
Transformations in lexicographic practices - the gathering of material on the vernacular language of Yue (Shaoxing)

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Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of the transformation in the lexicographic practices embedded in the changes of compilations collecting linguistic material and knowledge of the vernacular language. The case study is represented by the analysis of two works ascribable to a specific variety of the Early Modern Chinese (jindai Hanyu) of the late imperial period: Yueyu kenqing lu [Register of the essential points of the language of Yue] by Mao Qiling (1623-1716) and Yueyan [Sayings of Yue] (1882) by Fan Yin (1830-1911), with object the linguistic material of the popular topolect (Yue suyu) under the cultural influence of Shaoxing, in northern Zhejiang, considered as one representative variety of the broader Wu language (Wu yu).

The analysis includes the features that characterize the macro- and micro-structure and it is based on elements of a preliminary research on the well-rooted lexicographic practices of the vernacular language in the *Jiangdong* area () and on paratextual materials. The investigation focuses on the role and functions played by this typology of works that are primarily the dissemination of knowledge regarding a specific linguistic variety through two main acts, the gathering of different linguistic materials and textual formats, such as songs, sayings, expressions, on the one hand; and the adding of lexical gloss next to local meanings, colloquialisms (*suyu ci*) and popular graphic varieties (*suzi*) on the other.

The research moves from a lexical analysis in a diachronic perspective, ranging from the beginning to the end of the Qing era (1644-1911), to a comparison with similar compilations, such as *Hengyan Lu* [*Enduring Sayings*] by Qian Daxin (1805), *Zhengsu Wen* [*Rectification of popular words*] by Hao Yixing (1813), etc. The adopted methodology includes the consultation of different corpora, such as CCG (China Comprehensive Gazetteers), in order to reach the topolectal terminology in material of different nature. While in the onomasiologic structure of the lemmas of its *juan*, YyKql is ordered basically on the *Pingshui* rhyming scheme and on ancient Chinese tones, recalling a rhyme dictionary; *Yueyan*, on the other hand, represents a composite work made up of a first *juan* of variagated linguistic material (sayings, riddles, songs and rhymes, suffixes), a second *juan* divided into 24 subject categories following the traditional order of classified dictionaries (*leishu*), a third and last *juan* with sound (phonetic variations from a diatopic point of view, polyphonic characters, rhymes, etc.) as pivot. Ideologically, *Yueyan* exceeds the concept of classified dictionary that characterized most of the previous dialect lexicography compilations, especially for a distribution into categories defined from a more linguistic-oriented perception more than a semantic order. It represents a more complete work from the perspective of contemporary lexicographer.

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We consider this research as a contribution to a clearer definition of linguistic features of the Chinese language, embodied in the awareness we find in paratextual materials, such as in *Lun yasuzi* [*Discussion on elegant and vulgar characters*] (*Yueyan*, third *juan*), and to a broader conception of transmission of the linguistic material of a specific variety.

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