

Stratified Tonal Changes in Shaoguan Dialect of Northern Guangdong

Lin Deng
University of Washington
ldeng@u.washington.edu

Abstract

The dialect under discussion is locally referred to as *Bencheng sheng* 本城聲, “native tongue of the city.” It is a dialect that had been spoken among native residents in the old town area of modern Shaoguan city, the northernmost major city in Guangdong province. Shaoguan dialect and a handful others in northern Guangdong are collectively named as *Yuebei tuhua*, “aboriginal dialects in Northern Guangdong.” With untypical mixture of features, these dialects remain a challenge to dialect classification.

In the current paper, the author intends to touch upon this open problem from the perspective of stratification attested in tonal development, focusing on three sound changes occurred to original *yangshang* tone in Chinese dialectology convention. By identifying nature of each stratum, the author will come to conclude that the native layer reflects a change from *yangshang* into *yinqu* tone, and two other strata resulted from borrowing, one from either Cantonese or standard language, and the other from a shared layer between Gan and Hakka. To explore the nature of the native stratum, this paper will invoke the concept of “Proto-Gan”, which put forward in Sagart (2002), analyze the significance of the merger of *yangshang* and *yinqu* tone in terms of its geographical distribution among Chinese dialects, and raise a concern to the already vexing Gan-Hakka relationship. Possible factors that might have contributed to the native change will also be explored.

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