of the father and other locals, regardless of mother’s influence
  • Mother-child: Transmission and diffusion at the same time(?)
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