



Some synchronic and diachronic views on the Cantonese lexical suprafixes

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Chinese dialect grammar in typological perspective

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“Cantonese”

Narrowly defined:

Language of 廣州 Canton / Kwongchow / Guangzhou
and the Cantonese enclaves elsewhere (de Sousa 2021)

← Nanning



modern **Standard Cantonese**

Six tonemes: 1 [1] 2 [1] 3 [ɿ]
 4 [ɿ] 5 [ɿ] 6 [ɿ]

詩 /si1/ [1] ‘poem’	史 /si2/ [1] ‘history’	試 /si3/ [ɿ] ‘try’
時 /si4/ [ɿ] ‘time’	市 /si5/ [ɿ] ‘city’	事 /si6/ [ɿ] ‘matter’
唧 /tsit1/ [1] ‘tickle’ (tsit7)	節 /tsit3/ [ɿ] ‘festival’ (tsit8)	截 /tsit6/ [ɿ] ‘sever’ (tsit9)

	*A	*B	*C	*D, L	*D, S
*vceless	1 1 (~ɿ)	2 1	3 ɿ	3(8) ɿ	1(7) 1
*voiced	4 ɿ	5 ɿ	6 ɿ		6(9) ɿ

Non-lexical suprafix

Not determined by the lexical identity of the host

e.g. high rising 1 PRV < tsɔ 1 PRV

sɛk 1 kʰøy 1

sɛk 1 tsɔ 1 kʰøy 1

錫咗佢

kiss PRV 3SG

‘(X) kissed s/he/it’

jɛu 1 pɔŋ 1 tsʰæŋ 1

jɛu 1 tsɔ 1 pɔŋ 1 tsʰæŋ 1 油咗搵牆

paint PRV CLF wall

‘(X) painted the wall’

Lexical suprafix

Determined lexically

e.g. high rising 1 on (typically) nouns

橙 tsʰaŋ 1 > 1 ‘orange’

梨 lei 1 > 1 ‘pear’

李 lei 1 > 1 ‘plum’

碌柚 lɔk 1 jɛu 1 > 1 ‘pomelo’

but

杏 hɛŋ 1 ‘apricot’

龍眼 lɔŋ 1 ŋan 1 ‘longan’

菠蘿 pɔ 1 lɔ 1 ‘pineapple’

榴槤 lɛu 1 lin 1 ‘durian’

Lexical suprafix: tone 2 [1]

high rising suprafix [1]: very common

e.g. 妹 *mui* 6 [1] > 2 [1] ‘younger sister’ (independent word)

我 個 妹
ŋɔ 5 *kɔ* 3 *mui* 6 > 2
1SG CLF y.sis
‘my younger sister’

姊 妹
tsi 2 *mui* 6 > 2
o.sis y.sis
‘sisters’

Lexical suprafix: tone 1 [˥]

high level suprafix [˥]: rarer

e.g. -妹 -mui 6 [˩] > 1 [˥] ‘girl’ (suffix)

坡妹

pɔ̌ 1 -mui 6 > 1

pore-girl

‘Singaporean girl’

聾妹

lɔŋ 4 -mui 6 > 1

deaf-girl

‘deaf girl’

妹仔 mui 6 > 1 -tsɛi 2

girl-DIM

‘female servant’

In citation tone:

bound root 妹 *mui 6* [˥] ‘younger sister’ (< Mid. Chi. 妹 *mwoj*^c)

妹 夫
mui 6 *fu 1*
y.sis husband
‘younger sister’s husband’

兄 弟 姊 妹
hɿŋ 1 *tei 6* *tsi 2* *mui 6*
o.bro *y.bro* *o.sis* *y.sis*
‘siblings’

Lexical suprafix: tone 2 [1]

any tone other than tone 1/7 [1] can take suprafix tone 2:

片 *p^hin* 3 ‘slice’ > *p^hin* 2 e.g. ‘film’, ‘slide’

房 *fəŋ* 4 ‘room’ > *fəŋ* 2 ‘room’

女 *nøy* 5 ‘female’ > *nøy* 2 ‘daughter’

袋 *təi* 6 ‘bag’ > *təi* 2 ‘bag’

鴨 *ap* 8 ‘duck’ > *ap* 2 ‘duck’

碟 *tip* 9 ‘plate’ > *tip* 2 ‘plate / disc’

Lexical suprafix: tone 1 [˥]

any(?) non-/1/ tone can become /1/(7):

己 *kei* 2 ‘self’ > 自己 *tsi* 6 *kei* 2 ~ 1 ‘self’

派 *p^hai* 3 ‘faction’ > *p^hai* 1 ‘faction’

欄 *lan* 4 ‘railing’ > *lan* 1 ‘(animal) pen’

尾 *mei* 5 ‘tail’ > *mei* 1 ‘last’

妹 *mui* 6 ‘y. sister’ > -*mui* 1 ‘girl’

(8 > 1?)

掠 *læk* 9 ‘rob’ > *læk* 7 ‘rob’

(e.g. 掠水 *læk* 7 *søy* 2
rob money)

suprafix tone 4 low falling [ɿ]: very limited

Some kin-like terms:

小妹妹	妹妹仔
siu 2 <u>mui 6 > 4</u> mui 6 > 2	<u>mui 6 > 4</u> mui 6 > 1 -tsei 2
small y.sis y.sis	y.sis y.sis-DIM
‘little girl’	‘(naïve) young lady’

(Kin-like nicknames of 80s/90s HK celebrities:)

梅姐	達哥	哥哥
mui 4 > 1 <u>-tse 2 > 4</u>	tat 6 <u>-kɔ 1 > 4</u>	<u>kɔ 1 > 4</u> kɔ 1
Mui -o.sis	Tat -o.bro	o.bro o.bro
‘Anita Mui’	‘Ng Man Tat’	‘Leslie Cheung’

Some place names:

南灣	銅鑼灣
nam 4 <u>wan 1 > 4</u>	t ^h ɔŋ 4 lɔ 4 <u>wan 1 (> 4)</u>
south bay	bronze gong bay
‘Praia Grande’ (Macau)	‘Causeway Bay’ (Hong Kong)

Differences amongst Cantonese varieties

City centre became Cantonese dominant in:

late 19th century: Hong Kong (Ball 1888)

1940s: Macau (Zhān Bóhuì 詹伯慧 et al. 2002: 201–202)

1940s: Nánning (Lì Míng huì 利明慧 2008)

	Nánning Canto.	Older Macau Canto.	Hong Kong Canto.
繩 'string'	<i>seŋ</i> ↓	<i>siŋ</i> ↓	<i>siŋ</i> 1
帽 'hat'	<i>mu</i> ↓	<i>mou</i> ↓	<i>mou</i> 1
鉗 'pliers'	<i>k^hem</i> ↓	<i>k^him</i> ↓	<i>k^him</i> 1
碟 'plate'	<i>tip</i> ↓	<i>tip</i> ↓	<i>tip</i> 1
枱 'table'	<i>t^hoi</i> ↓	<i>t^hoi</i> ↓ (> 1)	<i>t^hoi</i> 1
枱布 'table cloth'	<i>t^hoi</i> ↓ <i>pu</i> ↓	<i>t^hoi</i> ↓ <i>pou</i> ↓	<i>t^hoi</i> 1 <i>pou</i> ↓
澳門 'Macau'	<i>u</i> ↓ <i>mun</i> ↓	<i>ou</i> ↓ <i>mun</i> ↓ (> 1)	<i>ou</i> ↓ <i>mun</i> 1
乞兒 'beggar'	<i>het</i> ↓ <i>-ji</i> ↓	<i>het</i> ↓ <i>-ji</i> ↓ 乞兒 <i>het</i> ↓ <i>-ji</i> ↓ <i>-tsei</i> 1 乞兒仔	<i>het</i> ↓ <i>-ji</i> ↓

Differences amongst Cantonese varieties

Huáng Yì 黄翊 (2007: 90–91)

人们戏称，说 [ɔu³³ mun¹¹ jan¹¹] 者是真正的澳门人，说 [ɔu³³ mun³⁵ jan¹¹] 者是假冒的澳门人。不过这种差别正在缩小。

[In Macau Cantonese, in contrast to Hong Kong Cantonese:]

People joke that, one who says [ou¹ mun¹ jen¹] is a real Macau person, one who says [ou¹ mun¹ jen¹] is a fake Macau person. But this type of difference [the usage of suprafixes] is narrowing.

Lín Yì 林亦 & Qín Fèngyú 覃凤余 (2008: 90)

使用远无广州、香港白话那么普遍，基本可以穷尽。

[In Nanning Cantonese, the high rising suprafix:]

The usage is far less common than Canton and Hong Kong Cantonese, [examples] can basically be exhaustively listed.

Chén Xiǎojīn 陈晓锦 & Chén Tāo 陈滔 (2005: 26)

例子很少，在我们的词汇表里，我们一共记录了七个有变调的词。

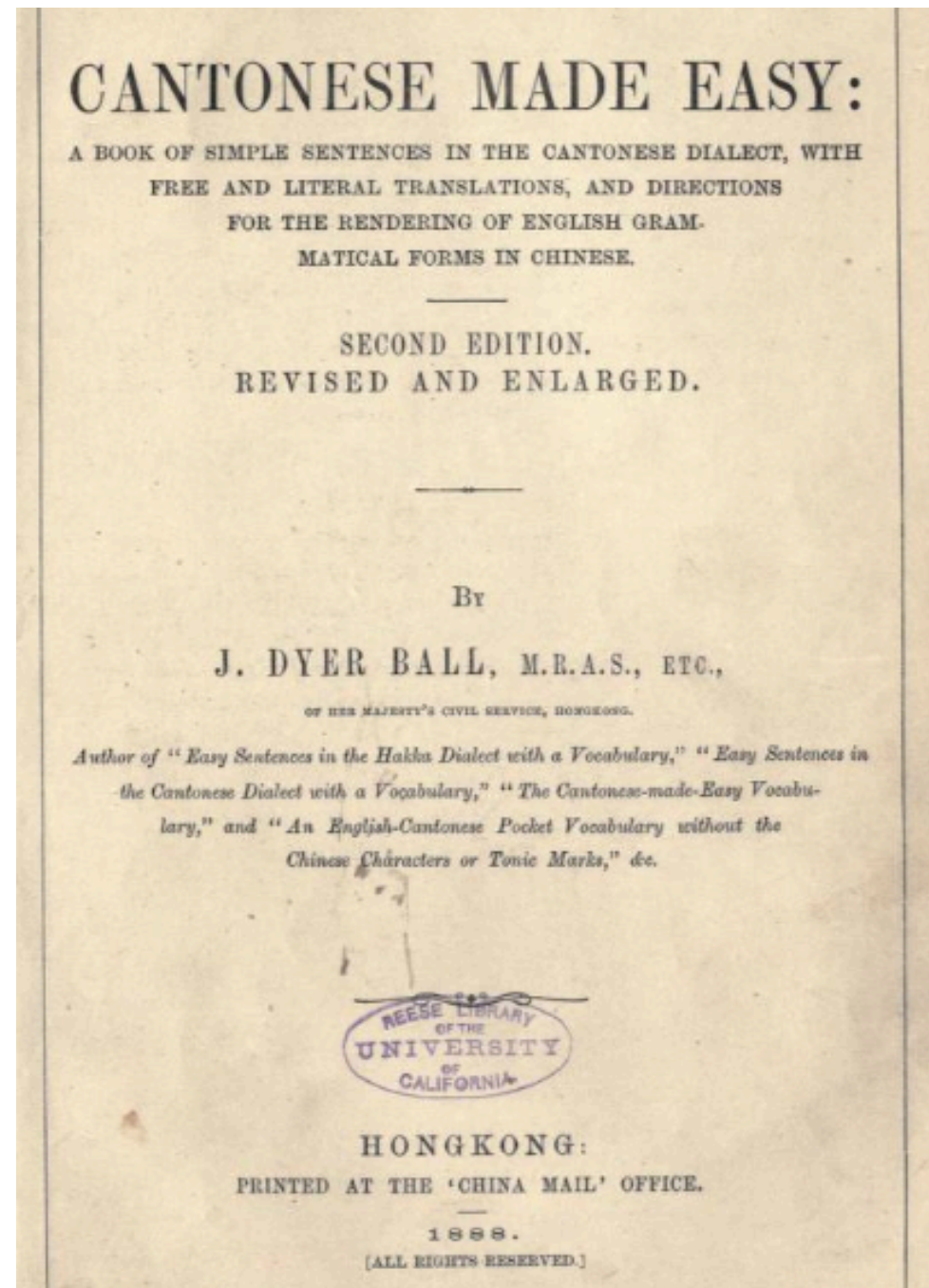
[In Beihai Cantonese, the high level and high rising suprafixes:]

There are very few examples, in our vocabulary list [2179 items], there are in total seven items with a suprafix.

Ball (1888)

<https://archive.org/details/cantoneseemadeeas00ballrich>

- Phrasebook/textbook plus grammar scatch
- Published in HK
Scenes depicted in the textbook section clearly HK
- “pure Cantonese”;
Sai Kwán wá [西關話 of Canton] as standard (:xv)



modern **Standard Cantonese**

	*A	*B	*C	*D, L	*D, S
*vceless	1 1 (~ʅ)	2 1	3 1	3(8) 1	1(7) 1
*voiced	4 ɹ	5 ɹ	6 ɹ	6(9) ɹ	

Suprafixes: /1/ [1 (~ ʅ)], /2/ [1]

Cantonese (Ball 1888)

	*A	*B	*C	*D, L	*D, S
*vceless	1 ʅ	2 1	3	3(8)	1(7)
*voiced	4	5	6	6(9)	

Suprafixes: /1*/ [1], /2*/ [ʅ]

Cantonese (Ball 1888)

Tone 1 Tone 1* Tone 4
ſi ʅ ſi ɿ ſi ʝ

8. 尸詩匙 _ſshí _oshí _ʑshi A corpse, a hymn, a spoon.

19. 貲資祠 _ſtsz _otsz _ʑt'z Wealth, postage,⁸ spring sacrifice.

tsz ʅ tsz ɿ tshz ʝ
Tone 1 Tone 1* Tone 4

Ball (1888): xxxiii

- citation tone 1 (e.g. 鷹 jin 1 [ʅ] > 1* [ɿ] 'eagle')
or tone 4 (e.g. 蠅 jin 4 [ʝ] > 1* [ɿ] 'fly')
(nowdays the suprafixed tone 1 can be from any non-1/7 citation tone)
- (nowadays very few people still make this 1 [ʅ] vs. 1* [ɿ] distinction)
- 24 lexical items with tone 1* in Ball (1888)
- (for items still used today) all cases of tone 1* is now tone 1

Cantonese (Ball 1888)

“Third Rising Tone” (here “Tone 2*”):

“is a longer tone than the other two Rising Tones, bann[ing] lower and ascending higher than either of them” (1888: xxxi)

(Also confirmed by Ch’an (1900), quoted by Kwok (2009).)

Cantonese (Ball 1888)

“Third Rising Tone” (here “Tone 2*”):

Tone 2	Tone 5	Tone 2*
fəŋ ˧	lɔŋ ˥	fəŋ ˧˥

3. 訪朗房	fəŋ ˧	˥lɔŋ	fəŋ ˧˥	To inquire, lustrous, a room.
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34. 挾養樣	yöŋ ˧	˥yöŋ	yöŋ ˧˥	To shake (as a cloth), to rear, pattern.
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jæŋ ˧	jæŋ ˥	jæŋ ˧˥
Tone 2	Tone 5	Tone 2*

Ball (1888): xxxvi–xxxvii

mostly citation tone 4 (e.g. 名 mɛŋ 4 [ɿ] > 2* [M] ‘name’)

or tone 6 (e.g. 廟 miu 6 [ɿ] > 2* [M] ‘temple’)

some tone 5 (e.g. 柿 tsʰɿ 5 [ɿ] > 2* [M] ‘persimmon’)

one case of tone 9 (賊 tsʰak 9 [ɿ] > 2* [M] ‘thief’)

so rare that Ball (1888) put in a footnote (: 31)

(nowdays the suprafixed tone 2 can be from any non-high citation tone)

Cantonese (Ball 1888)

(cases of lexical suprafix)

In 1888: Tone 2*

In 2023: Tone 2

lexical items:	15	53	11	(32)
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e.g.

1888: 'hat'	帽	mò 6 > 2*
2023: 'hat'	帽	mou 6 > 2

Cantonese (Ball 1888)

(cases of lexical suprafix)

In 1888: Tone 2* Tone 2*

In 2023: another tone Tone 2
 *(citation tone, or
 tone 1 in two case)*

lexical items: 15 53 11 (32)

e.g.

1888: 'bridge of nose' 鼻梁 pei 6 löng 2* (2023: pei6 löen 4)

1888: 'rhyme' 韻 wan 2* (2023: wen 5)

1888: 'ferry-boat' 橫水渡 wáng4shui2 tò 2* (2023: wan4søy2 tou 6)

tone 2* in any aspect/mood (i.e. lexical suprafix):

1888: verb 'sit' 坐 ts'o 5 > 2* (2023: ts^hɔ 5)

1888: adj. 'heavy' 重 ch'ung 5 > 2* (2023: ts^huŋ 5)

Cantonese (Ball 1888)

(cases of lexical suprafix)

In 1888:	Tone 2*	Tone 2*	Tone 2*	
In 2023:	another tone (<i>citation tone, or tone 1 in two case</i>)	Tone 2	(hard to tell, e.g. expression no longer used)	
lexical items:	15	53	11	(32)

e.g.

‘Nine cash.’ 九個錢 Kau2 ko3 ts’in2* (nine CLF cash) (1888:19)

Cantonese (Ball 1888)

(cases of lexical suprafix)

In 1888:	Tone 2*	Tone 2*	Tone 2*	citation tone
In 2023:	another tone (<i>citation tone, or tone 1 in two case</i>)	Tone 2	(hard to tell, e.g. expression no longer used)	Tone 2
lexical items:	15	53	11	(32)

e.g.

1888: 'bear'	熊人	hung4 yan 4	(2023: hʊŋ4 jən 2)
1888: 'mother'	老母	lò5 mò 5	(2023: lou5 mou 2)
1888: 'string'	繩	shing 4	(2023: sɪŋ 2)
1888: 'case'	案件	òn3 kín 6	(2023: ɔn3 kin 2)
1888: 'bangle'	鉅	ák 8	(2023: (ŋ)ak 2)
1888: 'gen. assistant'	打雜	tá2 tsáp 9	(2023: ta2 tsap2)

Cantonese (Ball 1888)

(cases of lexical suprafix)

In 1888:	Tone 2*	Tone 2*	Tone 2*	citation tone
In 2023:	another tone (<i>citation tone, or tone 1 in two case</i>)	Tone 2	(hard to tell, e.g. expression no longer used)	Tone 2
lexical items:	15	53	11	(32)

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16QtOMUk1gZcaogpX_Ed9m4v6nGPLc4dd1eQTCyBZD_0/edit

The absolute numbers do not mean much:

- Ball (1888) is a small data set
- 100% agreement amongst speakers rarely occurs

The Ball (1888) data, and the modern data from Macau/Nanning suggest that:
The use of lexical suprafix tone 2 in Hong Kong Cantonese has increased in the last 100 years or so.

(But the use of lexical suprafixes can revert.)

Lexical suprafix

Tone 2*: long

Diminutive suffix → lexical suprafix

e.g. Mài Yún 麦耘 (1995), Chen Zhongmin (1999), Zhōu Lièting 周烈婷 (2002), Kao Wan-yu 高婉瑜 (2007), Kwok Bit-chee 郭必之 (2016)

e.g.:

host^{Tone X} -DIM^{Tone Y}

→ host^{Tone X} -~~DIM~~^{Tone Y} → host^{Tone XY}

(→ host^{Tone Y (or Z)})

diminutive meaning may be extended, and lost, along the way

https://t.ly/QhD_



Diminutives / diminutive-like suffixes in Yuè dialects

Kao Wan-yu 高婉瑜 (2007), Kwok Bit-chee 郭必之 (2016)

-子 MC *-tsi^B* ('child')

-仔 MC *-tsVj^B* ('child')

-兒 MC *-nye^A* ('male child', later 'child')

-子 *-tsi^B* no obvious geographical pattern

-仔 *-tsVj^B* newer Cantonese / eastern form

(due to Cantonese, found to some degree throughout Yuè / Pínghuà)

-兒 *-nye^A* older form, common in the west

-仔 $-tsVj^B$ ('child')

Cantonese 仔 $tsei$ 1

In isolation: 'son'

As a suffix: all-purpose diminutive suffix

雀 $tsæk$ 1 > 1 'bird' > 雀仔 $tsæk$ 1 - $tsei$ 1 'little bird'

被 p^hei 1 'quilt' > 被仔 p^hei 1 - $tsei$ 1 'little quilt'

-兒 *-nye*^A ('male child' > 'child')

Cantonese

Noun root 兒 *ji* ↓ (Lower tone A),

e.g. 兒童 *ji* ↓ *t^hɔŋ* ↓ 'child' (literary expression)

As a suffix (in high level suprafix *ji*⁵⁵) only in fossilised forms

乞兒 *hət* ↓ *-ji* ↓ > ↓ (beg-DIM) 'beggar'

捉兒人 *tsək* ↓ *-ji* ↓ > ↓ *jən* ↓ > ↓ (catch-DIM person) 'hide and seek'

貓兒 *mau* ↓ *-ji* ↓ > ↓ (cat-DIM) 'kitten'

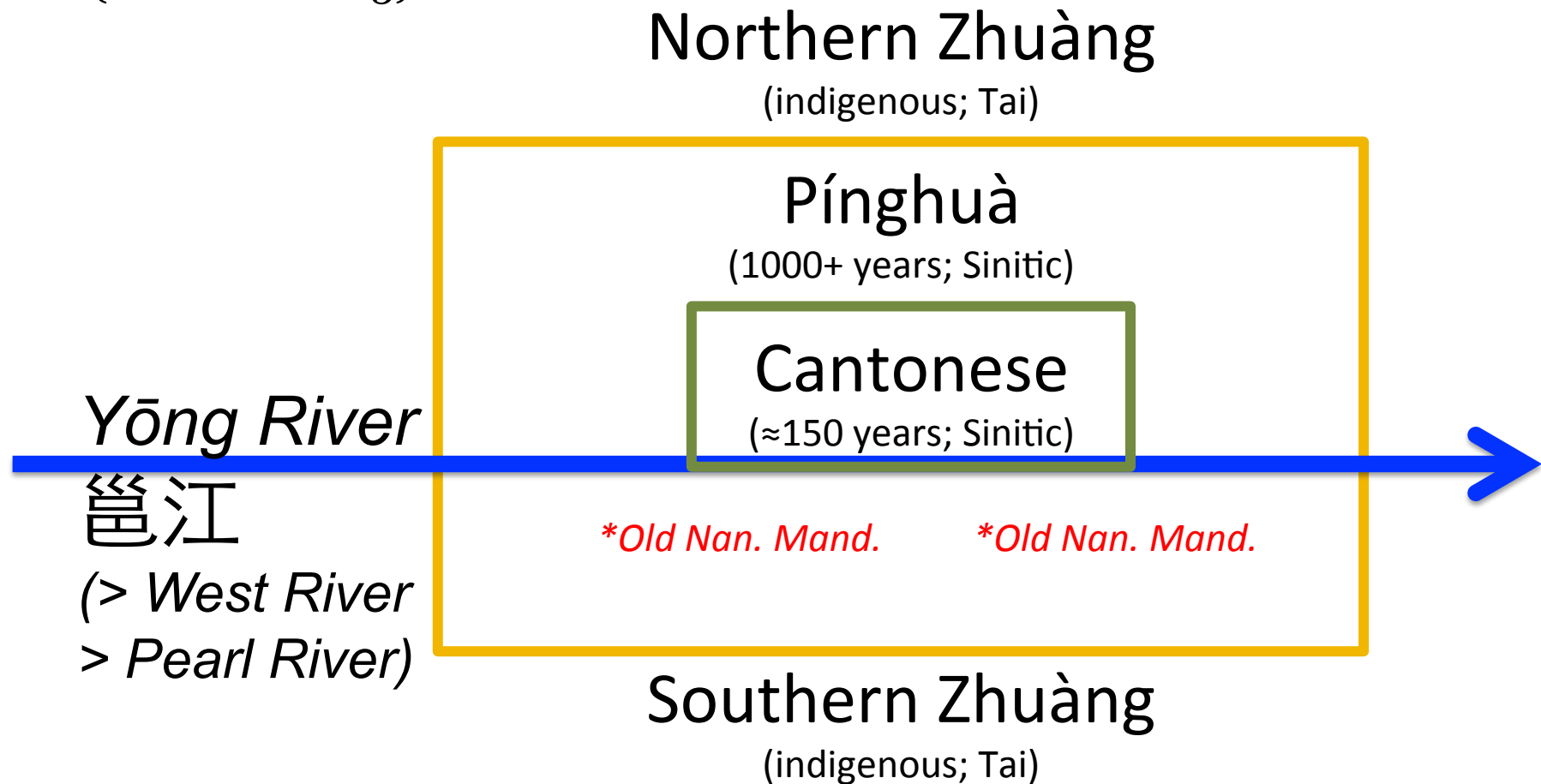
(c.f. nursery rhyme: 排排坐，食粉粿，貓兒擔凳畀姑婆坐，坐爛個屁股唔好賴我

c.f. idiom: 老狗嫩貓兒，食死有人知)

-nye Very common in western Yuè and Pínghuà

In 南寧 Nánning, schematically

(de Sousa 2015):



(*Old Nánning Mandarin 邕州官話 (less than 500 years), used to dominate the city centre but now moribund there)

Nánníng Cantonese (Lín Yì 林亦 & Qín Fèngyú 覃凤余 2008: 14)

6 tonemes: / 1 // 1 // 1 // 1 // 1 //

	*A	*B	*C	*D, L	*D, S
*voiceless	1	1	1	1	1
*voiced	1	1	1	1	1

Nánníng Wèizǐlù Pínghuà

7 tonemes: / 1 // 1 // 1 // 1 // 1 // 1 //

		*A	*B	*C	*D
*voiceless	+ asp			1	
	– asp	1	1	1	1
*voiced	*son				1
	*obs	1	1	1	1

(Irregular D: 1)

Old Nánníng Mandarin

4 tonemes: / 1 // 1 // 1 // 1 //

	*A	*B	*C	*D
*voiceless	1	1	1	1
*voiced	1	1	1	1

(Irregular D: 1, 1)

Nánning Pínghuà

Diminutives:

兒 -*ni* ↓

兒 -*ni* ↓ > 丫

仔 -*tsai* † (< newer Cantonese loan)

Not widely used

the suffix used is lexically determined

(one could always use an adjective 細 *tei* 'small' instead)

Nánning Pínghuà

e.g.:

	兒 -ni ↓	兒 -ni ↓ > ʔ	仔 -tsai ↓
雞 kei ʔ 'fowl'	✓		✓
狗 keu ↓ 'dog'	✓	(✓)	(✓)
羊 jɛŋ ↓ 'goat'	✓		
豬 tʃai ʔ 'pig'			✓
車 tʃʰɛ ʔ 'car'	✓	✓	✓
刀 tau ʔ 'knife'	✓		✓
燈 tɛŋ ʔ 'lamp'		✓	✓
屋 ʊk↓ 'house'		✓	
鑊 tʃʰɛŋ ʔ 'wok'		✓	
碗 un↓ 'bowl'			✓

Nánning Pínghuà

Suprafixes: infrequent

high falling ʔ, mostly in the diminutive suffix 兒 -ni ʔ > ʔ

Cantonese-like examples (Cantonese has 1 suprafix for these):

文 *mən* ʔ > ʔ ‘Yuán’, 米 *mɛi* ʔ > ʔ ‘metre’, 荷蘭 *hə ʔ lan* ʔ > ʔ ‘Holland’

Other examples:

歌詞 *ka* ʔ *tʃi* ʔ > ʔ ‘love song lyrics’ (vs. 歌詞 *kə* ʔ *tʃi* ʔ ‘song lyrics’)

(*ka* ʔ is a genre of songs)

大娘 *tai* ʔ -*nɛŋ* ʔ > ʔ (big-lady) ‘paternal grandfather’s senior wife’

細娘 *ɬɛi* ʔ -*nɛŋ* ʔ > ʔ (small-lady) ‘paternal grandfather’s junior wife’

(vs. 阿娘 *a* ʔ -*nɛŋ* ʔ (NAME-lady) ‘paternal grandmother’)

老娘 *lau* ʔ -*nɛŋ* ʔ > ʔ (old-lady) ‘mother’

Nánníng Pínghuà

Non-ʅ suprafixes:

姨娘 *hai ʅ -nɛŋ ʅ (> ʅ)* ‘mother’s younger sister’

雀 *tɕɛk ʅ > ʅ* ‘bird’

雀兒 *tɕɛk ʅ > ʅ -ni ʅ* ‘little bird’

(vs. 孔雀 *kʰuŋ ʅ tɕʰɛk ʅ* ‘peacock’

(Old Nánníng Mandarin 雀 *tsʰo ʅ* ‘bird’, Standard Mandarin 雀 *què*

Nánníng Cantonese 雀 *tɕʰæk ʅ*, Standard Cantonese 雀 *tsæk ʅ > ʅ*; MC *tsjak^D*))

爺爺 *jɛ ʅ jɛ ʅ > ʅ* ‘paternal grandfather’ (< Cantonese)

奶奶 *nai ʅ > ʅ nai ʅ > ʅ* ‘paternal grandmother’ (< Mandarin)

Cantonese:

non-lexical suprafixes

(Kwok Bit-chee 郭必之 2009)

lexical suprafixes

(Maurice Wong 1982; Alan Yu 2007)

(amongst many others)

Diminutives and suprafixes in Yuè in general:

Zhōu Lièting 周烈婷 (2002:154–171)

Kao Wan-yu 高婉瑜 (2007)

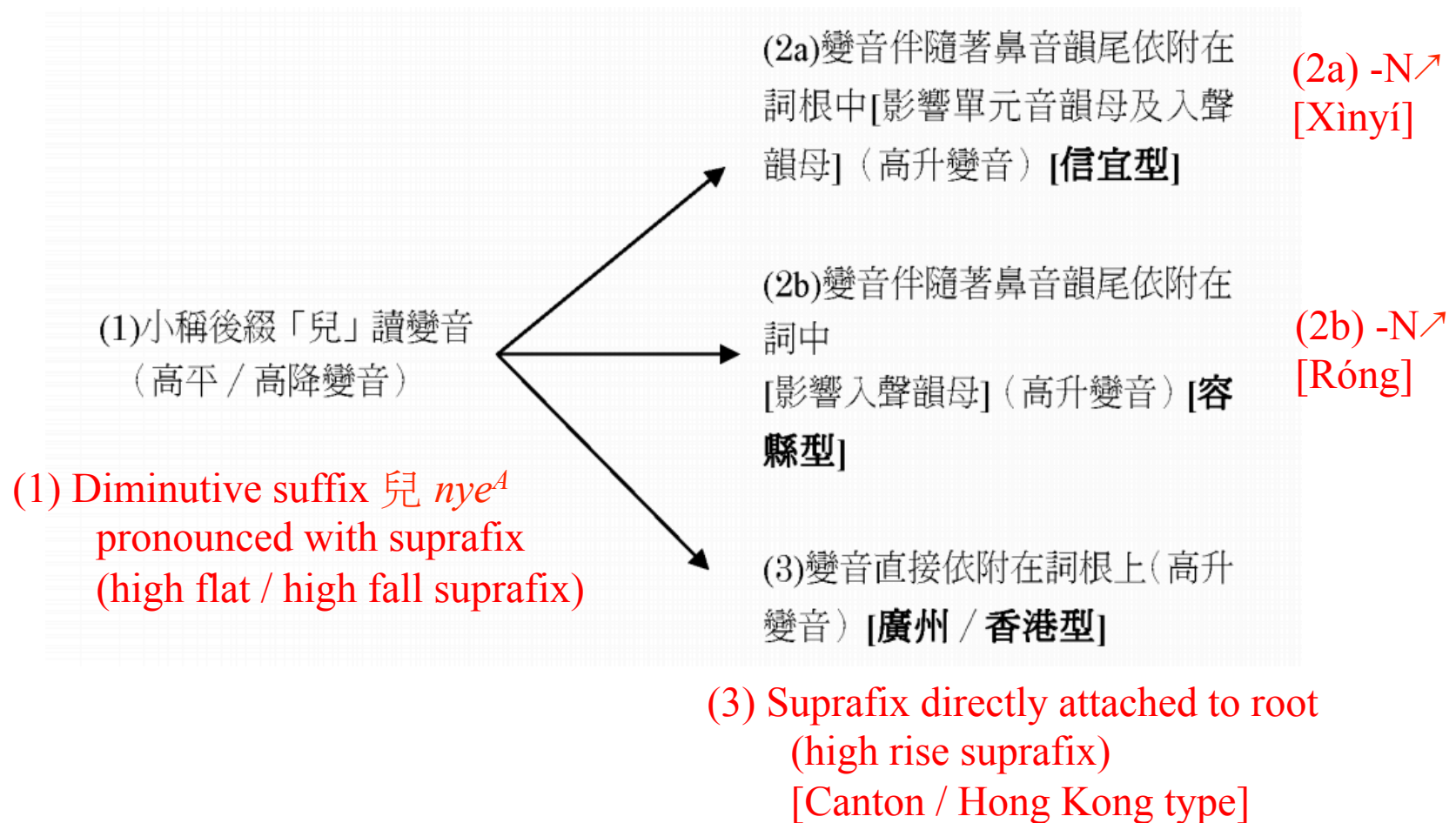
Chén Xiǎoyàn 陈小燕 (2007: 267–275)

Shào Huìjūn 邵慧君 & Gān Yū'ēn 甘于恩 (2007a,b)

Kwok Bit-chee 郭必之 (2016)

Nominal suprafix and diminutives

Kwok Bit-chee 郭必之 on Yuè dialects (2016: 306)



Nominal suprafix and diminutives

Looking at Pínghuà (and some western Yuè dialects):

(0) Diminutive suffix 兒 *nye^A*
in its original Lower tone A

(1) 小稱後綴「兒」讀變音
(高平 / 高降變音)

(1) Diminutive suffix 兒 *nye^A*
pronounced with suprafix
(high flat / high fall suprafix)

(2a) 變音伴隨著鼻音韻尾依附在
詞根中[影響單元音韻母及入聲
韻母] (高升變音) [信宜型]

(2b) 變音伴隨著鼻音韻尾依附在
詞中
[影響入聲韻母] (高升變音) [容
縣型]

(3) 變音直接依附在詞根上(高升
變音) [廣州 / 香港型]

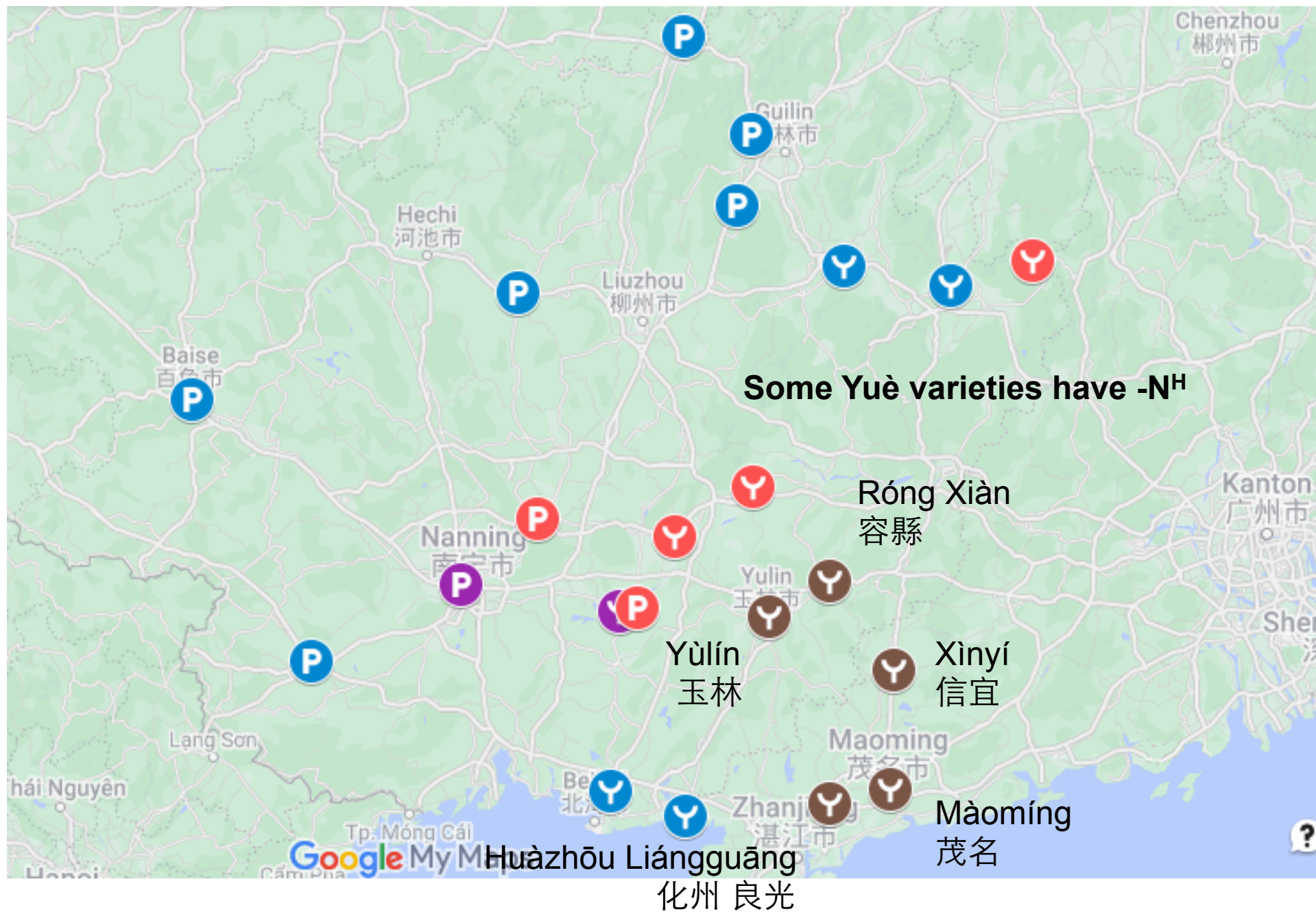
(3) Suprafix directly attached to root
(high rise suprafix)
[Canton / Hong Kong type]











-N^H (nasal suffix in high tone) > **-H**

Xìnyí 信宜 Yuè (Zhān Bóhuì 詹伯慧 et al. 2002: 204)
primarily (N)↗ [↗: rise to very high, often falsetto]

魚 *ny*¹³ ‘fish’ > *nyn*↗ ‘little fish’

亞叔 *a*³³ *sok*⁵⁵ (dad.y.bro) ‘uncle’ > *a*³³ *soŋ*↗ ‘little uncle’

狗 *keu*²⁴ ‘dog’ > *keu*↗ ‘little dog’

豬 *tʃy*⁵³ ‘pig’ (Shào Huìjūn 邵慧君 & Gān Yū’ēn 甘于恩 2007b)

豬 *tʃyn*↗ (pig\DIM) ‘little pig’

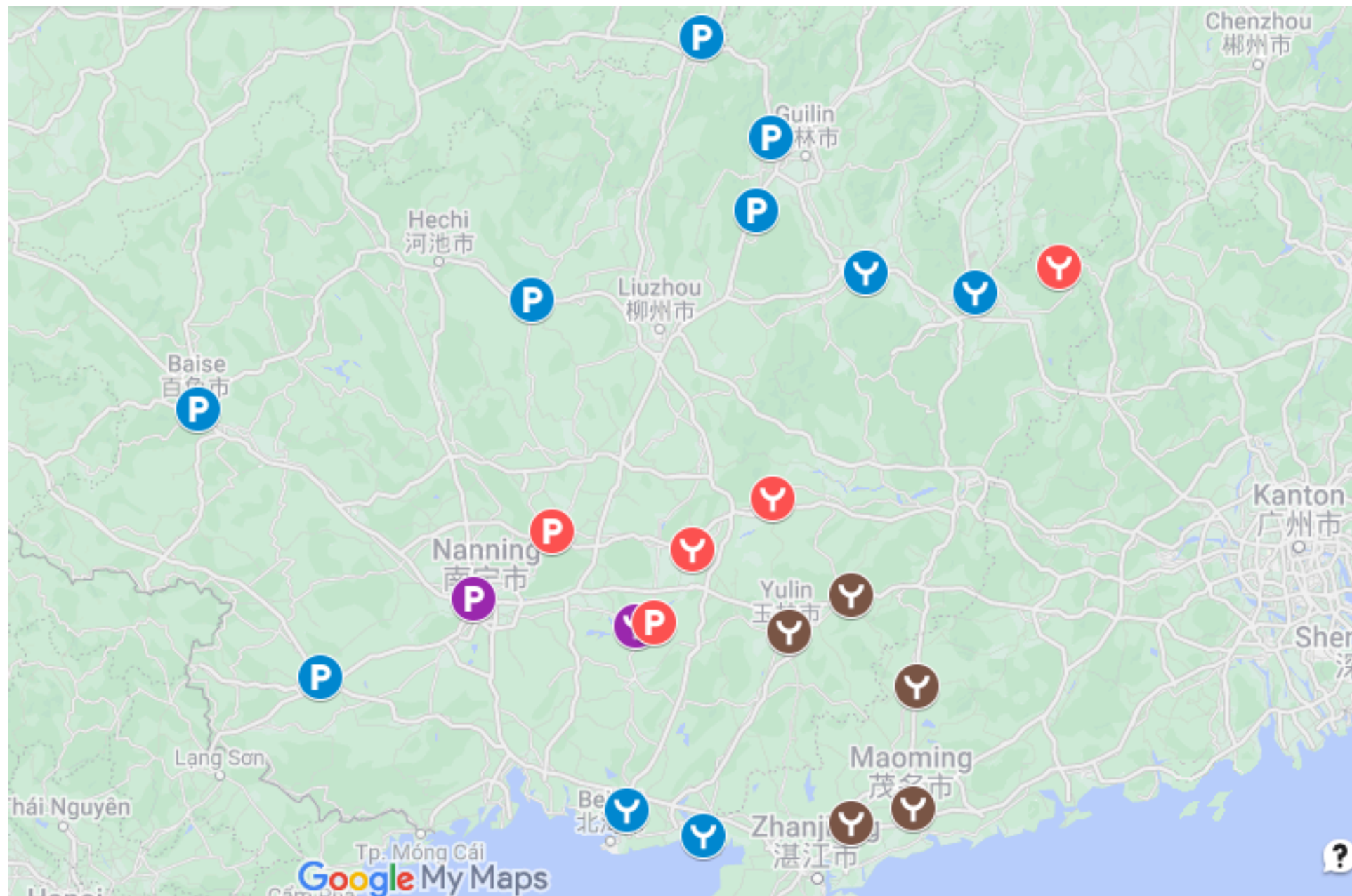
豬兒 *tʃy*⁵³-*ni*⁵³ (pig-DIM) ‘newborn piglet’

豬兒 *tʃy*⁵³-*nin*↗ (pig-DIM\DIM)

Róng County 容縣 Yuè (Zhōu Zǔyáo 周祖瑤 1987)

鋼筆 *koŋ*²² *pət*⁵ > *koŋ*²² *pen*³⁵ (steel pen) ‘fountain pen’

豬 *tsy*⁵⁵ ‘pig’ > *tsy*³⁵ ‘little pig’



So where did the Cantonese lexical suprafixes come from?



There is no written record (?) of what the lexical suprafixes were contractions of

兒 *nye*^A?

e.g. Mài Yún 麦耘 (1990), Zhōu Lièting 周烈婷 (2002: 154–171),
Chén Xiǎoyàn 陈小燕 (2007: 267–275) Kwok Bit-chee 郭必之
(2016)

1. 兒 *nye*^A diminutive is the source of the lexical suprafixes in western Yuè dialects
2. The (very few) fossilised cases of 兒 -jɿl in modern Cantonese

However,

1. There is no *a priori* reason why eastern Yuè dialects must have followed the same path as the western Yuè dialects
2. The range of nouns with a suprafix in Standard Cantonese does not overlap much with that with a -*nye* suffix in western Yuè dialects

(Shào Huìjūn 邵慧君 & Gān Yū'ēn 甘于恩 2007b)

仔 *tsVj^B*?

Kwok Bit-chee 郭必之 (2016): unlikely

Although the rising tone of Cantonese 仔 *tsei* 1 does coincide with the high rising suprafix in Cantonese, most Yuè dialects have 仔 *tsVj^B* in a rising tone, but their suprafixes are mostly high level or high falling.

Ball (1888):

仔 *tsei* 1 already a commonly used diminutive suffixes,
but 仔 *tsei* 1 did not have a suprafix, e.g.:

檯仔 *t'oi*2* *tsai*2 'little table' (: 41)

However,

There is no *a priori* reason why the development in Cantonese has to be the same as in other Yuè dialects

子 *tsi^B* diminutive?

e.g. Maurice Wong (1982), quoted by Alan Yu (2007: 202)

- (12) min²² tsi³⁵ ~ min³⁵ 'face, honour'
k^hei²¹ tsi³⁵ ~ k^hei³⁵ 'a chess piece'
jət² tsi³⁵ ~ jət³⁵ '(special) day'

However:

these loans from literary Chinese
(and there are very few such pairs)

Conclusion

There is no clear prove of where the Cantonese lexical suprafixes came from.



(Although the 兒 *-nye^H* hypothesis remain the most plausible.)

There has been increase in the use of the high rising lexical suprafix in Hong Kong Cantonese in the last 130 years.

Along the Pínghuà–Yuè dialect continuum:

- the dominant diminutives (from west to east) are:
兒 *nye^L* – 兒 *nye^H* (– *N^H*) – 仔 *tsVj^H*
- lexcial suprafixes are the most developed in Standard Cantonese in the east

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