

Dialect: 上海话

Interviewee: Josh Feng (鳳維墨德), student at Yale

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Length: 53 minutes

Overview:

Shanghainese is a dialect of Wu, and is classified as a part of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Shanghainese is spoken in the central districts of Shanghai and in the surrounding region. There are currently nearly 14 million speakers of Shanghainese.

At first, Shanghai did not have its own dialect; it was not until 1850 when, thanks to rapid economic growth, that it was able to overtake the previous Suzhou dialect. Its use had grown sustainably until about 1949 when the People's Republic of China was formed.

Soon after the formation of the PRC, Mandarin was set as the national language for all of China. Several factors can be attributed to its decline since then. Economic reforms in the late 1970s brought in droves of migrant workers who tended to speak Mandarin most of the time, due to its standard nature and acceptance. Alongside the migrant workers, however, there was still a sort of prestige to being able to speak and understand Shanghainese, and even through the 90s it was common to have local radio and TV broadcasts to be in Shanghainese.

Linguistic Features:

Six Features:

1. Pronouns

First, I wanted to investigate the role of pronouns in Shanghainese and how they differ from words like 我, 你, or 它 in Standard Chinese. I found that 我 is used, but is pronounced as /ŋu/. "We" is said as 阿拉, pronounced as /aʔ.la/. "He" and "she" is said as 渠, pronounced as /fi/. Finally, "they" is said as 渠拉, pronounced as /fi.la/.

2. Voiced/Voiceless

Next, I wanted to understand the use of voiced and voiceless sounds in Shanghainese. Although Josh wasn't too sure on the differences between it and Standard Chinese, we ran through a few phrases to help us find the differences. Shanghainese has 8 voiced initials, while Standard Chinese has no voiced initial stops or affricates. Also of note, voiced stops are phonetically voiceless with slack voice phonation while in the stressed, word initial position.

3. Expressive Modifiers

The third feature I wanted to analyze was the use of expressive modifiers. Right away he told me that Shanghainese is much more expressive than Standard Chinese.

Expression comes not only by set expressive modifiers, but also by the use of slang/ crude words. These slang words set the context and provide a meaning behind what is being explicitly said, much in the use of certain characters and grammar in Classical Chinese.

4. Negative Words

The next feature I wanted to investigate was the use of negative words. There wasn't much for me to explore here; he said that the Standard Chinese use of 不 still applies in Shanghainese with the same grammatical construction, although the character is pronounced as /pə/.

5. Tone

I wanted to understand the use of tone in Shanghainese as compared to the system that is used in Standard Chinese. Shanghainese only uses two tones, High and Low. High tones are only found with voiced initials, while the Low tones are only found with voiceless initials. According to Josh, tone does change the meaning of the word via inflection, but there can also be some expressive meanings tied to the use of tone as well.

6. Measure Words

Lastly, I wanted to understand the use of measure words in Shanghainese. In Standard Chinese, different measure words must be used for different types of nouns. In Shanghainese, however, there are less rules because of the nature of Shanghainese. Being a more colloquial language, there are less rules and structure that apply. Measure words are generally absent from this dialect.

Comparisons to Standard Chinese:

There are two main linguistic differences between Shanghainese and Standard Chinese, listed below:

| | Shanghainese | Standard Chinese |
|------------------------|------------------|--|
| Tones | 2: High and Low | 5: High, Rising, Dipping, Falling, and Neutral |
| Voiced Initials | b d g ħ z v dʒ ʒ | None |

In addition, Shanghainese is very rich in vowels [i y ɪ ʏ eⁱ ø ε ə a ɑ ɔ ɤ^w o ʊ u] and consonants. The tonal system also varies significantly from Standard Chinese, with a system closer to that

which is found in Japanese. Compared to Standard Chinese, Shanghainese is also very expressive and has been described as fun and full of life.

Variations Within His Family:

Josh came to the United States with his mother in 2001. His mother and extended family mostly originated from the Shanghai area, and thus Shanghainese is the most prevalent within his family. He and his Grandfather try to talk in Shanghainese, but since Josh hasn't spent much extended time in Shanghai, he can only communicate in basic words and phrases. Josh noted that he had spent some time in Taiwan, so after coming back, he had tended to put Taiwanese into Standard Chinese while his Grandpa was putting Shanghainese into Standard Chinese. When his Grandpa was trying to speak Standard Chinese with other family members, they will mostly stick with one dialect per sentence, but they will switch dialects sentence by sentence, and this is when Josh felt left out of the conversation with his non-native knowledge of the dialect. Lastly, he noted that his cousins in Shanghai told him that the dialect has changed in some areas where older generations don't understand what the younger generations are saying, which can also happen quite a bit here in the US.

Observation and Discussion:

Throughout our conversation and through my research online, I came to understand not only the linguistic differences between Shanghainese and Standard Chinese, but also important cultural issues that surround the use of Shanghainese and other dialects. Much like the poster to the left exemplifies, it is incredibly important to preserve the local dialects so that we can preserve the culture and history of the people that call Shanghai their home.

上海话是海派文化的基石，它是一棵扎根于土地的大树。我们不要放弃大树而选择没有根的电线木头！朋友，为了上海的未来，为了伟大祖国文化的多样性繁荣，我们行动起来吧！

I ♥ SH I ♥ China

说上海话，传承海派文化
做真正有文化的上海人

上海话和普通话是共存共荣的

There are many further points where I would be interested to study Shanghainese, especially in the areas of education/passing down the dialect within the family, the use of Shanghainese in artistic works such as opera or film. Next time I am able to visit Shanghai, I will be sure to immerse myself in the dialect and maybe even pick up some phrases myself.

Works Cited

I Love Shanghai Poster. *Language Log*, Apr. 2009, languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/image001.jpg. Accessed 11 Dec. 2016.

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Interview Sheet

Six Features to Investigate

1. Pronouns:

- What pronouns do you commonly use when speaking this dialect?
 - a la, women: yi, ta: wu, wo: nong, ni
- How would you say the following? (I, you, he, she, it, my, we)
 - Yi, he she it

2. Voiced/Voiceless:

- Is this dialect generally more voiced or voiceless than 普通话?
 - Unsure
 - "Over there" vs.
- How would you say the following? (Eat dinner, arrive, our, eat, speak, shanghaiese)
 - Chi ya vay, hui (down) dao, our, olishan, che, gang, zang hei ay wu

3. Expressive Modifiers:

- Are there any specific modifiers that deviate from 普通话?
 - ah, yi, yay, halei, Slang/crude words add expression on their own accords, connections to classical Chinese
- Is there more expressed emotion that comes through based off of these modifiers?
 - Yeah

4. Negative Words:

- Does this dialect use the standard 不 for negation or are there other characters for negation?
 - Yes, it does. ve=bu, same grammatical construction is most common
- If not, what is used in their place?
 - N/A

5. Tone:

- Is the function of tone similar to that found in 普通话?

- Maybe, it does change the meaning of the word via inflection but there may be some expressive meanings (only two tones?)
- How would you say the following? (Fruit, big sea, small child)

6. Measure words:

- Are measure words such as 个, 只, or 辆 obligatory as they are in 普通话?
 - There may be less rules just because of how 上海话, it's less concise, more like "whatever"
- How would you say the following? (One dog, two cars, three books)
 - Unsure

Differences between Mandarin and this Dialect

- How often, in your experience, do people actively switch between 普通话 and 上海话 within the same sentence?
 - With his grandpa it was when he was trying to speak Putonghua, with other family members, they will mostly stick with one per sentence, but they will switch sentence by sentence, conversation shifts if he feels left out.
 - He put Taiwanese into Putonghua, his grandpa puts in Shanghainese into Putonghua.
- What percentage of people are able to understand both 普通话 and 上海话? Is there a geographic falloff?
 - Look up stats here. Based off of experience, Shanghaihua use is decreasing based off of worker influx
- Which is more expressive, in your opinion?
 - Shanghaihua - even if you don't speak it, you can see that there is more onomatopoeia

Variations of the Dialect used in the Speaker's Family

- Which languages/dialects are most common in your family?
 - 上海话 is primary, part of Wu dialect Nanxiao, Wuxi, Jiangsu
- Have the dialects varied while being passed down through the generations?

- Cousins said that young Shanghainese dialect changed that older people don't know them
- Has the location/place of residence altered the use of the dialect? Has being away from Shanghai facilitated a shift back to using 普通话?
- Speaks mostly Putonghua, Chinese diaspora makes it easier to use putonghua.

Culture Related to this Dialect

- How have different dialects clashed as you have visited different places?
 - Hong Kong has been the biggest clash, Taiwan has more of an accent issue, whereas Taiyu is a dialect
- What's the line between an accent and a dialect?
 - From a Chinese perspective, an accent is the same grammar and vocabulary with different inflection and tones, while the basis is the same, while a dialect has different grammar, sentence structure
- How important is it to preserve the different dialects found around China?
 - Quite important, politics, and tied to culture, standardization, celebrating the difference. In Taiwan they try to preserve Taiyu. European countries are smaller (close to difference in Europe)
- Is it more common for workers in restaurants or shopping centers in Shanghai to speak 普通话 or 上海话?
 - Last in Shanghai in May/June. A lot of Shanghainese to each other, depends on the neighborhood. Depends on migrant workers, they don't know how to speak it. Store could be run by someone from a different province
- Is there any political pressure to eliminate the use of 上海话?
 - Yeah, although he heard that there were Shanghainese on the official busses. Guandong is vocal with pushback. People are having to respond to pushback.