

The Grey Area Between Mandarin and Wu Dialects: A Report on the Preliminary Mandarin-Wu Classification Survey

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This past summer I initiated a study of dialects on the border between the Jiang-Hwai Mandarin (江淮官話) and Wu groups in southern Jiangsu 江蘇 and northern Zhejiang 浙江.¹ One goal of this summer's work was to locate dialects that challenge a list of criteria I am developing to distinguish these two groups. If such dialects can be identified, they will provide a test for the criteria and thus help determine where and how the criteria should be refined and strengthened. This report reviews a trial survey of several dialects that I conducted using the criteria.²

Collectively, the criteria I used are successful in distinguishing the two dialect types. The preliminary conclusion based on the survey results is that several dialects on the true geographical edge of the Mandarin-Wu border—among which Nantong 南通 and Danyang 丹陽 are especially notable—strongly challenge the criteria in the way they evidence a mix of Mandarin and Wu traits; while a dialect long considered to show a mix of Mandarin and Wu features—Harngjou 杭州, represented in this report by the mountain tea-growing village of Uengjiashan 翁家山 where the Harngjou dialect is also

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the National Program for Advanced Study and Research in China administered by the Committee on Scholarly Communication with China, through which the fieldwork for this study was made possible. To preserve representation of tone where Chinese is romanized, this paper uses Gwoyeu Romatzyh.

² This report was prepared for presentation at the 4th International Symposium on Language and Linguistics—Pan-Asiatic Linguistics, January 8-10, 1996, sponsored by the Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development, Mahidol University at Salaya, Nakornpathom, Thailand.

spoken--adheres completely to the Mandarin type in all the criteria.

The primary criteria usually cited in determining whether or not a dialect belongs to the Wu group in the region I am studying is the presence or absence of a tripartite distinction in obstruent initials. If a dialect shows such a three-way distinction, and its set of voiced initials correspond to the voiced initial categories of Middle Chinese, that dialect is considered to be a Wu dialect. The classificatory criteria I used in the present survey leave this yardstick aside as unworkable because it is not based on clearly demonstrable distinctions.

If we look for how the Middle Chinese three-way contrast in obstruent-initials is reflected in true phonological distinctions, we find it usually most concretely manifested in tonal divisions, where distinctions between tone categories parallel the distinction between voiced and voiceless Middle Chinese initials. Yet this is true in both Mandarin as well as Wu dialects: In Wu dialects, the "voiced" obstruent initials--which are often not truly voiced at all in northern Wu dialects, but rather are articulated with a breathy murmur that is initiated after the onset of the initial--are in syllables with lower register tones and the voiceless initials are in syllables with upper register tones. Hence in the dialects I am surveying, it is impossible to find examples of minimal pairs that differ only in voicing in the initial. There is always a tonal distinction as well.

In Mandarin the distinction is most commonly preserved in the split *pyng* 平 tone, and in the evidence of a separate *yangshang* (or *yangshaang*) 陽上 category, now merged with *chiuh* 去 and distinct from the *inshang* (or *inshaang*) 陰上 in northern dialects. The distinction is preserved for all tone categories in some Jiang-Hwai Mandarin dialects. Nantong, for instance, has a complete set and lacks only the phonetic quality of low-pitched breathy murmur in its lower register tones to leave it sounding like a Wu dialect in this regard.

Furthermore, this three-way distinction in obstruent initials that has heretofore been considered the hallmark of Wu dialect affiliation--at minimum a necessary feature and generally often even considered a sufficient feature to mark a dialect as Wu--may turn out to be merely an areal phenomenon, a phonetic feature of certain tone categories heard in dialects of the Wu region. The compass points this way when we consider that the three-way distinction does not even exist in at least one dialect that is usually given the Wu label. Leu Shushiang (1993) and Tsay Gwuluh (1994), in two recent studies of the Danyang dialect, both reveal that Danyang has no voiced set of obstruent initials and thus lacks a tripartite division in any initial set. By what criteria, then, can this dialect be labeled Wu? My survey this summer was an initial attempt to find the answer to that question for Danyang as well as other dialects.

Leaving the presence or absence of a set of voiced obstruent initials aside as a means of evaluation, the criteria I used in the preliminary survey were designed to determine whether a dialect contains demonstrable distinctions that are more consistent with Wu patterns and out of sync with Mandarin norms, or vice

versa. They are outlined below.³ Many of the criteria also distinguish southern dialects in general from Mandarin dialects. But, as the primary goal of the survey was to distinguish between Wu and Mandarin at the boundary of these two dialect groups, and not necessarily to distinguish Wu from other southern dialects, this does not handicap my efforts.

1) In Wu dialects, a nasal initial /n/ will be found in a set of words (the so-called rih 日 initial words) where Mandarin has non-nasal initials such as /θ/ (zero initial) or /z/, for example in the words for 'person, meat, hot, soft', and of course generally also where Mandarin has /n/ (or /l/), as in 'ox'. Table 1 illustrates with examples from the Nanjing 南京 and Shanqhae 上海 dialects.⁴

Table 1	Mandarin: Nanjing	Wu: Shanqhae
hot	zəʔ7	ɲirʔ8
soft	zuā3	ɲyø6
meat	zəu5	ɲioʔ8
person	zəŋ2	ɲin6
ox	liəw2	ɲiv6

As Wu dialects have no contrast comparable to the distinction between /θ/ or /z/ and /n/ in Mandarin, the value of the initial in words of the set including 'person, meat, hot, soft' is diagnostically sufficient for this criterion.

2) In Wu dialects, nasal initial /m/ will be found in a set of words (the so-called wei 微 initial words) where Mandarin has non-nasal initials /θ/ or /v/, for example 'mosquito', and of course generally also where Mandarin has /m/, as

³ I originally considered the first two of the criteria at the suggestion of Professor Jerry Norman in early discussions I had with him on questions related to the history of the Harngjou dialect. My thinking with regard to the third criterion was augmented in e-mail discussions with Mr. Keith Dede. Some of criteria are also discussed in Simmons 1995.

⁴ The dialect data used in these and the following examples is from Sheu, et al. 1988 for Shanqhae, and Jiangsu sheeng her Shanqhae shyh fangyan gaykuang for Nanjing. In many of the examples, only the relevant comparable morphemes are given. *Dialect transcriptions follow the original sources, except that tones are identified by subscript numbers which identify the traditional tonal categories as follows: 1 for in-pyng, 2 for yang-pyng, 3 for in-shangq, 4 for yang-shangq, 5 for in-chiuh, 6 for yang-chiuh, 7 for in-ruh, and 8 for yang-ruh.*

in 'gate'. Table 2 illustrates.

Table 2	Mandarin: Nanjing	Wu: Shanqhae
mosquito	uəŋ2	mən6
gate	məŋ2	mən6

Again, as Wu dialects have no contrast comparable to the distinction between /θ/ or /v/ and /m/ in Mandarin, the initial in words of the set including 'mosquito' is diagnostically sufficient for this criterion also.

3) Wu dialects will show a nasal initial, usually /ng/ or /n/, in *all* of the comparable forms in words from the set 'tooth, eye, five', and 'fish' and this initial will contrast with the, usually, zero initial /θ/ found in a set including 'vomit'. Mandarin dialects will usually either show a zero initial in all these words, or the set including 'vomit' will have /ng/ initial; but in the latter case the initials /θ/ and /ng/ are in complementary distribution and are never followed by the same, non-contrasting, medial or main vowel. (The Wu pattern is sometimes described as showing a contrast between initials in the Middle Chinese categories *yii* 以 and *yiing* 影.) This criterion is illustrated in Table 3. Here we see that /θ/ and /ng/ contrast in Shanqhae but not in the Mandarin dialect of Changli 昌黎, where /ng/ does not occur before high vowels.⁵

⁵ Changli data is from Changli fangyan jiyu. For an early discussion of the significance of the initials /ng/ and /θ/ in classifying Mandarin, see Stimpson, 1966.