

Chinese Dialectal Parameterisation in Cantonese Teaching

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Abstract:

Using formal parameters and universal cartography, it is possible to account for linguistic variation in Chinese dialects, which display systematic microvariation within a common core grammar. This is particularly useful for the teaching of Chinese as a second language, as there is a growing interest in Chinese, not only in standard Mandarin but also in Cantonese which is immensely popular in the West and mainland China. As cartography seeks a universal word order from which language-specific parameter-settings are derived, the following schemata can account for Chinese dialects:

1) C(omp) Subj(ect) T(ense) Adv(erb) V(erb)-Aff(ix) Obj(ect) S(entence) F(inal)P(article)

2) Possessor Poss Dem(onstrative) Num(ber) Q(uantifier) Cl(assifier) Adj(ective) N(oun)

In the clausal (1) and nominal (2) domains, the head-initiality of Chinese correlates with commonly spoken languages like English and Romance, which facilitates the acquisition of Chinese by many foreigners. Furthermore, these schemata permit a systematic account of the microvariation between Chinese dialects, since while Mandarin and Cantonese share forms for the same categories (e.g. C: 因為 because... 所以 and so..., 雖然 although... 但是/係 but..., 如果 if... 就 then...; T: 會 will/shall, 應該 should, 要 must, 想 want; V-aff: completive aspectual 了/咗, anterior aspectual 過, stative aspectual 著/住; Poss: 的/嘅, Dem: 這/呢 (proximal), 那/個 (distal)), dialectal variation can be classified in three types: 1) dialectal forms exist in Cantonese but not in Mandarin e.g. progressive V-aff 緊 (3) 2) different word order, namely Cantonese postverbal adverbs and Mandarin preverbal ones (先 'before' (4), 多 'more' (5), 少 'less' (6)) 3) new constructions, like Cantonese classifiers heading noun phrases denoting articles, which indicates Cl-to-Poss movement (7):

3) 外邊 响度 落-緊 雨 / 外面 正在 下 雨
outside AUX fall-PROG rain outside AUX fall rain

'It is raining outside.' (Cantonese/Mandarin)

4) 我哋 行 先 / 我們 先 走
we go first we first go

'Let's go first.' (Cantonese/Mandarin)

5a) 我哋 諗-住 再 住 多 三 日
we think-ASP again live more three day

5b) 我們 想-著 再 多 住 三 天
we think-ASP again more live three day

'We are thinking of staying for three more days.' (Cantonese(5a)/Mandarin(5b))

6a) 我俾 少 十 分 個 學生
I give less ten mark that CL student

6b) 我 少 給 那 個 學生 十 分
I less give that CL student ten mark

'I gave ten marks less to that student.' (Cantonese(6a)/Mandarin(6b))

7a) 架 車 阻-住 個 出口
CL car block-ASP CL exit

7b) 這 輛 車 阻-著 出口
this CL car block-ASP exit

'The car is blocking the exit.' (Cantonese(7a)/Mandarin(7b))

Based on these examples, the dialectal parametric setting for Cantonese can be represented thus:

8) C Subj T Adv V-Aff(緊) Obj Adv (多/少/先) SFP

9) Possessor Poss (CL-D) Dem Num Q Cl Adj N



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