

**Note:** This is an early version of slides for a talk given at the Royal Asiatic Society in Shanghai in 2014. Graphics have been limited to reduce upload size. Contents may vary from those of the actual talk in other minor ways as well.

# Fighting Language Loss in China —

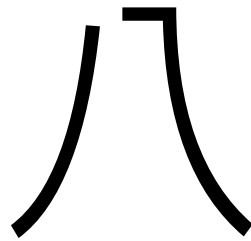
New Approaches to Dialect  
Preservation in the Modern Age

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# Historical Linguistics

- diachronic linguistics,  
comparative linguistics,  
dialectology
- compare features of existing dialects in order to  
determine correspondences

# Historical Correspondences



Shanghainese  
paʔ

Hakka  
p<sup>h</sup>at

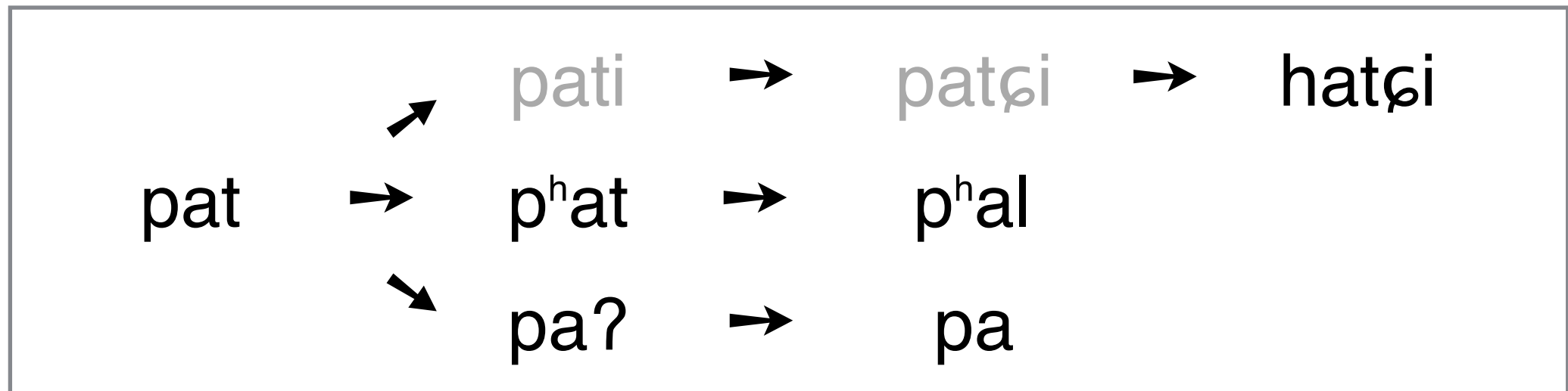
Mandarin  
pa

Cantonese  
pat

Korean  
p<sup>h</sup>al

Japanese  
hatɕi

# Historical Correspondences



Shanghainese  
pa?

Hakka  
p<sup>h</sup>at

Mandarin  
pa

Cantonese  
pat

Korean  
p<sup>h</sup>al

Japanese  
hatɕi

# Historical Linguistics

- looking at changes
  - where they come from
  - where they're going

# Why does language preservation matter?

- *Isn't it a good thing to all share a common language?*
- *What's the big deal if we lose a few dialects?*

# Why does language preservation matter?

- *Isn't it a good thing to all share a common language?*
  - having a lingua franca does not necessitate abandoning local languages

# Why does language preservation matter?

- *What's the big deal if we lose a few dialects?*
- Loss of language means:
  - a loss of culture
  - a loss of future scientific understanding



# Dialectal Music

- Kun Opera, Peking Opera
- Linguistic tone in music
  - Mandarin
  - Cantonese
  - Hakka mountain song

# Cantonese tone in Music

- *“Cantonese singers included a rising contour when singing words with rising tones and Cantonese listeners were attuned to this. “*
- *“Mandarin singers did not add in contour information and Mandarin listeners had difficulty recognizing the words out of context.”*

The Realization of Tone in Singing in Cantonese and Mandarin  
by Murray Henry Schellenberg

# Cantonese tone in Music

- *One may be purely aesthetic: given the uses and re-use of a limited set of melodies, the use of the linguistic tones of the lyrics provides a greater variety of melody. The other reason he suggests is expediency. Heavy reliance on linguistic tone limits the need for musical notation and rehearsal – singers may be relied upon to produce good theatre without needing a lot of outside rehearsal.*

The Realization of Tone in Singing in Cantonese and Mandarin  
by Murray Henry Schellenberg

# Hakka tone in Music

- Hakka tone as produced in spoken language is retained in song
- A song sung in one dialect will have a completely different melody if sung in another dialect

A topographic map of a coastal region, likely in the Philippines, showing a coastline on the left and a river flowing from the interior to the sea. The map is color-coded by elevation, with green for lower areas and brown for higher terrain. Two locations are labeled in white text: 'Siyeen Hakka' and 'Hoiliuk Hakka'. There are three red dots on the map, one near 'Siyeen Hakka', one near 'Hoiliuk Hakka', and one further south. A small blue lake is visible in the lower right.

Siyeen Hakka

Hoiliuk Hakka

# Hakka tone in Music

- 一日到暗想妹想情郎  
rhid ngid do am siong moi siong qin lang
- 毋識念起才過老爺娘  
m sii niang hi coi go lo ia ngiam

# Further cultural expressions

- “Li Bai sounds better in Cantonese”
  - Conservativeness of non-Mandarin dialects lends itself to earlier poetry
- Dialect as an admission ticket
  - Gaochun Old Street, Southern Jiangsu

- without the dialects, these previous expressions of culture will be lost or rendered meaningless



# The Linguistic Situation in China and Taiwan

# Taiwan

- Mandarin as the formal language
- Southern Min as the majority local language
- Hakka as dominant language in certain parts of Taiwan (Hsinchu, Zhubei, Hualien...)
- over a dozen Austronesian languages spoken by indigenous communities

# Taiwan

- back-and-forth attitudes regarding minority language education coming from the Ministry of Education

## DPP lawmakers riled by language funding cuts

By Rachel Lin and Jason Pan / Staff reporter, with staff writer

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The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government is under fire from Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) lawmakers for slashing the budget for mother tongue language learning by 42 percent.

The lawmakers said the cut amounted to "President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) regime driving Taiwanese languages out of the education system."

DPP Legislator Lin Chia-lung (林佳龍) on Wednesday said the Ministry of Education has cut the budget for programs for Hoklo (also known as Taiwanese), Hakka and Aboriginal languages for junior high and elementary schools.

Lin said the budget was reduced to NT\$52 million (US\$1.75 million) for this year, compared with more than NT\$70 million in last year's budget and more than NT\$90 million two years ago.

The budget for research, development and organizing the language proficiency certification program for Hoklo has been slashed from NT\$40 million to NT\$17 million, a reduction of 58 percent, Lin said.

As a result of the cutbacks, the number of students learning Hoklo, Hakka and Aboriginal languages is declining, with 110,000 fewer students last year compared to 2011, Lin said.

## Native languages to be compulsory

**DISSENTING VOICE:** Most parents' and teachers' groups welcomed the education ministry's announcement, but the Secondary and Elementary School Principals Association disagreed

By Rachel Lin and Jason Pan / Staff reporter, with staff writer

The Ministry of Education on Wednesday announced that courses in the nation's native languages would be compulsory from as early as 2016, news that was welcomed by most parent groups and teachers' organizations.

Minister of Education Chiang Wei-ling (蔣偉寧) said that the revised education curriculum for the 12-year compulsory national education program would include Taiwanese (also known as Hoklo), Hakka and Aboriginal languages.

Chiang said that students in junior-high school would have at least one class a week learning a native language, which will be implemented by making the optional courses compulsory.

The National Academy for Educational Research is responsible for revising and updating the school curriculum for the shift to the 12-year national education program starting next

# Taiwan

- Despite national policies one way or another, many younger speakers simply choosing not to speak the language of their parents' generation
- Those who do often have significant Mandarin influence on their Min or Hakka
  - gua -> ua
  - ngai -> nai

客語

三字部

【6劃】

99504 自助餐

(新實惠康樂隊)

客語

五字部

【6～14劃】

99502 有樂町人生

(新實惠康樂隊)

99500 妳敢函記得

(潘運俊)

99501 遠方的鼓聲

(潘運俊)



# China

- Around a dozen major Sinitic languages
- Countless languages spoken by ethnic minorities
- General country-wise policy of Mandarin-only education starting in 1992



# China

- Many parents choosing not to speak their local language to their children
- Some local efforts to combat this have come up in recent years
- Usage of local languages sometimes seen as exclusionary by migrants

## Shanghai kindergartens to promote local dialect

Updated: 2014-02-07 07:44

By Wang Hongyi in Shanghai (China Daily)

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Children in 20 kindergartens in Shanghai will be encouraged to speak their local dialect in a pilot program by the city's education authorities starting this year. The move represents a change in the policy that promoted the sole use of Putonghua, or standard Mandarin.

The move is part of the city's efforts to protect the dialect, which is at risk of extinction, especially among young people, according to the working plan for 2014 of the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission.

Protecting the dialect is one of the major tasks for the city's language authorities, along with promoting Putonghua and regulating the use of foreign languages, said Yuan Wen, deputy director of the commission.

# Shanghai pilot programme encouraging local dialect in kindergartens under fire

Classes will still be instructed in Putonghua, as required by Beijing

Amy Li  
chunxiao.li@scmp.com

PUBLISHED : Thursday, 23 January, 2014, 12:35pm

UPDATED : Tuesday, 28 January, 2014, 5:12pm



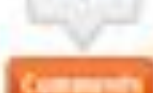
A student salutes during the weekly flag-raising ceremony at the East Experimental School in Shanghai. Kindergarten children will be encouraged to speak Shanghaiese instead of Putonghua between classes. Photo: Reuters

Children in 20 kindergartens in Shanghai will be encouraged to speak Shanghaiese instead of Putonghua as part of a pilot programme the city's education bureau launched this month, Chinese media reported.

While the experiment will see children speaking Shanghaiese during "game sessions" between classes, the classes will still be instructed in Putonghua as required by Beijing. It's not clear if and when more kindergartens or schools will be joining the programme.

While most local parents applauded this new move, which they believe will

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## MORE ON THIS STORY



Shanghaiese youth

# China

- National broadcasts must be in Mandarin as per State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television notice issued in January 2014
  - Local stations going national can mean the end of dialectal broadcasts



The New York Times

## Shanghai Laments Loss of TV Show in Local Dialect

By DIDI KIRSTEN TATLOW MAY 2, 2014 6:18 AM 14 Comments



iders to Shanghai in recent years has weakened the hold of the native dialect. Peter  
Hess — Getty Images

"Because DocuTV will soon start broadcasting on satellite, programs in local dialect can't go on and 'Shanghai Dialect Talk' will close. Thank you everyone for your support! I'm grateful!"

That [message](#) last Tuesday on the Sina Weibo account of [Gao Bowen](#) provoked an outcry among people in Shanghai. Mr. Gao is a

# China

- Education policies ultimately have the greatest impact on dialect use
  - From an early age, children are socialised in Mandarin
  - Dialects are rarely if ever used with peers
  - Higher ed & specialist topics are also often exclusively in Mandarin

# China

- younger people more comfortable using Mandarin than parent's language
- younger people are generally uncomfortable speaking other language to each other even when they're highly mutually intelligible dialects of the same language  
(e.g. capable Wuxi, Suzhou & Shanghai speakers still speak Mandarin when together)
- the language of the home is only used, if at all, when speaking to older relatives

# UNESCO Classification

Vulnerable



Definitely endangered



Severely endangered



Critically endangered



elderly

adults

children



- Many of China's languages are slowly disappearing
- Many people are simply unaware of the diversity being lost or what it means
  - each language is a part of one's identity
  - it's a loss of shared culture
  - it's a loss of history and heritage
  - it's a significant loss to science

# Preventing Language Loss

# Preventing Language Loss

- Efforts by Local Government:
  - Shanghainese in kindergartens
  - announcements in Shanghainese on busses, metro and at the airport

## 16号线开通乘客爆棚 采用3节编组首次用沪语报站

2013年12月30日09:05

东方早报

评论

A-

A+

- 采用3节编组被称最短地铁列车并首次用沪语报站
- 12号线运行首日发生故障

分享到微博



## Municipal buses to use Shanghai dialect

Updated: 2013-09-12 18:43

(chinadaily.com.cn)

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Announcements in the Shanghai dialect will be expanded to all buses in the municipality from October, according to Shanghai transportation management office, Shanghai Oriental News Radio reported.

Commuters will hear announcements about routes and stops in Mandarin, the Shanghai dialect and English on buses traveling in central urban areas but only Mandarin on buses serving the outskirts.

Residents welcomed the change and hoped the dialect will be used in more public services to highlight Shanghai and better protect and showcase the language and culture.

A pilot program commenced in December 2011 on buses on the No 785 route, which operates in the Pudong New Area. Seven bus routes have joined the program so far.

There is no plan to add the dialect to announcements on the metro, which currently includes Mandarin and English, according to the Shanghai subway authorities.





The story appears on  
**Page A4**  
February 18, 2014

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TENCENT WEIBO

HOME + METRO

## Airport gives Shanghai dialect a new voice

By Yang Jian | February 18, 2014, Tuesday | PRINT EDITION

ANNOUNCERS at Pudong International Airport has begun broadcasting greetings messages and some boarding information in the Shanghai dialect, the airport authority said yesterday.

The welcome announcements can be heard by all passengers in Terminals 1 and 2 after those delivered in Mandarin and English, while the local dialect will also be used for boarding information for flights between Shanghai and Hong Kong, it said.

The new system was introduced on a trial basis during the Spring Festival, but might become a regular feature if passengers are in favor of it, an official said.

Meanwhile, Shanghai Airlines said yesterday it too is trying to promote local culture by printing the lyrics to Shanghai-dialect folk songs on its meal boxes.

The new containers, which also offer tips on pronunciation, will be used on all flights from next month, it said.

China Eastern Airlines and Shanghai Airlines said they have also begun making broadcasts in the Shanghai dialect on selected flights into the city.

# Preventing Language Loss

- In Print
  - Shanghai Daily regularly does pieces on the language situation with Shanghainese
  - The paper also regularly has Shanghainese 'lessons' for foreigners

# Preventing Language Loss

- Academic outlets  
(e.g. PKUCN)
- Language “fan sites”  
(e.g. [sinolect.org](http://sinolect.org))
- Locally-focused forums  
(e.g. 宽带山)
- podcasts  
(e.g. 荔枝FM )



# Preventing Language Loss

- local broadcasts done in regional languages
  - radio
  - television
- popular dramas and sitcoms
- use of dialect in films

# Preventing Language Loss

- Meetups & Festivals
  - salons & language meetups
  - culture festivals
    - annual hakka fest in hsinchu
    - Wu culure festival in Wuxi



鄉音苑



## A story from Yúháng

Shā Shǒu Bèi 22F

Zhè jiāng, Hángzhōu Shì Yú Háng Qū  
Wú (Shanghai) - Tàihú Pàn Lín Shào Xiào Pàn

uploaded by joeyvaperbee



home dialect map volunteers blog support about upload

username

password

sign in

lost password

register

Li language: English

Select language family: Sinitic

### Sponsor Space!

- Connect to mainstream media
- Reach opinion leaders in every Chinese community
- Build your brand's reputation



play



stop

00:00/01:30

播放

我觉得小孩光过年味道好极了。

暂停

点击此处可编辑...

字幕

我觉得小时候过年味道挺好的。

设置

When I was a kid, I felt Spring Festival was fun.

播放

循环播放

就是早上头起来年初一还要穿新衣服。到外婆那里去。

点击此处可编辑...

就是早上起来。年初一，要穿新的衣服。到外婆家去。

I'd get up on the first day of lunar new year, wearing brand-new clothes and go to my g home.

播放

循环播放

# Phonemica

- Phonemica is a platform for crowdsourcing language documentation through storytelling
  - Stories give the project more general appeal
  - Stories ensure more natural language
  - Benefit of documenting personal histories similar to projects like StoryCorps













热河湖-流苏花田

# Our users

- Around 12,000 registered users contributing
- 500 stories submitted over the past year
- 320,000 unique visits over the past year
- Users actively providing more submissions



# Where we're headed

- Helping people set up local activities in their cities
- Expanding out of Sinitic and into more language families