

【 Feature Article 】

Preface

Hsieh Feng-fan

Institute of Linguistics
National Tsing Hua University

Language contact is a recurring phenomenon in the history of human languages. Due to various socio-political factors, speakers of different languages and dialects interact with one another, eventually leading to a transfer of lexical items, linguistic features and/or grammatical structures. Consequently, language contact is admittedly one of the major factors in language change. In pre-modern East Asia, it is well-known that Sinitic languages have been the most influential source language, as far as lexical borrowing is concerned. There has been an enormous influx of Chinese loanwords into genetically unrelated neighboring non-Sinitic languages such as Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and so on. In these languages, Chinese loanwords with Sino-Xenic pronunciations formed a distinct lexical stratum in its own right, exhibiting distinct phonological patterning from the native words. As a matter of fact, Southern Sinitic languages (or, “Chinese dialects”) also absorbed a fair amount of loanwords from Mandarin Chinese (or, *Guanhua* 官話 “Speech of the officials”), resulting in the distinction between the Colloquial pronunciation versus the Literary pronunciation, especially in Southern Min Chinese. Beyond lexical borrowing, it is not surprising to see that these (South) East Asian languages share some areal features as well, just like the multiple click consonants in the phoneme inventories of both Khoisan and certain Southern Bantu languages in South Africa, or the retroflex consonants in Dravidian and Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the Indian subcontinent. Needless to say, areal features may only be shared in the scenario of long term, intensive language contact and the ongoing spread of Confucianism, to a great extent, facilitated even deeper language contact between Sinitic and non-Sinitic languages in (South) East Asia. That being said, it is somewhat unexpected to realize that there

seems no substantial areal influence on syntactic and/or phonological features in both Japan and Korean. For example, Lyman's Law is operative in the Sino-Japanese lexical stratum, but not vice versa, meaning that no known Chinese phonological rules have been introduced into Japanese. Likewise, there seems no trace of Sinitic grammatical structures found in Korean, even though the Syllable Contact Law, for example, plays an important role in Sino-Korean words as well. To this end, it is a bit puzzling why language contact has been limited to lexical borrowing in Northeast Asia.

Frederic Pain's article in this volume calls attention to the language contact beyond loanword adaptation in the Sprachbund of Mainland Southeastern Asia. In this area, tonogenesis, register system, and monosyllabicity are three of the most well-known areal features among the genetically unrelated languages in this Sprachbund. On the basis of Michel Ferlus's work on Chinese and Southeast Asian diachronic and areal linguistics, Pain argues that there is something more than "monosyllabization" in the Southbound language contact in question. Specifically, the distinction between "tense" and "lax" group of rimes in Middle Chinese, which is derived via an earlier contrast of monosyllable vs. sesquisyllable in Old Chinese, is assimilated into the phonological structures of non-Sinitic languages spoken in Giao Chỉ, a part of Nanyue (Nam Việt) and later the Jiaozhi commandery of West Han dynasty. As such, Giao Chỉ in turn becomes the diffusion center for some subsequent contact-induced sound changes all the way down to the Gulf of Siam. In sum, an understudied linguistic facet of the Sprachbund of Mainland Southeastern Asia is raised and explored in this article, filling a gap in the literature of the Sinicization process in Southeast Asia. It is equally remarkable that the transfer of "Type 1" syllable vs. "Type 2" syllable (whatever the exact phonetic realization they would be) from Sinitic languages to proto-Vietic languages is unprecedented in our current knowledge of language contact in the Sinosphere, which definitely merits more studies in the future.