

Abstract

Development of the –m Coda and the “Closed-Mouth Final” in the Yong’an Dialect Spoken in Fujian Province

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The Yong’an dialect spoken in central Fujian province has a special characteristic: a plethora of syllables with –m coda. In other Min dialects, the majority of syllables do not have –m coda. The development of –m coda in Yong’an can be explained as a regular phonological change from Proto-Min (the mother language of modern Min dialects) to Yong’an dialect: *-ŋ in Proto-Min is assimilated to the roundness of the previous vowel and became –m in Yong’an, which is also [+round]. (*-ŋ [-round] > -m [+round] > [+round]_#). Examples include *sāng* 桑 *sɔŋ > sɔm, *zhāng* 張 *tɕɔŋ > tsiam, *guāng* 光 *kuɔŋ > kɔm, etc.

Yong’an dialect also has a so-called “closed-mouth final”, wherein the mouth is closed when the articulation starts. The development of the closed-mouth final is due to the influence of neighboring Southern Min dialects: in Southern Min, some syllables that do not have [+round] medial in any other Chinese dialects are pronounced with [+round] medial. This “irregular” [+round] medial is widespread in Southern Min. For example, *shān* 山 as well as *sǎn* 傘 are read [sũã] both in Xiamen and in Chaozhou colloquial reading. It is read with a closed-mouth final in Yong’an ([sũm] according to Norman’s transcription). Also, *dān* 單 *tan is read [tũa] both in Xiamen and in Chaozhou; *ān* 安 *an is read [ũã] both in Xiamen and in Chaozhou; *gǎn* 稈 *kan is read [kũai] in Xiamen and [kũã] in Chaozhou. They are read [tum], [um], and [kum] respectively in Yong’an.

Therefore, the development of the closed-mouth final in Yong’an dialect can be explained as an areal feature. Yong’an, located nearby the Southern Min speaking areas, was influenced by the irregular [+round] medial for colloquial words, and developed the closed-mouth final. Whereas the feature [+round] is reflected in the medial in Southern Min, it exerted an influence on the final (which includes medial, main vowel and coda) in Yong’an, producing the closed-mouth final.