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Review of: The Lungtu dialect, a descriptive and historical study of a South Chinese idiom by Søren Egerod

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The Lungtu Dialect, A Descriptive and Historical Study of a South Chinese Idiom. By Søren Egerod. Pp. 284. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, Ltd., 1956.

Reviewed by Richard L. Phillips

This book presents (1) a synchronic description of the Lungtu dialect of Chinese which is spoken in Kwangtung province in a small part of the area between Canton and Macao, and (2) the diachronic relationship of it to older reconstructed stages of Chinese, with some comparison with other modern Chinese dialects. An excellent short summary is appended to the book (pp. 280-81) stating the purpose, a brief outline, and some basic principles and definitions.

Of greatest interest is the author's handling of the grammar. The special problems of describing an 'isolating' language are solved in a way that is admirably suited to the language itself, and the result may well prove useful as a guide to others working with languages of similar structure.

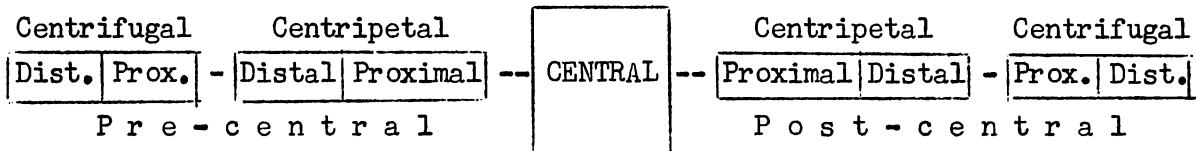
It is of primary importance to recognize the differences of structural relationships between words. The author does this when he establishes word classes on the two criteria of presupposition and position. For the first he is indebted to Hjelmslev, having adopted his distinction between unilateral presupposition (one unit modifying another) and mutual presupposition (two units being bound to each other). According to the criteria, in the author's terms, all words are either modifiable or non-modifiable. Modifiable words are defined by the words which modify them; non-modifiable words are defined by their positions in relation to modifiable words.

Modifiable words may be divided into negatables (roughly verbs and adjectives, in English translation), which may occur with the morpheme for 'not,' and non-negatables, which do not so occur. Non-negatables are arranged into word classes such as approximatables (numerals, etc.), modified only by the morphemes for 'approximately;' singulatives (classi-

fiers etc.), modified by approximatables; collectives (nouns, etc.), modified by singulatives; and so forth, with subclasses according to limitations of occurrence within the classes involved. Just as 'not' defines the negatables, so 'approximately' starts the chain that establishes non-negatables. In this sort of a description there is a necessary order of treatment for much of the material.

Non-modifiable words are definable by position in relation to centrals or to non-centrals. Centrals consist of non-omissible negatables and two other stated words. Here some interesting new terms are used to refer to general or specific positions in the sentence. Both before and after the central, there are two major positions, centripetal and centrifugal. Within each of these, there are the specific positions, proximal and distal.

The following diagram may illustrate the arrangement.



The terms might be somewhat misleading at first unless one realizes that the construction relationships are not between proximal and distal of, say, the centripetal position, but rather between proximal centripetal and central and between distal centripetal and some centrifugal element, or 'usually' so (p. 60). Within the centripetal or centrifugal position the relation between proximal and distal is that they are words of the same category (pp. 59-61). Yet distal centrifugal postcentrals (final particles) hardly seem to be of the same category as their corresponding proximals, unless this reviewer does not understand what is meant by 'category.' Sequences of two or more words of the same category are possible in one position 'box,' but such anomalies can be treated separately without disturbing the basic system.

Sentences containing more than one unit of the same order (e.g. more than one central) are illustrated, together with the possibilities of reversing certain sequences. There are also some general statements of the positions in the sentence of certain modifiable word classes: for instance, collectives and singulatives are ambipositionals with respect to the central, the position of a particular word depending, in the examples given, on the particular central involved. (p.58). But there is otherwise disappointingly little said of the structure of the sentence as a whole, to show how the various modifiable words (other than centrals) and their expanded expressions fit in among the non-modifiable words. Full-sentence examples with all parts clearly labeled according to the proposed terminology might have made the sentence structure more understandable to the reader who is unfamiliar with Chinese. It would seem that the risk of laboring the explanation at this point might be justifiably taken for such a language in which structural relationships are in so large a measure indicated by position.

Preceding the grammar section is a chapter on phonology. Four possible phonemic analyses for the consonants and eight for the vowels are suggested, none of them being clearly superior. A preferred solution is selected on the criteria of simplicity and agreement with the general pattern of neighboring dialects. (Phonemic summaries of each of six other Chinese dialects are presented in the preliminary section of the book). Thus the desire for ease in later historical and comparative handling of the data affects the initial synchronic analysis.

After chapters that present the syllabary and a number of texts, the historical section occupies the last part of the book. An interesting point that emerges here is the use of literary pronunciations of various South

Chinese dialects in the historical reconstruction. The literary pronunciation of Lungtu is based on a nearby contemporary dialect, but other literary idioms of the area point back in history to the influence of another stratum of Chinese as brought in by a different administration. While the strata have remained rather separate (colloquial versus literary) in some dialects, they have become mixed in colloquial Lungtu.