

Revealing the Cantonese Influence on the Information Structure of China Coast Pidgin

I-Ying Lin
National Chengchi University
iyinglin0729@gmail.com

China Coast Pidgin is a Chinese-based pidgin spoken between the foreign merchants and the local Chinese during the 18th and 19th centuries, and it was widely used in Canton as well as many seacoast areas. Its grammar has substantial influence from Cantonese. For example, the structure *how fashion* parallels the use of *dím yéuhng* in Cantonese (Ansaldo, Matthews & Smith 2010). Furthermore, the available data shows that its phonology reveals typical characters of Cantonese pronunciation.

While most of the research on China Coast Pidgin focuses on grammatical or historical discussions, our analysis wants to expand the knowledge of the language to the field of pragmatics. We apply the framework of information structure in order to evaluate the pragmatic-syntactic interface of China Coast Pidgin. The approach of information structure Knud Lambrecht (1994) is selected as the theoretical basis and the criteria for our analysis. Our goal is to analyze its topic-structure system as well as the Cantonese-influenced phenomena that affect the information structure of China Coast Pidgin. The dialogues used for our analysis come from Chinese-English Instructure (英語集全), which is recognized by scholars as a reliable documentation of China Coast Pidgin. Our study reveals that topic-comment is the most canonical topic structure in China Coast Pidgin, namely topics tend to occur initially in clauses in a discourse. In terms of the Cantonese influence on the information structure of China Coast Pidgin, we observe the phenomena, to name a few: First, the partially ellipted noun phrase structure [one-CLF-Ø] is influenced by Cantonese. Such construction is grammatically not acceptable in English. Second, the second-person pronoun at the clause-initial position in an imperative clause can be either presented or omitted in China Coast Pidgin and Cantonese, whereas the occurrence of second-person pronouns in English imperative structures is atypical. Our findings reveal that the substrate influence on the language goes beyond than just the grammatical level.

Reference

- Ansaldo, U., Matthews, S., Smith, G. (2010) China Coast Pidgin: Text and context. *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Language*, 25(1), 63-94.
- Lambrecht, K. (1994) *Information structure and sentence form: Topic, focus and the mental representations of discourse referents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

