

## 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>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (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.

The two variant constructions are sociolinguistically stratified in spoken Cantonese, the "Mandarin" construction with *bei*<sup>2</sup> being used more by more educated and younger speakers, and in more formal registers. Although Yue-Hashimoto (1992) has suggested that there is a syntactic change in progress here, it is not obvious that the Mandarin construction will *replace* the Cantonese one in the foreseeable future. For the moment we have register variation, and this could continue indefinitely. Yue-Hashimoto (1991) shows that the indigenous southern Min interrogative constructions have typically survived alongside the A-not-A type of question borrowed from Mandarin (she terms this coexistence **stratification**). In the Yilan dialect of Taiwan, for example, the VP-NEG construction (19) and the Q-VP construction (20) coexist with the A-not-A type (21):

- (19) Li be khi bo?      (20) Le kam be khi?  
       you want go not      you Q want go  
       'Do you want to go?'      'Do you want to go?'  
  
 (21) Li bat m bat tse le lang?  
       you know not know this CL person  
       'Do you know this person?'

Similarly in Chaozhou, the VP-NEG and A-not-A forms are alternative forms of yes/no question (Koons 1967:25):

- (22) Le sɛ Ng a mi?      (23) Le si m si sɛ Ng?  
       you name Ng or not      you be not be name Ng  
       'Is your name Ng?'      'Is your name Ng?'

These alternatives are lexically stratified, with the A-not-A form used more with the copula *si* than with main verbs. They are not necessarily semantically equivalent, often differing in the presuppositions behind the question. Such cases, where the alternatives are functionally as well as stylistically differentiated, are likely candidates for stable ditaxia.

### 3 Hybridization

Another possible outcome of dialect contact is fusion or hybridization, in which features of two dialects are combined to give a new structure. Hybrid forms are found in the aspect system, where indigenous Min forms such as the experiential *pak* have been combined with Mandarin ones (Chappell 1992). The Mandarin experiential with *guo* (24) combines with the southern Min form with *pak* (25):

*Mandarin**Old Chaozhou**New Chaozhou (hybrid)*

- (24) Ta qu-guo Beijing. (25) I pak khə Pakkia. (26) I pak khə kwe Pakkia.  
 he go-EXP Beijing he EXP go Beijing he EXP go-EXP Beijing  
 'He's been to Beijing.' 'He's been to Beijing.' 'He's been to Beijing'

Crosland (1994) found that in the southern Min dialect of Xiamen, the Mandarin comparative (14) has been combined with the traditional Amoy structure (27) to give a hybrid form (28):

*Mandarin**Old Xiamen**New Xiamen*

NP bi NP ADJ + NP k'a? ADJ NP => NP pi NP k'a? ADJ

- (27) Kin a tsui k'o k'a? li tsa hŋ. (indigenous form)  
 today water-level more low yesterday  
 'Today the tide is lower than yesterday.'
- (28) Kin a tsui k'o pi tsa hŋ k'a? li. (hybrid form)  
 today water-level than yesterday more high  
 'Today the tide is lower than yesterday.'

Crosland found that older and less educated informants use the hybrid form (28) in fewer syntactic environments than younger informants, consistent with a gradual change in progress toward the hybrid structure.

Hybridization typically, and perhaps necessarily, results from ditaxia. Ferguson (1959:339) noted that over time, the H variety tends to be replaced by some compromise between H and L. Thus the Cantonese possessive construction construction with *ge*<sup>3</sup> (29), resembling the Mandarin type with *de*, is relatively formal, while the classifier construction as in (30) is more colloquial, as discussed in section 2 above. A hybrid construction with both the classifier and *ge*<sup>3</sup> (31) has recently been observed (Luke & Nancarrow 1993, Matthews & Yip 1994:90, Tsang (this volume):

- (29) Gong<sup>2</sup>duk<sup>1</sup> ge<sup>3</sup> fong<sup>1</sup>-ngon<sup>3</sup>  
 governor LP proposal
- (30) Gong<sup>2</sup>duk<sup>1</sup> li<sup>1</sup> go<sup>3</sup> fong<sup>1</sup>-ngon<sup>3</sup>  
 governor this CL proposal
- (31) Gong<sup>2</sup>duk<sup>1</sup> li<sup>1</sup> go<sup>3</sup> ge<sup>3</sup> fong<sup>1</sup>-ngon<sup>3</sup>  
 governor this CL LP proposal

The hybridization account for the [CL *ge* N] construction is paralleled in Chaozhou by the polyfunctional *kay* which serves both as linking particle (Mandarin *de*, Cantonese *ge*<sup>3</sup>) and as the default classifier (Mandarin *ge*, Cantonese *go*<sup>3</sup>):<sup>5</sup>

	<i>Mandarin</i>	<i>Cantonese</i>	<i>Chaozhou</i>
(32)	zhe ge ren this CL man	(33) ni <sup>1</sup> go <sup>3</sup> jan <sup>4</sup> this CL man	(34) tsi <b>kay</b> nang this KAY man
(35)	wo de pengyou I LP friend	(36) ngo <sup>5</sup> ge <sup>3</sup> pang <sup>4</sup> jau <sup>5</sup> I LP friend	(37) wa <b>kay</b> phengyu I KAY friend

Whereas Cantonese fuses the two structures by putting the classifier and the linking particle side by side, Chaozhou does so by using the same morpheme in both syntactic contexts. In the case of nouns which take a classifier other than *kay* (in obligatory classifier contexts such as following numerals and demonstratives), there is a choice between *kay* (corresponding to possessive *ge* in Cantonese) and the specific classifier. This is the case, for example, with the word *sq* "shirt" which selects the classifier *kyq* but allows either *kyq* or *kay* in the possessive construction:

(38)	Le kyq sq you CL shirt 'your shirt'	or (39)	Le kay sq you KAY shirt 'your shirt(s)'
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### 3.1 Redundancy

Each of the above examples of hybridization involves an apparent redundancy. In the Chaozhou form *pak V gwe*, the experiential aspect is marked twice; in the Xiamen comparative, both *pi* and *ka?* mark the comparative degree. In the Cantonese case, *ge* seems redundant since there is already a classifier between the modifying phrase and the head noun. We might ask why change should result in such redundancy.

First, we may note that double-marking is not unusual, but constitutes a recognized typological pattern, as in the case of structures which are both head-marking and dependent-marking in the sense of Nichols (1986). Many languages show possessive constructions where the possessive relation is marked both on the head (possessum) and the dependent noun (possessor):

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<sup>5</sup> Gil (1995) shows that Hakka *e* also covers both functions. Its syntax appears to be similar to that of Chaozhou *kay*.

*Mexican Spanish:**Austrian German:*

- (40) Su casa de Juan                      (41) Dem Wolfgang sein Lied  
       his house of John                    the-DAT Wolfgang his song  
       'John's house.'

There are functional advantages to such double-marking. One is that it enables the grammatical relation to be clearly marked even two elements of a constituent are separated, as in Hungarian:

- (42) János-nak el-ment a barátnő-je.  
       John-DAT PFV-went the girlfriend-3sg  
       'John's girlfriend has left.'

In many cases redundancy can be seen to have a processing value. Chaozhou *pak*, for example, retains its lexical meaning "know" alongside the grammatical meaning of experiential aspect. The addition of postverbal *kwe* eliminates the possibility of misinterpreting experiential *pak* as a main verb. Or it may have a stylistic function: the Cantonese redundant *ge<sup>3</sup>* (31) is a feature of elaborated style, such as public speaking. Within such registers, it enables the speaker to compromise between the Cantonese tendency to use the classifier and the pressure to use *ge<sup>3</sup>* corresponding to Mandarin *de* in noun modification structures.

In a historical perspective, double marking can be a mechanism of transition from one structural type to another, as noted by Thomason (1983). French negation, for example, is marked both by preverbal *ne* and postverbal *pas*:

- (43) Je ne mange pas.  
       I NEG eat not  
       'I'm not eating.'

Only recently has the *ne* been lost in colloquial speech, completing the drift from preverbal to postverbal marking of negation (Harris 1978). Whether the double-marked hybrid structures which have appeared in the Chinese dialects will resolve themselves in favour of a pan-Chinese pattern remains to be seen.

### 3.2 Hybridization and Hypercorrection

Hybridization is parallel to hypercorrection in several respects:

- (i) the prestige of the H variety involved is a triggering factor;
- (ii) the result is grammatical neither in the H nor the L as these existed before contact.



For example, *between you and I* is the ungrammatical result of attempting to mimic the prescribed subject form *you and I*. The similarity between hybridization and hypercorrection in several is based on the fact that both involve confusion of two related varieties. While this may be taken in a non-judgmental sense, prescriptive commentators regularly condemn hypercorrection as indicative of confusion. We might, therefore, expect a similar prescriptive reaction to hybrid structures. This is a further issue deserving research.

#### 4 Summary and implications

In this paper we have considered two aspects of convergence at the grammatical level. Bilingualism in Chinese speech communities does not straightforwardly entail grammatical convergence; rather, it leads in the first instance to diglossic alternations, whose syntactic instantiations may be termed ditaxia. In the longer term, there are at least three possible outcomes of ditaxia:

- (i) convergence through replacement of the indigenous form by the pan-Chinese one;
- (ii) stable register variation;
- (iii) hybridization, producing a new structure with elements of both.

These processes which can be observed in modern Chinese dialects can be assumed to have taken place throughout the history of Chinese. Historical developments may be illuminated by study of the processes under way today. Neither phenomenon is likely to be limited to the case of Chinese dialects, but both presumably occur widely in Southeast Asian languages and other contact situations.

It is important to recognise ditaxia in discussions of Chinese dialect grammar, especially with respect to claims about the similarities and differences between dialects. The notion "Cantonese grammar", for example, means different things depending on what range of registers is included. It is the "L" register which is most distinctive, while the "H" register is much more uniform across dialects.

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