

## Ditaxia and Hybridization in Chinese Dialect Grammar

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### 1 Convergence in dialect grammar

The Chinese dialects exemplify the centrifugal and centripetal forces at work in language change. On the one hand, with the gradual spread of Chinese over East Asia, divergent varieties have developed, often showing features of surrounding language groups (Altaic in the north, Tai and Miao-Yao in the south). This spread is comparable to that of Latin throughout the Roman Empire, giving rise to the Romance languages. On the other, the spread of the standard and written language has tended to exert a standardizing effect, especially in recent decades. In many parts of China the majority of speakers are multi-dialectal, with at least some knowledge of Mandarin and written Chinese. While additional factors such as prestige may play a role, bilingualism (or bidialectalism) probably exerts the strongest centripetal effect on dialect grammar: a natural convergence takes place through mutual transfer of grammatical features in bilingual speakers.<sup>1</sup>

It has sometimes been assumed that bidialectalism in China leads to convergence, so that such grammatical differences as once existed are gradually ironed out. However, the process of convergence and its results have not been adequately defined. In this paper we explore two aspects of convergence: ditaxia or stratification (section 2), and hybridization of the indigenous and Mandarin forms to produce a new structure (section 3). Examples are drawn from Cantonese, Chaozhou and other southern Min dialects. The concepts introduced have potential consequences for the understanding of contact-induced syntactic change, especially in southeast Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> Convergence goes both ways, however; an example of influence on Mandarin from other dialects is the structure *Wo qu Shanghai* which formerly meant 'I leave Shanghai'. Since the cognate structure in southern dialects, as in Cantonese *Ngó<sup>5</sup> heoi<sup>3</sup> Soeng<sup>6</sup>hoi<sup>2</sup>*, means the opposite, "go to Shanghai", there must have been communicative pressure for convergence, and the southern syntax won out in this case (Chao 1970: 49). Nor does convergence necessarily result in pan-Chinese features. Mandarin syntax varies from place to place according to the dialect background: for example, the Taiwan Mandarin interrogative construction [*you-meiyóu* VERB] is calqued on the Min dialect of Taiwan, and still sounds foreign in northern Mandarin.

## 2 Ditaxia

The term *ditaxia* is intended to refer to the co-existence of two syntactic alternatives, stratified by register and by social variables. It is thus a special case of *diglossia*. The purpose of introducing a new term is to reduce the ambiguity of the term *diglossia* which has been understood in a number of ways: while Ferguson restricted it to related languages or varieties of a single language, others have extended the notion to cover cases of unrelated languages, resulting in confusion (Hudson 1994:929). This alone suggests that finer distinctions are needed. Independent of these interpretations, however, diglossia may exist at a number of levels. Just as homonyms can be sub-divided into homophones, homographs, etc., we can identify diglossia at the phonological, lexical and syntactic levels. A case of phonological diglossia occurs in Cantonese, where initial *n-* (as in *nei*<sup>5</sup> "you") is a feature of formal register, replaced by *l-* (*lei*<sup>5</sup>) in colloquial speech. Lexical diglossia is illustrated by the grammatical morphemes in Cantonese, where L marks the low and H the high variety (essentially, the Cantonese readings for standard Chinese characters):

	L	H
copula	hai <sup>6</sup>	si <sup>6</sup>
locative coverb	hai <sup>2</sup>	zo <sup>6</sup>
linking particle	ge <sup>3</sup>	dik <sup>1</sup>

The L and H forms are to a large extent grammatically interchangeable, with the H forms used in formal registers such as songs and speeches. Syntactic instantiations could be called *syntactic diglossia*, but this seems counter-intuitive, partly because the root *gloss-* suggests an individual word or morpheme. Hence the term *ditaxia*: diglossia in Ferguson's original sense, but specifically at the syntactic level.

Diglossia in the case of Chinese dialects is type 4 diglossia in Fishman's (1980) typology: H is written/formal and L colloquial, with the two languages being genetically related. In the dialects, written Chinese and the Mandarin on which it is based provide the H variety. At the syntactic level this gives two distinct strata. Ramsey (1987:105) gives a sensitive description of this state of affairs:

Some differences between Cantonese and Mandarin grammar are very subtle. Almost any Mandarin grammatical pattern can be used in Cantonese and be understood, but such locutions are often not idiomatic. Typically, a sensitive and forthright native speaker will say of such Mandarinisms: "You could say it that way--that sentence pattern exists in Cantonese--but actually that's not the way we say it, we say it this way..."

An example of such a subtle difference would be the agentless passive. As noted by Hashimoto (1972), Browning (1974:88) and Matthews & Yip (1994:149), the

inclusion of the agent phrase in passives is optional in obligatory in spoken Cantonese:<sup>2</sup>

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|--|---|
| (1) Wo bei ren pian le.<br>I PASS people cheat-PFV<br>"I've been cheated." | (2) Ngo <sup>5</sup> bei <sup>2</sup> jan <sup>4</sup> ngaak <sup>1</sup> -zo <sup>2</sup> .<br>I PASS person cheat-PFV<br>"I've been cheated." |
| (3) Wo bei pian le.<br>I PASS cheat-PFV<br>"I've been cheated."            | (4) * Ngo <sup>5</sup> bei <sup>2</sup> ngaak <sup>1</sup> -zo <sup>2</sup> .<br>I PASS cheat-PFV<br>"I've been cheated."                       |

The impossibility of the agentless passive (4) in spoken Cantonese represents a typologically significant contrast (Matthews 1995).<sup>3</sup> The agentless passive, however, is not straightforwardly ungrammatical in Cantonese; rather, it is a "Mandarinism" of the type described by Ramsey. It can be found in news reports for which there is a written script and in formal or literary register:

- (5) Keoi<sup>5</sup> ge<sup>3</sup> tin<sup>1</sup>coi<sup>4</sup> jat<sup>1</sup>zik<sup>6</sup> bei<sup>6</sup> maai<sup>4</sup>mut<sup>6</sup>-zo<sup>2</sup>.  
s/he LP talent always be bury - PFV  
"Her talent has always been buried."

The same principle applies to most areas of Cantonese syntax: wherever Cantonese has a distinctive construction, it exists alongside a Mandarin-like alternative. Another important case of ditaxia in Cantonese involves the possessive and relative constructions with classifier. In each case there is a choice of a Mandarin-like structure using the particle *ge*<sup>3</sup> as a counterpart to Mandarin *de* (6,10) or a

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<sup>2</sup> The Cantonese examples are given in the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong *JyutPing* romanization system; the tones are (1) high level, (2) high rise, (3) mid level, (4) low fall, (5) low rise and (6) low level. The romanization used for Chaozhou is based on Koons (1967), omitting the tones which are not marked consistently in Koons' system. Abbreviations used in the glosses are as follows:

CL classifier	Q question marker
EXP experiential aspect	PASS passive
LP Linking particle	PFV perfective aspect

<sup>3</sup> It has been hypothesized as a universal of passivization (Keenan 1985) that whenever a language allow an agentive passive, it will also allow the agentless passive. On generalization (Keenan 1985:247) states that "If a language has passives with agent phrases then it has them without agent phrases", which makes the wrong prediction for Cantonese.

Cantonese one using the classifier (9,12):

<i>Cantonese</i>	<i>Mandarin</i>
(6) ngo <sup>5</sup> ge <sup>3</sup> ce <sup>1</sup> I LP car 'my car'	(7) wo de chezi I LP car 'my car(s)'
(9) ngo <sup>5</sup> ga <sup>3</sup> ce <sup>1</sup> I CL car 'my car'	
(10) Ngo <sup>5</sup> se <sup>2</sup> -zo <sup>2</sup> ge <sup>3</sup> seon <sup>3</sup> I write-PFV LP letter 'The letter(s) I wrote'	(11) Wo xie de xin I write LP letter 'The letter(s) I wrote'
(12) Ngo <sup>5</sup> se <sup>2</sup> -zo <sup>2</sup> (go <sup>2</sup> ) fung <sup>3</sup> seon <sup>3</sup> I write-PFV (that) CL letter 'The letter I wrote'	

The *ge*<sup>3</sup> constructions are typical of formal register, while the classifier constructions are often more idiomatic. This variation across registers is what constitutes ditaxia.<sup>4</sup>

An important aspect of Ferguson's concept is the **stable** nature of diglossia. A relevant example is the comparative construction in Cantonese and Chaoshou. In Cantonese, the *bei*<sup>2</sup> construction (13) corresponding to Mandarin (14) competes with the indigenous Cantonese one with *gwo*<sup>3</sup> ((16): the *gwo* construction (17) exists in certain varieties of Mandarin, such as Nanjing).

<i>Cantonese</i>	<i>Mandarin</i>	<i>Chaoshou</i>
(13) Ngo <sup>5</sup> bei <sup>2</sup> keoi <sup>5</sup> gou <sup>1</sup> I than him tall	(14) Wo bi ta gao I than him tall	(15) Wa pi i kuy I than him tall
(16) Ngo <sup>5</sup> gou <sup>1</sup> gwo <sup>3</sup> keoi <sup>5</sup> I tall than him	(17) Wo gao gwo ta I tall than him	(18) Wa kuy kwe i I tall than him

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<sup>4</sup> There are also semantic distinctions between the two alternative constructions (Pacioni 1994). As suggested by the translations, the *ge*<sup>3</sup> constructions can denote a set whereas the classifier constructions have specific reference.