

Exploring the outcome of dialect contact across three generations in Hohhot, China

Wang Xuan
Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Koineization situations, where a new linguistic variety is formed induced by contact between mutually intelligible dialects, have been studied in many western societies (e.g., Kerswill, 1994; Trudgill, 2004; Britain, 1997; Omdal, 1977). Many Chinese urban cities have seen similar linguistic processes especially after the industrialization and large-scale migratory movement in the 1950s, which provide valuable test ground for sociolinguistic studies in non-western localities (e.g. Xu, 1992; Yang, 1997; Sun, 2013; Lu, 2014). This talk will first give a brief overview of the relevant studies in the Chinese context, and then report the results of a variationist sociolinguistic investigation of a Chinese immigrant city, Hohhot.

Hohhot is considered to be a bifurcated city, consisting of the Old Town and the New Town. The “traditional” local residents are concentrated in the Old Town, speaking the local Jin dialect (晋语). Most residents in the New Town are migrants who arrived in the 1950s encouraged by government policy. Thus, a mixed, new urban vernacular combining features of Jin and Pǔtōnghuà (standard Mandarin) was formed, known locally as Hū Pǔ 呼普 (Puthuval & Wang, 2017), or Hohhot Pǔtōnghuà. Through quantitative analysis of the social and linguistic constraints operating on two linguistic features of Hū Pǔ (the stress pattern variable and the fricative variable), this paper explores the outcome of this contact variety.

67 speakers from both the local and the migrant communities across three generations were interviewed, with their socio-demographic information collected by a questionnaire and their linguistic production data collected by a word elicitation task. About 2800 tokens were manually coded on these two features, and these data were separately hand fit into binomial mixed effects models using the lme4 library in R (Bates, Maechler & Bolker, 2011; R Core Team, 2017). The independent variables included were social factors like town, age group, sex, and education; as well as linguistic factors like the following vowel, phoneme, etc. Word and speaker were treated as random intercepts.

The results found a significant interaction between town, sex, and age group for both linguistic variables. The language change pattern shows that the two linguistic features both presented the typical koineization process with a converging trend between new town and old town speakers, and focusing happened rapidly in the second generation. The results will be further discussed in conjunction with the specific social situation in Hohhot and models of new dialect formation, and how socio-psychological factors like speakers’ attitudes and identity are likely to shape the outcome of the contact variety will be discussed.

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