

A study on prefix of Hohhot dialect

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Abstract—Hohhot dialect (Cidihua), as the most important and prevalent spoken-language in Hohhot, has its own linguistic features. This paper focuses on morphology in Hohhot dialect. Based on the analysis of three dominant prefixes, we find that these three prefixes have their own features and have no substantive meaning.

Keywords—Hohhot dialect; Prefix; Linguistic features

I. INTRODUCTION

Hohhot, the provincial city of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, is the political, economic and cultural center of Inner Mongolia. The major languages and dialects are Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese), Hohhot dialect (Cidihua) and several varieties of Mongolian (Puthuval & Wang 2016). Hupu, a contraction of huhehaote and Putonghua, is also a very interesting branch of Hohhot language attracting researcher's sight (Wang 2014).

Hohhot dialect (Cidihua), as the most prevalent spoken-language in Hohhot, plays an important role in Hohhotians' daily life. Like other dialects in China, Hohhot dialect also has its own linguistic features in phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. This paper will focus on three typical prefixes and want to analyze more specifically of them.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Liao (2014) believes that "if a bound morpheme carries no substantive meaning, and / or its position is fixed, it is best analyzed as an affix. Otherwise, it should be categorized as a bound root". The analysis of the following prefixes in this paper will be based on this definition.

Li & Li (1986) analyze prefix and suffix and state some explanations on Hohhot dialect. $kəʔ$, as the most important affix in Hohhot dialect (as the branch of Jin dialect), is mostly discussed. The origin of $kəʔ$ is also having a heated discussion (Zhang 2010; Liu & Liu 2012). Liu & Liu (2012) think that $kəʔ$ in contemporary Jin dialect has the obvious property of

agglutination, which is like the agglutinative elements in Altai Language. It combines with Chinese roots and forms a special kind of mixed language.

III. THE PREFIX $/kəʔ/$

$/kəʔ/$ is the most important prefix in Hohhot dialect. As the most productive prefix, it can be combined with nouns, verbs, adjectives and classifiers. (Li & Li 1986; Liu & Liu 2000; Liu & Liu 2012).

A. $/kəʔ/$ + monosyllabic noun root

The prefix $/kəʔ/$ combines with the monosyllabic noun root taking the form XY.

- (1) $kəʔ$ ua^{35}
prefix concave
'the place where high in two sides but low in middle'
- (2) $kəʔ$ tan^{35}
prefix egg
'egg-shaped things'
- (3) $kəʔ$ $tei\alpha^{44}$
prefix point
'the top of the cone'
- (4) $kəʔ$ $t\alpha\alpha^{44}$
prefix fragment
'very smaller pieces of food or earth'

The basic meaning of the $kəʔ$ -noun is the basic meaning of their roots. For example, the meaning of $/kəʔ ua^{35}/$ 'the place where high in two sides but low in middle', $/kəʔ tei\alpha^{44}/$ 'the top of the cone' and $/kəʔ t\alpha\alpha^{44}/$ 'very smaller pieces of food or earth' in (1) (3) (4) contains the original meaning of the noun root. Some $kəʔ$ -noun's meaning is the metaphor of the root. For instance, $/kəʔ tan^{35}/$ 'egg-shaped things' in (2) is not the egg, but a kind of egg-shaped thing.

kəʔ-noun can also undergo reduplication (RED) of noun root, and take the form XYY.

- (5) /kəʔ tan³⁵---RED---/kəʔ tan³⁵ tan/ ‘a very small egg-shaped thing’

The example (5) indicates that the process of reduplication XYY is XY + Y.

Does /tɕiə⁴⁴ tɕiə⁴⁴/, /ua³⁵ ua³⁵/, /tsa⁴⁴ tsa⁴⁴/ in (1), (3) and (4) exist in Hohhot dialect? The answer is no. We usually use kəʔ-noun to describe these kinds of things. There is a special case to /tan³⁵tan³⁵/ in (2). When we use /tan³⁵tan³⁵/alone, it refers to children’s testis. It is a proper noun. But according to what we analyzed, we think that /tan³⁵tan³⁵/, which indicates children’s testis, is the result by the consensus of the mass.

There is also a group of reduplicated words that are different from the above one.

- (6) /sɿ⁴⁴---RED---/sɿ⁴⁴ sɿ⁴⁵---PRE---/kəʔ sɿ⁴⁴ sɿ⁴⁵/ ‘a tiny bit’

- (7) */kəʔ sɿ⁴⁴/ ---RED---/kəʔ sɿ⁴⁴ sɿ⁴⁵/ ‘a tiny bit’

/kəʔ sɿ⁴⁴ sɿ⁴⁵/ ‘a tiny bit’ in (6) and (7) show that it doesn’t undergo the process of XY+Y, but undergo prefix-adding(PRE). It means that the root undergoes reduplication first and then adds the prefix. Therefore, the process of this kind of form is YY (reduplication of noun root) + X (prefix- kəʔ). The reason is that the word /kəʔ sɿ⁴⁴/ doesn’t exist in Hohhot dialect, but /sɿ⁴⁴ sɿ⁴⁵/ does.

- (8) /ts^ha⁴⁴---RED---/ts^ha⁴⁴ ts^ha/---PRE---/kəʔ ts^ha⁴⁴ ts^ha/ ‘very small pieces’

- (9) /kəʔ ts^ha⁴⁴---RED---/kəʔ ts^ha⁴⁴ ts^ha/ ‘very small pieces’

There is also a very interesting case that /kəʔ ts^ha⁴⁴ ts^ha/ ‘very small pieces’ can undergo these two different kinds of process, because both /ts^ha⁴⁴ ts^ha/ and /kəʔ ts^ha⁴⁴/ exist in Hohhot dialect.

Therefore, we can conclude that there are two different kinds of construction on kəʔ-noun. They are XY/Y and X/YY.

Wang (1994) believes that the reduplication of Chinese noun refers to favor “xiao”, kindness “qinqie” or tininess “xixiao”, which always apply to children’s language. We find that the meaning of reduplicative forms of XY in Hohhot dialect also have little changes which indicate “a little / small”.

B. /kəʔ/ + monosyllabic verb root

The prefix /kəʔ/ combines with the monosyllabic verb root taking the form XY. The verb roots which can be combined with prefix-/kəʔ/ usually express the physical action. The kəʔ-verb and the verb itself can both be used in Hohhot dialect, but Hohhotians prefer using kəʔ-verb. For example:

- (10) kəʔ k^hau³⁵
prefix lean
‘lean against’

- (11) kəʔ t^hui⁴⁴
prefix push
‘push’

- (12) kəʔ t^hai⁵³
prefix lie down
‘rest’

Firstly, Liu & Liu (2000) argue that verb XY usually express “take actions slowly or a short period”. For instance:

- (13) ni³⁵ tɕiou⁴³⁵ tsai³⁵ su³⁵ naə kəʔ
you AUX in tree there prefix
k^hau³⁵ ɕia⁵³
lean a while

‘You just lean against the tree for a while.’

- (14) ni³⁵ tɕiou⁴³⁵ tsai³⁵ su³⁵ naə k^hau³⁵
you AUX in tree there prefix
ɕia⁵³
lean

‘You just lean against the tree for a while.’

- (15) ni³⁵ tɕiou⁴³⁵ by nəŋ⁴⁴ tsai³⁵
you AUX not can again
sau²⁴³⁵uei⁴⁴ kəʔ t^hui⁴⁴ ɕia⁵³
a little bit prefix push a while

‘Why can’t you push a little bit more?’

- (16) ni³⁵ tɕiou⁴³⁵ by nəŋ⁴⁴ tsai³⁵
you AUX not can more
sau²⁴³⁵uei⁴⁴ kəʔ t^hui⁴⁴ ɕia⁵³
a little bit prefix push a while

‘Why can’t you push a little bit more?’

(17) zɔ⁵³ tʰɿ³³ tɕhy³⁵ tʂho⁴⁴sy kəʔ tʰaŋ⁵³
 let he go bed prefix lie down
 xueiə⁴³⁵
 a while

‘Let him rest in bed for a while.’

(18) zɔ⁵³ tʰɿ³³ tɕhy³⁵ tʂho⁴⁴sy tʰaŋ⁵³
 let he go bed lie down
 xueiə⁴³⁵
 a while

‘Let him rest in bed for a while.’

Examples (13) to (18) show that there is no difference when the verb root attaches with or without prefix- kəʔ. so the existence of prefix-kəʔ doesn’t have any influence on expressing “take actions slowly or a short period”. The meaning of “slowly or slightly” derives from “/ɕia⁵³/ and /xueiə⁴³⁵/ ‘a while’”. It can be concluded that the meaning of “take action slowly or a short period” derives from the context, not the prefix- kəʔ.

Secondly, Li & Li (1986) argue that some kəʔ-verbs can express “non-stop repeated action”. See the following examples (excerpted from Li & Li (1986)).

(19) ni³⁵ biau⁴³⁵ kəʔ niou⁴³⁵ lɛ
 You not prefix twist ASP

‘Don’t twist your body anymore.’

(20) nia³⁵ kəʔ tsuan⁵³ lɛ
 3PL prefix walk around ASP
 iəʔ tʰie⁴⁴ lɛ
 one day ASP

‘They walk around all day.’

The sentence (19) and (20) show that actions /kəʔ niou⁴³⁵/ ‘twist’ and /kəʔ tsuan⁵³/ ‘walk around’ in sentences respectively refer to non-stop repeated action. But if we use the verb root alone in sentences, will this meaning still remain. See the examples (21) and (22).

(21) ni³⁵ biau⁴³⁵ niou⁴³⁵ lɛ
 You not twist ASP

‘Don’t twist your body anymore.’

(22) nia³⁵ tsuan⁵³ lɛ iəʔ tʰie⁴⁴ lɛ
 3PL walk around ASP one day ASP

‘They walk around all day.’

Compared with the sentences (19) to (22), (21) & (22), which the verb roots don’t attach with prefix- kəʔ, still express the meaning of non-stop repeated actions. We find that the verb what the prefix attached has this kind of property:

niou⁴³⁵ [+non-stop +repeated]

tsuan⁵³ [+non-stop +repeated]

According to the above analysis, it can be concluded that “non-stop repeated” meaning derived from the verb root. Therefore, prefix- kəʔ doesn’t refer to repeated and non-stop. The meaning of them derives from the verb itself and the context.

Based on the above analysis, prefix-kəʔ of verb carries no substantive meaning. The meaning of “take action slowly or a short period” and “non-stop repeated action” derives from the verb itself and the context.

C. /kəʔ/ + monosyllabic adjective root

The prefix /kəʔ/ combines with the monosyllabic adjective root taking the form XY, which refers to the property of an entity. For example:

(23) kəʔ ɕiou³⁵
 prefix Shriveled
 ‘shriveled’

(24) kəʔ liau³⁵
 prefix bent
 ‘bent’

Some reduplicated adjective root can also combine with prefix-kəʔ. Reduplication in adjective root is not a very obvious feature in Hohhot dialect, compared with Mandarin Chinese.

D. /kəʔ/ + monosyllabic classifier root

Chinese has a particular rich nominal classifier system that requires classifiers to occurs in a noun phrase using the following construction (Ahrens & Huang 2016):

Determiner(Det) / Number (Num) / Quantifier (Q) - Classifier (CL) – Noun (N)

They use “sortal classifier” and “measure classifier” to refer to its subcategories. Sortal classifiers include individual classifier, event classifier and kind classifier, while measure classifiers include container

measure word, standard measure word and approximation measure word.

Prefix-kəʔ in Hohhot dialect can combine with some kinds of classifiers. For instance:

(25) iəʔ kəʔ tui¹³ uəŋ⁵³ tʰi⁴³⁵

‘a bunch of questions’

(26) san¹³ kəʔ teiaʔ y³⁵ teia¹³

‘three sections of corn’

(27) iəʔ kəʔ ku mʌ³³ səŋ¹³

‘a hemp rope’

According to what we analyzed, prefix-kəʔ can only combine with approximation measure words. So the structure of noun phrase in Hohhot dialect can be written as follows:

Determiner(Det) / Number (Num) / Quantifier (Q) – (kəʔ)-Classifier (CL) – Noun (N)

E. Summary

Prefix /kəʔ/ is a very important morpheme in Hohhot dialect and people use it in almost all the sentences. Based on what we analyzed above, we find that prefix-kəʔ can combine with nouns, verbs, adjectives and classifiers. However, it doesn’t carry substantive meaning. We also explain some grammatical features and characteristics of /kəʔ/.

IV. THE PREFIX /xuəʔ³²/

A. /xuəʔ³²/ + monosyllabic verb root

Prefix /xuəʔ³²/ always combine with monosyllabic verb root. It refers to continuity and repetition of an action (Li & Li 1986), and have derogatory sense (Liu & Liu 2000). The meaning of /xuəʔ³²/-verb is the basic meaning of the verb root. For example:

(28) xuəʔ³² tou³²
prefix quiver
‘quiver’

(29) xuəʔ³² liao⁴⁴
prefix uncover
‘uncover’

(30) xuəʔ³² zau⁵³
prefix walk around
‘walk around’

(31) xuəʔ³² teiau⁴³⁵
prefix stir
‘stir’

As we can see above, these words express continuity, e.g. /xuəʔ³² tou³²/ ‘quiver’ in (28), /xuəʔ³² zau⁵³/ ‘walk around’ in (30) and /xuəʔ³² teiau⁴³⁵/ ‘stir’ in (31). But /xuəʔ³² liao⁴⁴/ ‘uncover’ in (29) doesn’t refer to cover and uncover the quilt continually. We find that the verb root has the same property:

tou³² [+continuity + repetition]

zau⁵³ [+continuity + repetition]

teiau⁴³⁵ [+continuity + repetition]

As we present above, /tou³²/ ‘quiver’, /zau⁵³/ ‘walk around’ and /teiau⁴³⁵/ ‘stir’ in (28), (30) and (31) all express continuity and repetition. So the property of continuity and repetition doesn’t derive from prefix-xuəʔ³², but the verb itself. Therefore, it can be concluded that /xuəʔ³²/ doesn’t have any substantive meaning. It only uses as the derivational prefix.

V. THE PREFIX /zəʔ³²⁴/

Prefix /zəʔ³²⁴/ can combine with verbs and adjectives. For example:

A. /zəʔ³²⁴/ + monosyllabic verb root

(32) zəʔ³²⁴ xuŋ¹³
prefix cheat
‘cheat’

(33) zəʔ³²⁴ ɕie¹³
prefix show off
‘show off’

(34) zəʔ³²⁴ ts^hu³⁵
prefix brag
‘brag’

The above examples show that /zəʔ³²⁴/ always combine the verb root which has the property of derogatory, like /xuŋ¹³/ ‘cheat’ in (32), /ɕie¹³/ in (33) and /ts^hu³⁵/ in (34).

B. /zəʔ³²⁴/ + monosyllabic adjective root

(35) zəʔ³²⁴ kuai¹³
prefix strange
‘strange’

(36) $zə^{324}$ $ɥɛ^{44}$
 prefix incredible
 ‘incredible’

(37) $zə^{324}$ $teɪŋ^{13}$
 prefix shrewd
 ‘shrewd’

The examples above can show that the roots of / $zə^{324}$ / in (35) to (37) have the same property.

$kuai^{13}$ [+derogatory]

$ɥɛ^{44}$ [+derogatory]

$teɪŋ^{13}$ [+derogatory]

Therefore, the meaning of these words derives from the root, and the derogatory sense is also encoded in the root itself.

VI. Conclusion

Three main prefixes are explained and analyzed to present a micro vision of Hohhot dialect. Based on what we analyzed, we find that prefix in Hohhot dialect has no substantive meaning and its position is fixed. It will help us to analyze more precisely on language and dialect.

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