Nominal-marking strategies in Xiang elicited narratives

Abstract

Previous work describes the nominal-marking processes of Xiang Chinese varieties, which in speech can vary markedly from published descriptions. Given this and pressures on speakers to use Putonghua, it is expected that (a) this variation will be primarily PTH-like, and (b) that strategies that can be connected to PTH will be less morphologically complex. Elicited narratives from 22 speakers were gathered across five locations. Findings indicate that strategies are largely location-specific and more (affix-stacking, process-stacking) or less (regularization, bi-morphemic forms) complex than expected. Rather than direct evidence of PTH influence, regionally common bi-morphemic forms are preferred, potentially through cross-dialectal influence.

Keywords: Xiang Chinese, morphology, narrative elicitation, nominalization, diminutives

Résumé

Les travaux antérieurs décrivent les processus de marquage nominal des variétés chinoises de Xiang, qui, à l'oral, peuvent considérablement différer des descriptions publiées. Compte tenu de cela et des pressions exercées sur les locuteurs pour utiliser le putonghua, on s'attend à ce que (a) cette variation soit principalement similaire au PTH, et (b) que les stratégies pouvant être reliées au PTH soient moins morphologiquement complexes. Des récits sollicités ont été recueillis auprès de 22 locuteurs de cinq endroits. Les résultats indiquent que les stratégies sont largement spécifiques à chaque endroit et plus (empilage d'affixes, empilage de processus) ou moins (régularisation, formes bi-morphémiques) complexes que prévu. Plutôt qu'une preuve directe de l'influence de PTH, les formes bi-morphémiques régionalement communes sont préférées, potentiellement grâce à une influence inter-dialectale.

Mots-clés: Chinois Xiang, morphologie, élicitation de récits, nominalisation, diminutifs

1. Introduction

This study seeks to explore the ways in which younger speakers use Xiang nominal marking strategies, through narrative elicitation tasks developed in Chafe (1980) and Erbaugh (2001, 2013). Previous work has illustrated the distinctive ways varieties of Xiang nominalize terms for children or small animals (Wu 2002, 2005; Luo 2006; Zhuang 2021), which are not uniform even from one variety to the next. While many varieties of Xiang are quite well-documented, most of the available descriptive materials were published more than twenty years ago and focus on elicitations from elderly, less mobile speakers. However, this glosses over emerging sources of potential change in the language, as well as performance as a key factor of language use. Like many other varieties of Sinitic (Gil 2022), most (if not all) speakers of Xiang are bilingual in Putonghua (PTH, Standard Mandarin), leading to intense, sustained language contact (Matthews 1996; Escure 1997: 140; Zhou 1998; Matthews 2010; Kurpaska 2010), a scenario which is predicted to give rise to novel structures, which may increase in morphological complexity (Dahl 2009). Contrary to expectations, despite supposed ongoing merge with Northern Sinitic varieties, it will be observed that some speakers do complexify their nominal-marking constructions, rather than simplify on an entirely PTH-like model; however, certain simplifying trends of ambiguous origin are increasingly common as well.

The present research focuses on lexical and morphological variation on terms for children within and across five Xiang varieties: Yueyang, Yiyang, Changsha, Shaoyang, and Hengyang, with data collected in the form of 22 narratives retelling the events of the Pear Story video (see Chafe 1980; Erbaugh 2001). The narratives are collected from speakers averaging 27 years of age, which is younger than would be considered for most dialectal research but is essential in exploring emerging changes, given that younger speakers are likely to be highly fluent in PTH

(Zhou 2012; Liang 2015). Descriptive data is gathered from six book-length descriptions on the varieties in question (Fang 1999; Cui 1998; Bao et al. 1999; Chu 1998; Li 1986; Peng 2005).

The following questions are raised: What patterns emerge for nominal-marking strategies in Xiang narrative elicitation? Do these differ from those strategies seen in published grammatical sketches, and if so, are they more or less complex? Can they be connected to PTH-like patterns? Results will be compared to methodologically similar work in Erbaugh (2001).

2. Background

Hunan is a linguistically diverse region of China, with at least six recognized varieties of Sinitic found in the province, namely Southwestern Mandarin, Gan, Kejia, Waxiang, Pinghua, and Xiang (Wu 2005: 375). All of these, whether directly or indirectly and to differing degrees, are also under the influence of Putonghua (Zhou 2012), the standard language of China. Northern or Mandarin influence on Xiang can be divided into that which stems from Putonghua (henceforth, PTH), and that which stems from regional varieties of northern Sinitic, such as Southwestern Mandarin (SWM), which borders Xiang varieties to the north and west.

Most authors classify Sinitic varieties as morphologically isolating/analytic (e,g. Bauer 1988; Bybee et al. 1994; Sagart 2004; Packard 2006; etc.), or as 'morphologically impoverished' (Feng et al. 2011). These conceptions have been shown to be somewhat misguided (Arcodia 2015, 2020; Chappell 2024), at least in their most extreme versions. While a general lack of inflectional morphology is apparent, it would be a mistake to claim that morphological processes are inactive in Sinitic languages, or that one cannot conduct analyses of their morphology (see e.g. work in Packard 2000). As pointed out by Arcodia (2015, 2020), it is possible that some of these assumptions stem from focus being often restricted to PTH (Standard Mandarin), whereas

rarer processes including morphological tone change, affix-stacking, and phonological erosion of previously free morphemes is more common in non-standard varieties. For instance, Li & Liu (2019) note that stacking of diminutive affixes is possible in Gan varieties; Wu (2005) and Chappell (2024) both point out that many varieties of Hunanese Sinitic (Xiang or otherwise) make use of non-concatenative morphology such as tone change to indicate certain inflectional categories (primarily pronominal number), which can also co-occur with affixal morphology. As will be seen in Section 5.4, Xiang varieties generally use affix stacking to mark terms for children, although reduplication can also sometimes serve this purpose.

2.1 Nominal-marking in PTH

In many varieties of Sinitic monosyllabic nominal roots cannot occur in isolation, and must be accompanied by different nominal affixes, thus allowing them to occupy a nominal syntactic slot (Li & Liu 2019). Some commonly encountered examples of these affixes in PTH include 子 *-zi* and 儿 *-er*, which have related, but distinct functions. For instance, the former attaches to nominal roots to create common nouns:

(1)	女子	男子	孩子
	nǚ-zi	*nán-zi*	*hái-zi*
	female-NMLZ	male-NMLZ	child-NMLZ
	‘woman’	‘man’	‘child’

This affix also forms nouns referring to common objects, such as 帽子 *mào-zi* [hat-NMLZ] ‘hat’, 车子 *chē-zi* [vehicle-NMLZ] ‘small vehicle, bicycle, car, etc.’. In some cases, there remains some indication of ‘smallness’, as the final example shows; this is most likely a fossilized remnant of the original diminutive function this affix had, given its origins from a full noun meaning ‘son’. The *-zi* suffix is therefore generally treated as an all-purpose nominalizer applying across a variety of noun types (Wiedenhof 2015), but rarely changing the meaning of words. It is unique

among the affixes here discussed in that it is the only one shared with Xiang varieties (see Section 4).

The *-er* suffix on the other hand still retains diminutive functions, albeit quite bleached of their semantic content.[1] It is often referred to as a diminutive marker, given its preference for nouns referring to small objects, or else used to convey a familiar or endearing tone; for instance:

(2)	女儿	男儿	孩儿
	nǚ-ér	*nán-ér*	*hái-ér*
	female-DIM	male-DIM	child-DIM
	'girl'	'real man'	'baby'

The *-zi* suffix in particular differs from more common lexical nominalizers in PTH and in languages generally in not changing the meaning of nouns. For example, the nominalizer 者 derives agentive nouns from verbs (lexical nominalization), and as an additional function allows the deverbal noun to then occupy a nominal syntactic slot (functional/syntactic nominalization); e.g. 作者 *zuò-zhě* [write-NMLZ] 'writer'. It appears, however, that *-zi* possesses only the second function, performing a grammatical well-formedness function but not contributing to the semantics. One can also note the fact that of the three affixes just discussed, only *-zi* loses its tone; indicating that it is even more grammaticalized than the preceding two affixes.

The *-er* suffix on the other hand differs from most diminutives in changing meaning irregularly and in being unable to attach productively to nominal roots. For diminutives in other languages, these often establish contrasts between larger and smaller instances of the same referent, and only as an extension also indicate the younger versions of such referents, or a sense of familiarity on the part of the speaker with the referent. One can consider contrasts such as Spanish *gato* 'cat' and *gatito* 'little cat, kitten', which establishes a contrast between a regular-sized and a smaller cat but does not necessarily refer to a 'kitten' (i.e. the cat can be fully grown but simply small).

[1] Note that forms like 儿子 'son' show that this form still retains some lexical value.

This sort of lexical change is not immediately obvious for PTH *-er*, however, as the examples in (2) suggest; it is unclear, for instance, whether 女儿 *nǚ-ér* can refer to a fully grown but comparatively small woman, or if 男儿 *nán-ér* can refer to a 'small man'. In fact, they cannot.

In addition to these affixes, there are other 'semantically-null' affixes such as 头 *-tou*, as well as root reduplication as a nominal-marking strategy with similar functions, including functional nominalization and diminutive marking, particularly with terms for family members, e.g. 叔叔 *shū-shu* 'uncle'. It is also possible, as Packard (2000: 246-9) notes, for complex words to be affixed or for NMLZ affixes to occur word internally, so long as a two morpheme word bearing the affix already exists, e.g. 手指头 *shǒu-zhǐ-tou* [hand-finger-NMLZ] 'finger', 棒子面 *bàng-zi-miàn* [cudgel-NMLZ-flour] 'cornmeal'.

Most Xiang varieties possess an analogous system of nominalizing affixes/processes, with the same all-purpose functional nominalizer 子 *-tsɿ* and an ambiguous diminutive/nominalizing suffix 崽 *-tsai* (Wu 2002, 2005). However, unlike PTH and most Northern Sinitic, all varieties lack *-er* but many have an additional affix 唧 *-tɕi* which serves a more traditionally diminutive function (Zhuang 2021). These are treated in more depth in Section 4.

2.2 The Pear Stories and narrative elicitation

The Pear Stories paradigm has been used to successfully elicit naturalistic speech in narrative form since its creation by Chafe in 1980, and is particularly effective for the exploration of lexico-morphological variation (Croft 2010), since, as Erbaugh (2001) puts it, "lexical variation is strongest in informal, connected speech". The paradigm has been used to conduct comparative research on a variety of Sinitic languages, focusing on features including discourse analysis and numeral classifier usage (Chui 1994; Christensen 1994, 2000; Erbaugh 1990, 2001, 2013; the

video can be found here: http://pearstories.org/). The purpose of the film is to, 'tap into universal experiences' (Erbaugh 2001), and regardless of whether it achieves this particular goal or not, the Pear Story allows for an efficient methodology for the analysis of lexical variation in natural language.

By requiring informants to watch and then recount the events of the video, Erbaugh (2001) collected 212 Sinitic narratives across 7 locations (including 30 speakers of Changsha Xiang: http://pearstories.org/changsha/changsha.htm), allowing for systematic comparison across the best known varieties of Sinitic. However, one of the major issues with Erbaugh's corpus is its low recording quality, in addition to the artificiality of the procedure given the presence of an interviewer. Despite this, we can see that the features explored in this study, can and have been elicited through the Pear Stories methodology (see Section 5.3).

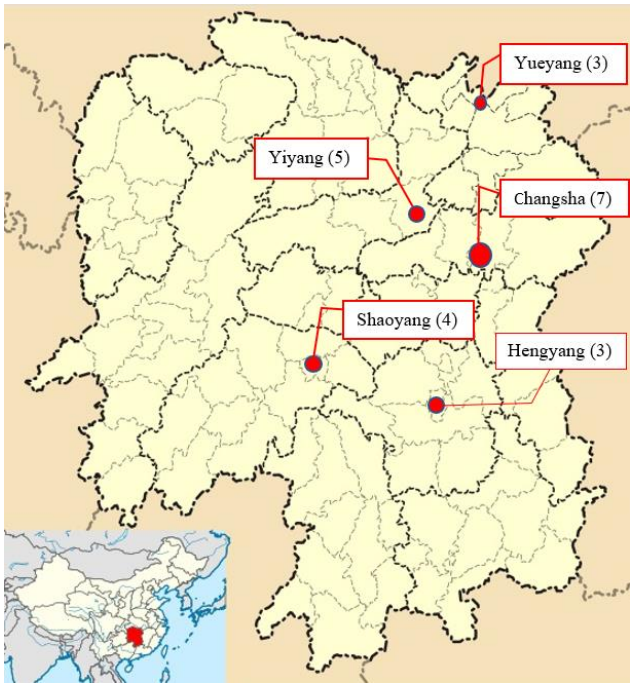
3. Methodology

The primary data was gathered from a small corpus of 47 recorded Xiang narratives gathered by the author, in which speakers from 16 locations across Hunan retell the events of the Pear Story video. Speakers were contacted through WeChat (Tencent Holdings Limited 2022) and word of mouth, and participation was based on self-professed ability to speak one of the Xiang varieties (following the group's definition in Bao 2017: 2-3). Each informant was sent a link to an online experiment set up using Gorilla (Anwyl-Irvine et al. 2019; gorilla.sc), where they first entered their demographic information, and then proceeded to watch the Pear Story video. The informant was then taken to another site (found here: https://addpipe.com/simple-recorderjs-demo/) where they were requested to record themselves retelling the events of the video in their native variety. This second site is an online microphone which outputs un-compressed audio files in WAV

format created by Matt Diamond (<https://github.com/mattdiamond/Recorderjs>). The recording was then returned to the researcher on WeChat. All narratives were transcribed and analyzed on Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2022).

3.1 Locations and speaker demographics

Of the 47 speakers in the original set of narratives, 22 (16 female) were analyzed representing 5 varieties: 岳阳 Yueyang (3), 益阳 Yiyang (5), 长沙 Changsha (7), 衡阳 Hengyang (3), and 邵阳 Shaoyang (4) (this information is summarized in Map 1).[2] These varieties were chosen based on three factors: (a) they are relatively better researched (with at least one or more grammars published on each), (b) they represent relatively wide geographical spacing across Hunan from north to south, and (c) they have the highest number of speakers per variety in the original sample (at least more than 3).



[2] Outline of Hunan: "Location Map of Hunan, China": https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location_map_China_Hunan_EN.svg
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Map 1. Locations and number of speakers for the five varieties analyzed

Each of the 22 narratives is coded with the abbreviation appropriate to the provenance of the speaker, plus their sequential number in the order they were recorded. The transcriptions themselves (found at the following DOI: <10.25442/hku.26156524>) are divided into 'phrases' roughly equating to speech between breaths, and when reference is made to one it will be marked with a capital 'P' in brackets next to the time (in seconds) at which an example can be found; therefore, 'CS5 [P11: 32.05]' refers to Changsha speaker number 5's 11th 'phrase' or breath group at 32.05 seconds into the recording.

All of the speakers are bilingual in PTH, with an average age of 27 years, and are highly educated (all have a bachelor's degree, and 10 have a master's degree or above). All speakers indicated native or near-native proficiency in their native dialect, minus two: HY1 and CS4, who indicate that they are 'able to speak' (能对话) or 'fluent' (流利), respectively.

Some speakers, in addition to being bilingual in PTH, are also able to speak other varieties of Sinitic. Speaker YY3, for instance, lists no less than 8 other varieties of Sinitic that she is familiar with (3 of which are Xiang, not including her native dialect). HY3 is also proficient in Cantonese, and YY4 is proficient in Yueyang and the 'Hubei dialect'. On the other hand, all speakers of SY and most CS speakers indicated that they were proficient in no varieties other than PTH and their native variety, or else did not specify which varieties they were proficient in. Places the speaker had lived were also taken into account. The most common places of residence (other than hometowns) include Hong Kong (and other Cantonese speaking areas like Guangzhou; n = 5), Changsha (n = 5), Wuhan (n = 3), and places outside China or no answer (n = 5).

Table 1. Places of residence

	Yueyang	Yiyang	Changsha	Shaoyang	Hengyang

Hong Kong, Guangzhou		YY1, YY2, YY3	CS9		HY3
Changsha		YY4	CS11	SY1, SY2	HY2
Wuhan			CS5*, CS8	SY3	
Chengdu	YuY2	YY5			
Shanghai			CS2		
Beijing					HY1
Outside China or Unknown	YuY1, YuY3		CS3, CS10	SY4	

*CS5 had also been residing in Hong Kong

All of these factors can have a bearing on idiolectal differences between speakers, but, as will be seen below, nominal-marking was remarkably consistent for each dialect location, despite the high degree of mobility of the participants and tended to follow the broad outline of descriptive accounts, summarized in the next section.

4. Descriptive data

This section introduces the nominalization strategies on the terms for 'boy' and 'girl' of the Yueyang, Yiyang, Changsha, Shaoyang, and Hengyang varieties, drawing data from published works: Fang (1999), Cui (1998), Bao et al. (1999), Chu (1998), Li (1986) and Peng (2005), respectively.

Table 2 summarizes data on citation forms for the five varieties surveyed.[3] The equivalent forms in PTH are also provided in IPA following Duanmu (2007). PTH items were chosen based on their appearance in the Modern Chinese Dictionary 现代汉语大词典 (*Xiandai Hanyu Da Cidian*, MCD 2003), excluding any items marked as 'antiquated' (旧称) or 'dialectal' (方言). Therefore, while the term 伢 'child' does occur in the dictionary, it is not included under PTH since it is

[3] Citation forms for Yueyang are particularly problematic and should be considered with caution. Owing perhaps to its high similarity with Southwestern Mandarin, the main source on the variety (Fang 1999) neglects to provide a full vocabulary list (only 'man', 'boy', and 'girl' coming from this source) and the vocabulary had to be supplemented with data from the 'Yueyang County Local Chronicle Compilation Committee' (1994), which includes data from a variety of dialects across Yueyang county.

also marked as ‘dialectal’. Under the heading ‘Gloss’ is also the lexical item in simplified Chinese characters, following the morphology of the most common PTH form; these characters do not necessarily correspond to the Xiang entries.

Table 2. Citation forms for ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ (PTH forms for reference)

Gloss	**Yueyang**	**Yiyang**	**Changsha**	**Hengyang**	**Shaoyang**	**PTH**
男孩（子）or（儿）‘boy’	*ŋa꜒-tsai* youth-DIM	*ŋa꜒-tɕie* youth-DIM	*ŋa꜒-tsɿ* youth-NMLZ *ŋa꜒-tsaiꜘ-tsɿ* youth-DIM-NMLZ	*naiꜗ-(tsaiꜗ)-tɕi* boy-NMLZ *kaiꜙ-(tsaiꜗ)-tɕi** child-NMLZ	*ŋa꜒-ŋa* youth-RED *ŋa꜒-tsɿ(-ka)* youth-NMLZ	*nanꜙ-xaiꜙ(-tsɿ)* or *(-ɔ)* male-child
女孩（子）or（儿）‘girl’	*meiꜗ-tsai* girl-DIM	*meiꜘ-tɕie* girl-DIM	*meiꜘ-tsɿ*** girl-NMLZ *meiꜘ-tsaiꜘ-tsɿ* girl-DIM-NMLZ	*meiꜘꜗ-(tsaiꜗ)-tɕi* girl-NMLZ	*meiꜙ-tsɿ(-ka)* girl-NMLZ	*nyꜘ-xaiꜙ(-tsɿ)* or *(-ɔ)* female-child

* Both sources also list *ŋa꜒-tsɿ* ‘boy’

**Changsha also has *ŋa꜒-meiꜘ-tsɿ* youth-girl-NMLZ ‘girl’

All varieties in the above table share a root 伢 *ŋa* ‘boy’, which is not found in PTH (‘dialectal’ in the MCD) but is quite common across the Yangtze belt, especially among Xiang and Gan varieties (Ni 2022). HY is unique here for having two additional roots for this item, namely 倷 *naiꜗ* and 阶 *kaiꜙ*, both meaning ‘child, boy’[4] and written using homophonous characters; HY is also listed as sharing the form *ŋa꜒-tsɿ*. There is more regularity for ‘girl’, where each variety has an equivalent of 妹 *mei* as the root; *mei* does occur in PTH, but with the meaning ‘younger sister’. Notice that no variety is described as using the PTH root 孩 *xai* in the colloquial vocabulary stratum.

By and large the most common nominalizer is the 子 *-tsɿ* affix shared with PTH. This observation is also born out by Wu (2002), who states that around 37% of Changsha common nouns take this affix. In terms of the above table, YuY, CS, and SY share the *-tsɿ* suffix, YuY

[4] Cao (2008: 40) list no less than 20 different ways to say ‘boy/child’ in Hunan, not all of them occurring in Xiang, divided among six roots.

and CS share a 崽 *-tsai* suffix, and YY and HY share a 唧 *-tɕie* or *-tɕi* suffix. SY is unique in having a reduplicated form and a /-ka/ 家 suffix not shared with the others (at least for these terms for children; YY has a form 男人家 *lãʌ-ninʌ-ka* [male-person-NMLZ] 'man'). The *-tsai* and *-tɕi* suffixes and the reduplicative form have both diminutive and nominalizing properties; they are nominalizing in the sense that they function to allow the root to occupy a nominal slot which it could not do in isolation (Li & Liu 2019), and they are diminutive in the sense that they attach or apply to nouns referring to small things (Wu 2002, 2005; Zhuang 2021), including small animals, small humans, seeds or small objects, small lengths of time, etc. (depending on the variety in question; see Wu 2002, 2005: 89). The *-tɕi* suffix is not restricted to occurring on nouns, appearing on adverbials, pronouns, and classifier phrases as well (e.g. Cui 1998: 231-33 for Yiyang).

It should also be mentioned that nominalizers occurring on nouns referring to children and those referring to inanimate objects (of any size) differ in terms of diversity. The latter are far more uniform in their nominalizations, where the *-tsɿ* suffix occurs without exception in all varieties. For instance, all speakers have a form 帽子 *mao-tsɿ* [hat-NMLZ] 'hat' and a form 梨子 *li-tsɿ* [pear-NMLZ] 'pear'[5] (two very common nouns in the Pear Stories); however, hypothetical forms 帽唧 **mao-tɕi* or 梨崽 **li-tsai* are absent. However, as can be observed in the data provided by Zhuang (2021), certain inanimate objects and animal terms in other varieties can possess quite complex forms, of uncertain glossing, e.g. 涟源 Lianyuan: 桌子崽崽唧 'little table' (no glossing or transcription provided in source).

Table 2 shows that CS, HY, and SY possess forms for 'boy' and 'girl' which are morphologically complex. Luo (2006: 105) additionally notes that YY and HY also have

[5] This applies to all speakers except YY2, who uses a mystery nominalizer: /mo-tə/ hat-NMLZ 'hat' and /li-tə/ pear-NMLZ 'pear'. The origin of this nominalizer is unknown.

nominal forms for small humans which are complex, e.g. YY 鬼崽子 *kuei˥˩-tsai˥˩-tsɿ* ‘little ghost (a term to scold children)’. What is unclear, however, is whether the middle element should be treated as a suffix or as a root meaning ‘child’.[6] It seems clear that *-tsai* does not function as a root in two-morpheme constructions, given forms like Guzhang (Waxiang) 崽崽 *tsa˨˧-tsa˧* ‘boy’ (Wu 2005: 90), for instance. In three-morpheme constructions, such as CS 伢崽子 *ŋa˨˧-tsai˥˩-tsɿ*, considering that 崽 *tsai˥˩* here can be tonally specified (unlike *-tsɿ* or *-tɕi*), it seems plausible that this represents a root in a compound structure: [‘youth’ + ‘child’ + NMLZ]. This particularly seems to be the case when *tsai* itself is doubled following the main root (which does not occur in the above table, but is found elsewhere in Xiang), e.g. Loudi 狗崽崽 *tɕiɤ˥˩-tse˥˩-tse* [dog + child + DIM] ‘puppy’, 鸡崽崽 *tɕi˦-tse˥˩-tse* [chicken + child + DIM] ‘chick’ (Zhuang 2021), where the second *-tsai* is toneless. This is also the approach taken by Peng (2005: 25), when dealing with complex constructions in HY, such as 倈(唧)崽唧 *lai˦(-tɕi) tsai˦-tɕi*, where the diminutive affix can optionally occur between the root and *-tsai*. While the above examples from Zhuang could potentially be treated as compounds to which a diminutive affix is attached, the Peng forms are more mysterious. It appears that, relative to *-tsɿ* and *-tɕi*, *-tsai* can still be recovered as a full noun and used in compound constructions. When dealing with three-morpheme constructions involving *-tsai*, the present piece will assume a [root + root + affix] compound structure, while in two-morpheme constructions, following Wu (2002, 2005), it will assume a [root + affix] structure.

5. Analysis of the narratives

[6] Forms like 伢妹子 *ŋa˨˧ mei˩˧-tsɿ* ‘girl’ (Bao et al. 1999: 188) give evidence that what we may have here is a sequence of [Adj N-NMLZ] rather than a morphologically complex [child-girl-NMLZ]. Regardless, however, these forms are not recoverable from the CS discourse data, all speakers preferring the simpler 伢子 *ŋa˨˧-tsɿ* and 妹子 *mei˩˧-tsɿ* (see Section 5).

Overall there were 208 items referring to 'children', with 177 (85%) of these referring to 'boy', divided among 8 roots (see Figure 1 below): three being from Xiang varieties (伢 [ŋa], 倻 [lai], 阶 [ka]), three being shared with PTH (孩 [xai], 生 [səŋ], 朋友 [pəŋ.jəu]), and two of unknown provenance restricted to two speakers ([ɛi-pe] 细□ (CS7); [ʃ̩-ka-ʃ̩] 细?阶?□ (SY2); both under 'Other' in Figure 1). Both 倻 [lai] and 阶 [ka] are restricted to Hengyang speakers. 生 [səŋ] 'being' and 朋友 [pəŋ.jəu] 'friend' are separated from 孩 [xaj] as they do not refer uniquely to 'boy' or 'child'.[7]

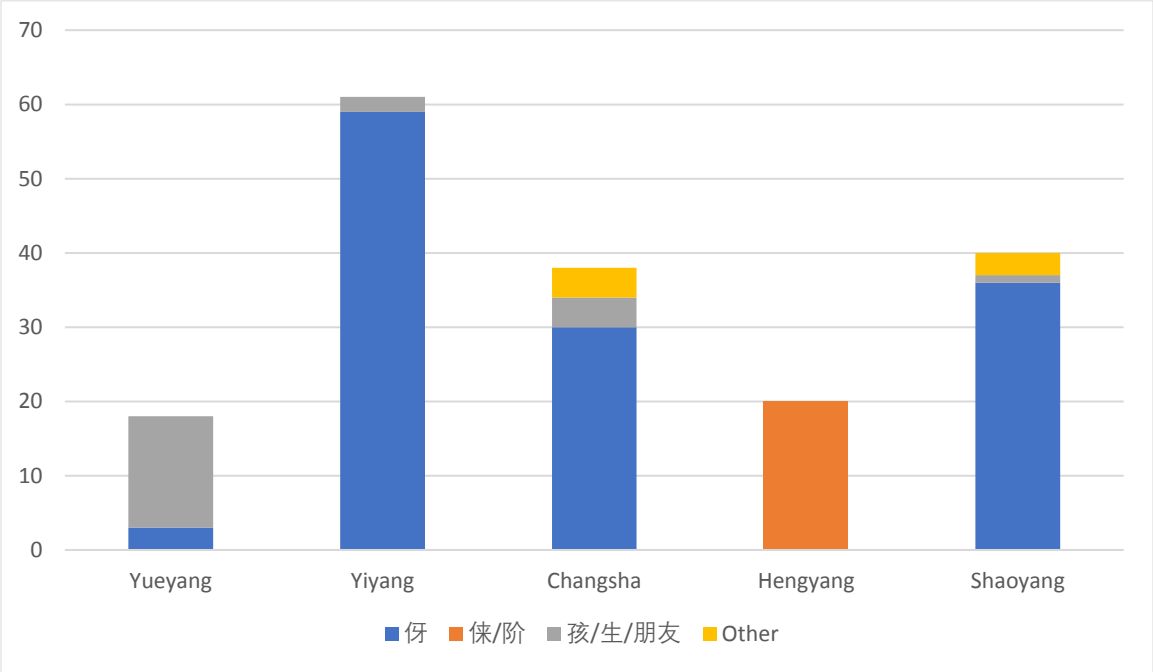

Figure 1. Roots for 'boy' by location

Figure (1) shows that while unexpected roots are relatively rare overall, they make up the majority of the YuY sample (15/18); each YuY speaker uses exclusively one root: [səŋ] for YuY1, [ŋa] for YuY2, and [xai] for YuY3. It should be noted that overall, only one speaker uses [səŋ] (YuY1; same for 'girl' below), and only two use [xai] (YuY3 and CS3).

[7] Numbers by speaker/locale and actual forms produced can be found in Tables 1-2 in the Appendix.

Of the 31 instances of items referring to ‘girl’, 25 use the Xiang-like root 妹 [mei], with the remaining items being divided among 孩 [xai] or 生 [səŋ] (shared with PTH; see Figure 2), as well as the alternative 女 [ny] ‘woman’ (under ‘Other’). Once again, a majority of the YuY tokens are PTH-like (either 孩 [xai] or 生 [səŋ]), albeit coming from only one speaker in this case.

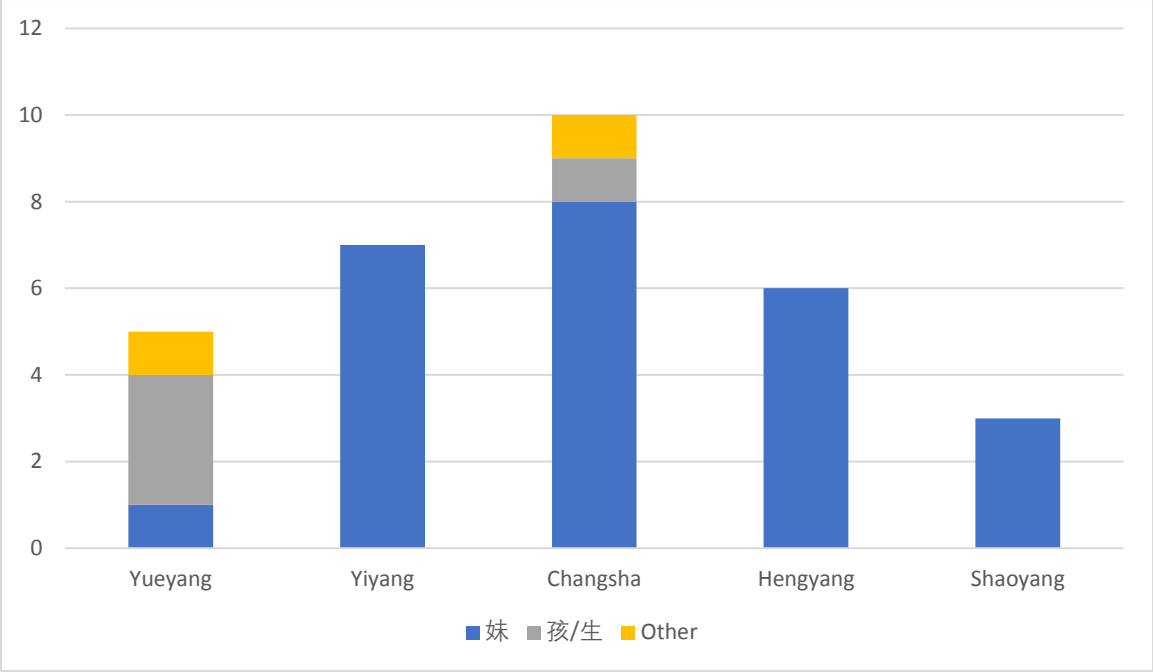

Figure 2. Roots for ‘girl' by location

Once again, we see speaker-specific lexical preferences: YuY1 prefers 生 [səŋ] across both referents, while CS3 prefers 孩 [xai]. Within the YuY sample, speakers have no common form, either for ‘boy’ or ‘girl’, with each speaker using a different root (except for YuY2 and YuY3 using 朋友 [pəŋ.jəu] to refer to the children in the latter half of the film); this can be compared with the consistency seen for the Hengyang speakers, with a similar sample size.

From a cursory examination of the above figures we can see a good deal of overlap with the roots listed in the grammars, with only about 17% of items (n = 35) unexpected. This general

trend is disrupted by the occasional presence of (1) the presence of roots shared with PTH[8] (n = 26), and by (2) the occasional presence of lexical items not referring to children or of unknown origin (n = 9).

Speakers often make different lexical choices based on the appearance of new referents in the film. YuY2, YuY3, and YY4 use the alternative term 小朋友 *xiǎo péngyǒu* 'child, (lit.) little friend' exclusively when referring to three children appearing in a later part of the film, and HY3 uses an alternative form 阶唧 [ke-tɕi] when referring to this novel referent. Other speakers use alternative terms interchangeably, such as CS3, SY1, SY3, and SY4. These appear to be stylistic choices for the sake of lexical variation.

Borrowing and interference seems plausible terms used by YuY3 and CS3, both of which are based on the PTH-like pattern 男孩 *nánhái*, a form which is not supposed to occur in these locations (Cao 2008: 40); for CS3 this is in apparent competition with forms with 伢 [ŋa]. An additional item which might be added here is the term 男生 used by YuY1 (also 'girl' below), which is likewise common in PTH.

Concerning the root for 'girl', every speaker (minus YuY1, YuY2, CS3, and CS6) uses a root [mei] 妹 for this item, with only two speakers (YuY1 and CS3) having PTH-like items here. Once again, CS3 has a borrowed form for this item, in the form of the PTH-like 女孩 *nǚhái*. Some speakers have alternative words referring to the same referent in the film, but not necessarily meaning 'girl' (YuY2 and CS6), e.g. 女的 [ny ti] 'woman, female'.

Each variety tends to prefer different nominalization strategies for the roots in question (some, in fact, are entirely relegated to one location), broadly in line with the literature. Six major patterns

[8] This does not mean that these roots are necessarily borrowed from PTH, just that they share the same lexical source and similar form. [xai] and [səŋ] are most likely borrowings or an instance of L2 interference, but [pəŋ.jəu] is less clearly so, especially given native forms for 'friend' being quite similar in YY and SY glossaries: *pənʌ.iəu*˥; *buŋʌ.iəu*˥ 'friend'. However, neither grammar lists this root as one of the terms for children.

emerge, each concentrated in particular locations: (1) affixation of the diminutive 唧 [-tɕie] or [-tɕi] (Yiyang); (2) affixation of 子 [-tsɿ] (Changsha); (3) addition of both 崽 [-tsai] and 唧 [-tɕi] (Hengyang); and (4) reduplication of the root with occasional addition of 子 [-tsɿ] (Shaoyang); (5) addition of both 子 [-tsɿ] and 家 [-ka] (Shaoyang); and (6) other patterns (Yueyang). There is some overlap; for instance, HY speakers also often make use of pattern (1).

The major differences between the two roots is that 'girl', possibly due to the smaller number of tokens (n = 31), has less diversity in terms of the processes observed; most importantly, there is only reduplication in SY for 'boy' and never for 'girl'. Results are summarized in Figure 3.[9]

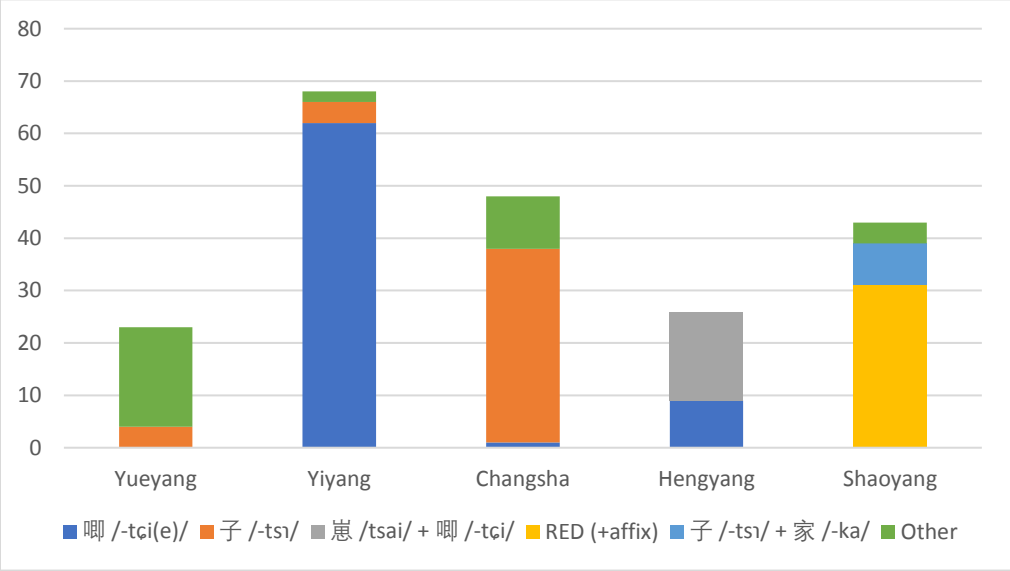

Figure 3. Nominalization processes on human terms ('boy', 'girl')

Divergence from expectations tends to be towards affixation with *-tsɿ*, and it should be noted that affixes exclusive to PTH, such as 儿 *-er*, are entirely lacking. This can be seen in the items for YuY2 (伢子 [ŋa-tsɿ], n = 3), YuY3 (妹子 [mei-tsɿ], n = 1), YY4 (伢子 [ŋa-tsɿ], n = 4), where we see overlap with the form identified for CS. There is also the isolated (n = 1) presence of a YY

[9] 'Other' refers to all processes occurring on all unexpected roots from Figures (1) and (2), e.g. PTH-like or unidentified forms.

form for CS3 (伢唧 [na-tɕie]), who then switches to 男孩 *nánhái* for the remainder of the narrative.

Complex forms are seen for speakers HY2, HY3, SY3, and SY4, whether that means employing affix-stacking two nominalizing suffixes (SY3, SY4; n = 8), adding a diminutive suffix to a compound (HY2, HY3; n = 17), or adding a suffix onto a reduplicated form (SY3; n = 12); each of these is illustrated in examples (1-3) below. HY1 differs from other HY speakers in representing an expected but less complex outcome: 侅唧 [lai-tɕi] [boy-NMLZ] (n = 5) and 妹唧 [mei-tɕi] [girl-NMLZ] (n = 2).

(1) SY4 [P6: 49.42]

一	只	妹子家
i	tsa	mei-tsɿ-ka
one	CL	girl-NMLZ-AFF
‘a girl’		

(2) HY2 [P6: 35.23]

细	阶崽唧
ɕi	ka-tsai-tɕi
small	boy-child[10]-DIM
‘small boy’	

(3) SY3 [P4: 17.50]

一	只	伢伢子
i	tsa	ŋa-ŋa-tsɿ
one	CL	boy-RED-NMLZ
‘a boy’		

(1) and (2) both represent an expected but more complex pattern, while (3) represents an unexpected and more complex pattern. It should be noted again that the pattern in (3) is not found for ‘girl’, most likely due to the small number of tokens. On the other hand, there is no evidence of the complex CS form 伢崽子 *ŋaˠ-tsaiꓤ-tsɿ* or 妹崽子 *meiꓶ-tsaiꓤ-tsɿ* and 伢妹子 *ŋaˠ-meiꓶ-tsɿ* listed in the sources, representing an expected but less complex outcome. Yueyang

[10] Arguably, as mentioned previously, for Hengyang this could also represent a case of affix doubling; regardless, the construction is still unaccounted for in the grammars in question.

speakers have no common pattern, with apparent borrowing of different PTH-like roots for YuY1 and YuY3, and do not show evidence of the form 伢崽 *ŋaʌ-tsai* or 妹崽 *meiɬ-tsai* listed in Fang (1999); when a Xiang-like root emerges, as it does for YuY2, it is on the CS *ŋa-tsʔ* pattern. The outcomes for all speakers in terms of morphological complexity and expectations from the literature are summarised in Table 3. 'More Complex' here means using forms with more than two morphemes, including affix-stacking such as in examples (1), compounding and affixation such as in example (2), and reduplication and affixation such as in example (3).

Table 3. Outcomes by speaker in terms of complexity/expectations in the literature

	More Complex	Less Complex	No Change or Ambiguous
Expected	HY2, HY3, SY4	CS1, CS2, CS4, CS5, CS7, HY1	YY1, YY2, YY3, YY5, SY1
Unexpected	SY3	YuY2, YY4, CS3	YuY1, YuY3, SY2, CS6

One will notice that YuY2 and YY4 are placed within the 'unexpected, but less complex' category, even though the two forms (that found in the literature and that produced by the speaker) are bi-morphemic. However, it is considered that the use of a regionally common form by way of CS *ŋa-tsʔ*, which, as we will see in the following section, is very much the preferred form in past work on CS.

5.3 Comparison with Erbaugh (2001)

If we compare Erbaugh's sample (34 speakers) with the present Changsha sample, we can see several key similarities. There are a total of 363 items referring to children in the corpus, divided among expected Xiang-like roots (86%) and unexpected PTH-like roots (14%). This last group comprises 50 instances of constructions with 孩 [xai], all of them [modifier + root] (e.g. [ny-xai]

female-child ‘girl’, etc.) which are not found in the native Changsha lexicon (Bao et al. 1999). Of the 265 instances of the root 伢 [ŋa], all of them occur in the two-morpheme format of 伢子 [ŋa-tsɿ], and of the 48 instances of the root 妹 [mei], all of them occur in the analogous 妹子 [mei-tsɿ] construction; see Figure 6 below.

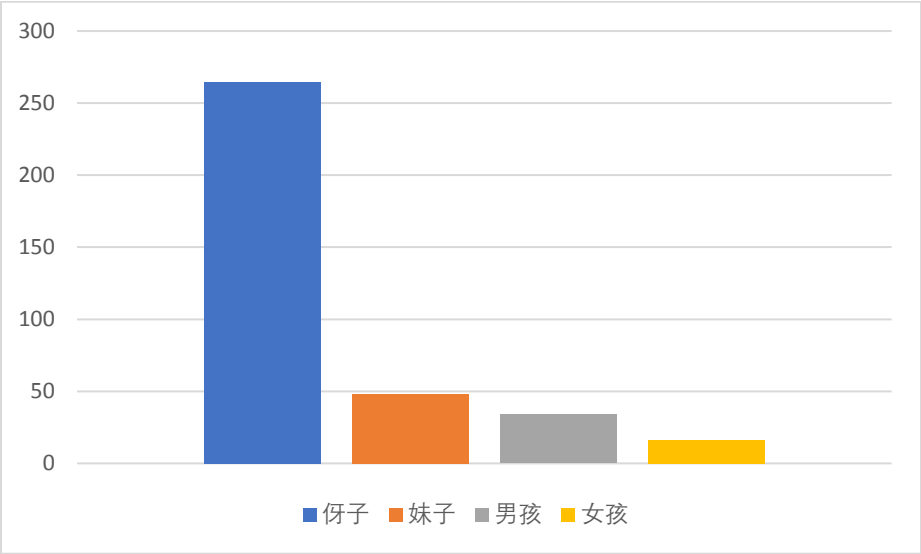

Figure 6. Terms for ‘children’ in Erbaugh (2001)’s Changsha corpus

Just as in the current sample, despite claims about a complex three-morpheme form for CS, it does not appear in narrative elicitation, unlike for other varieties such as HY and SY.

Erbaugh’s Changsha corpus betrays PTH-like influence throughout, in particular in terms of grammatical and lexical selection; consider the following from speaker CS01 line 4.3 (phonological transcription is the present author’s):

(4) 又有一个小男孩…一个细伢子小男孩骑到车子

jou jou i	ko **ɕio lã-xai**…	i	ko ɕi ŋa-tsɿ	**ɕio lã-xai**
also be one CL	**small male-child**…	one CL small child-NMLZ		**small male-child**
tɕhi-tao	tshə-tsɿ			
ride-arrive	vehicle-NMLZ			

‘There was also a small boy (PTH)… a small boy (X), small boy (PTH) who came riding a bicycle’

In example (1), any bolded items are PTH in origin. One notices that there is apparent competition between a PTH compound form [male + child] and a Xiang form with the structure

[child + NMLZ], with the PTH term eventually winning out. Interference and competition between the forms is also apparent, as we can see in Example (5) below:

(5) 他看见了一个细…细妹子小女孩

$t^ha\ k^han$-tɕjen lə	i ko ɕi…	**ɕi mej-tsɿ**	**ɕjaw ny-xaj**
3sg see-see ASP	one CL small…	**small girl-NMLZ**	**small female-child**

'He saw a small… small girl, a small girl.'

Note the use of both 妹子 *mei-tsɿ*/ and 女孩 *ny-xaj* for 'girl', with the latter form being used (one assumes) for the interviewer's sake. One also notices the shift from the native form for 'small' 细 [ɕi] to the non-native form 小 [ɕjaw], which is also seen in Example (4).

A major difference between Erbaugh's data and the current work is that immediate translations into PTH are rare (the only known instance being YuY1 briefly switching to 男人 [nan-ɻən] 'man' at [P5 (14.34)]); one assumes this is because of the interview being conducted in PTH in the original corpus. Interference and code-switching is predicted to be strongest when one is switching back and forth from one language into another. On the other hand, since the present piece required participants to send in recordings, it is predicted that instances of interference were related to issues of fluency rather than code switching for the researcher's benefit.

6. Discussion: Local and PTH influence

The results show that nominal-marking strategies in the spoken Xiang of the present sample are both more (HY, SY) and less (CS, YuY) complex than those found in the literature, usually dependent on location. Increases in complexity involved both affix-stacking and process stacking (compounding + affixation, reduplication + affixation). The preference for complex forms can be predictable but more complex (e.g. Shaoyang affix-stacking: *ŋa-tsɿ-ka* [boy-NMLZ-AFF] for *ŋa-ŋa* [boy-RED] 'boy'; Hengyang compounding plus affixation: *mei-tsai-tɕi* [girl-child-DIM] for *mei-tɕi* 'girl') or not predictable but more complex (e.g. Shaoyang reduplication plus

affixation: *ŋa-ŋa-tsɿ* [boy-RED-NMLZ] for *ŋa-ŋa* ‘boy’). The preference for relatively simpler bi-morphemic forms follows a different distribution, with expected simpler forms (e.g. Changsha: *mei-tsɿ* [girl-NMLZ] for *mei-tsai-tsɿ* [girl-child-NMLZ] ‘boy’), or an expected bi-morphemic form being crowded out by a regionally more common form (Yueyang: *mei-tsɿ* for expected *mei-tsai* [girl-NMLZ] ‘girl’). It should be noted that between these two, most YY speakers evinced no change in complexity, and mostly adhered to expectations from the literature.

There are several exceptions to the above. For one thing, CS3’s brief adoption of a form with 唧 -*tɕi* is unexpected, and HY1 tends to prefer bi-morphemic forms 倈/妹唧 [lai/mei-tɕi] at the expense of the more common [compound + affix] tri-morphemic form of HY2 and HY3. This is most likely due to self-reported low fluency relative to the other speakers (see Section 3). Finally, YY4’s adoption of 伢子 [ŋa-tsɿ] is a break with the regular trend for YY speakers.

PTH-like roots display similar trends to those outlined for marking strategies, where varieties with less-morphologically complex forms also display the most PTH-like influence (CS, YuY). While no speakers adopt PTH-like affixes or processes (such as retroflexion) on native roots, at least 7 speakers (~32%) use PTH-like roots at least once.

The evidence suggests that, despite the tremendous pressure exerted on local dialects by PTH (Ramsey 1987: 14; Matthews 1996; Escure 1997: 140; Kurpaska 2010: 13; Zhou 2012; Li 2022), despite the young age, high education, and ubiquitous bilingualism in the present sample, speakers retain distinctive features relative to PTH. Evidence of PTH interference, which, for all of the above reasons, was predicted to be pronounced, is largely relegated to particular speakers and is by no means ubiquitous. This can be contrasted with Li’s (2022) work on Chengdu, which found extensive evidence of regularization along PTH lines. In turn, when non-local features or

interference did emerge, the picture could be much more complex; consider that a considerable portion seems to originate in not only other varieties of Xiang, but also from other non-standard varieties of Sinitic. This therefore questions the view of a steady march towards convergence with PTH; of course, Xiang varieties are not generally considered varieties of Northern Sinitic ('Mandarin'), which given their genetic affinity are predicted to converge with PTH by way of dialect-levelling (Li 2022). Possible convergence with SWM on the other hand (Norman 1988: 208; Zhang 2015; Künstler 2019: 248), which may indirectly contribute to the appearance of PTH-like features, seems plausible.

It is perhaps illustrative that the variety with no overarching pattern across its speakers, Yueyang, is also the variety on the periphery of the Xiang-speaking area (Chen & Bao 2007), and therefore is likely to demonstrate the effects of more intense contact with non-Xiang varieties (Hubei SWM in particular).[11] It is of note that the newest edition of the Language Atlas of China (2012), does not include Yueyang within the Xiang sphere, instead classifying it as a SWM variety (further evidence of ongoing convergence confusing classificatory models). Of course, idiolectal effects cannot be discounted, especially considering sample size; however, common trends could be established for all other locations, with comparably small numbers.

Given the correspondence between the results for CS in the present study and in Erbaugh's corpus, it seems that the three-morpheme form is on the decline in the variety. It is quite possible, given similarities with forms in Section 2.1, that regularization along an [X-ts˩] pattern can be connected to PTH or larger supra-regional patterns. The fact that PTH and many varieties of Sinitic outside of Hunan share this affix, and that it represents one of the most common nominalizers in PTH (Wiedenhof (2015: 308) describes it as "extremely frequent") could

[11] It is important to note that there is no strong boundary between Xiang and SWM (Norman 1988: 207, Künstler 2019: 248) and that features are shared across borders (see e.g. Zhang 2015 for Xiang-like features in Wuhan SWM). The classificatory model is adopted by convention.

reinforce its replacement of more complex forms in CS or YuY by way of convergence and dialect-levelling, as in Li (2022). On the other hand, Xiang varieties (particularly Changsha) are often remarked upon for their excessive use of this particular affix (Wu 2005: 103), indicating there may be evidence that this represents a variety-internal change. In addition, Xiang varieties are not 'dialects' of Northern Sinitic in the way one might think of Chengdu or SWM, generally being considered divergent enough to merit their own Sinitic subgroup (structural affinity for Northern Sinitic is regional, however; Norman 1988: 208), therefore speaking of 'dialect'-levelling may be misguided. A variety-internal regularization is therefore not unlikely.

In any case, it seems plausible that change in CS is accelerated due to the city's status as a provincial capital, where speakers of many different varieties of Xiang (and Sinitic generally) converge (Zhang 2015: 125); simplification and regularization along these lines might therefore represent a form of koineisation or dialect-levelling (within Xiang) following the outline in Millar (2016), whereby contact between near relatives is the main catalyst for regularization.[12] In particular, speakers of varieties of SWM, including speakers from Chongqing, Wuhan, and Hubei generally, are likely to converge in Changsha. In Wuhan SWM for instance, *-tsʔ* is quite well-represented and the 伢 *ŋa* root does occur, although apparently without any accompanying morphology (Zhang 2015: 28). With evidence from only one feature, however, this is still speculative; further research could be conducted on koineisation and dialect-levelling in Sinitic, along the lines of Matthews (2010) and Li (2022).

What is perhaps more interesting than potential influence from PTH or SWM is the possibility of influence from one variety of Xiang into another. We can observe potential cross-dialectal influence in the use of forms like *ŋa/mei-tsʔ* by YuY3 and YY4, which is not predicted by either

[12] This assumes that Xiang is a valid subgroup, and that the varieties in question are 'dialects' of Xiang, a view which has been questioned extensively in Coblin (2011).

grammar; this form is so common it might be bolstered in its appearance by widespread occurrence in the Changsha variety, which, as a pseudo-regional standard,[13] would have some influence and cultural prestige. Other potential cases of interference from Xiang include CS3's use of the form *ŋa-tɕi*. Many speakers are in fact both multi-lingual and multi-dialectal (see Section 3), and many speakers live or have lived in other parts of Hunan, five having studied or lived in Changsha (including YY4, for instance). Poly-dialectism and high mobility are increasingly the norm nation-wide. Further attention should be given to cross-dialectal influence and bi-dialectism in Sinitic, in particular in contexts excluding PTH, such as with regional standards like Cantonese or pseudo-regional ones like Changsha Xiang.

7. Conclusions

The present study explores Xiang nominal-marking strategies in use, as well as potential ongoing changes in Xiang varieties. Regarding claims as to the morphological impoverishment of Sinitic, it seems apparent that Xiang varieties lie on the higher end of morphological complexity, even demonstrating stacking of affixes and processes. Work by Wu (2005) and Chappell (2024) provides evidence of non-concatenative morphological processes in Hunanese Sinitic varieties (e.g. tone change in demonstrative and personal pronominal paradigms), which additionally supports a more morphologically complex view of the family.

Certain limitations are apparent with the present methodology, in particular relating to the number of speakers; results can be dramatically skewed by idiolectal variation. An additional issue relates to the lack of a control group of elderly speakers for comparison with this

[13] This term is used here because, as Moser points out (1985: 132), while Changsha Xiang represents the speech of the provincial capital, where many Hunanese go for work or education, this variety does not have the status of places such as Guangzhou or Suzhou, which have historically defined their own regional standard forms for Yue and Wu, respectively.

comparatively younger group; although as mentioned the published grammars are assumed to stand-in in this case. The choice of items is biased towards those that can be most easily compared through the Pear Stories methodology, meaning that items which have low incidence cannot be compared. Therefore, focus may be biased towards features which already exhibit a high degree of variation. Finally, in the discussion of Yueyang data, the question arises of precisely which variety of Yueyang is being described here. A cursory examination of Fang (1999: 4-23) and later work (Fang 2001) will reveal that dialects under the 'Yueyang' heading but outside of the metropolitan area are more conservative and therefore less structurally comparable to PTH.

In narrative elicitation and language in use, the major source of unexpected roots might be PTH, which is unsurprising given the current sociolinguistic situation in Hunan (and China generally), but for nominal-marking strategies, but other varieties of Xiang or Sinitic as sources of unexpected strategies should not be discounted. In addition, increasing and decreasing complexity for these strategies appears to be area-specific; in fact, simplification by way of regularization may be a local factor driven by Changsha, rather than one uniquely driven by PTH or regionally significant varieties of SWM. An often overlooked potential source of variation is local influence originating from other varieties of Xiang with regional influence. This can take the form of influence from pseudo-regional standards like Changsha or from other varieties into Changsha, for instance. This calls for increased research into multi-dialectism in areas with high linguistic diversity, such as in Guangxi, Guizhou, or Yunnan, and how this multi-dialectism interacts with morphological complexity. Further studies into variation in this diverse linguistic region and increased attention on language use in naturalistic contexts may further help tease apart the sources and directions of change.

Abbreviations

ASP ‘aspect marker’

CL ‘classifier’

CS ‘Changsha’

DIM ‘diminutive’

HY ‘Hengyang’

NMLZ ‘nominalizer’

PTH ‘*Putonghua* (Standard Mandarin)’

RED ‘reduplicated root’

SWM ‘Southwestern Mandarin

SY ‘Shaoyang’

YuY ‘Yueyang

YY ‘Yiyang’

Appendix

Table 1. Items for ‘boy’ by speaker and locale

Speaker	YuY	YY	CS	HY	SY
1	小男生[ɕiao nan-sen] (4)	伢唧[ŋa-tɕie] (11)	伢子[ŋa-tsɿ] (11)	侠唧[lai-tɕi] (5)	伢伢[ŋa-ŋa] (7) /小朋友[ɕio bəŋ-jo] (1)
2	伢子[ŋa-tsɿ] (3) / 小朋友[ɕio pəŋ-jo] (1)	伢唧[ŋa-tɕie] (14)	伢子[ŋa-tsɿ] (12)	阶崽唧[ka-tsai-tɕi] (7)	□ □ □ [ʃɿ-ka-ʃɿ] (3)
3	男孩[lã-xaj] (8) / 小朋友[ɕio pəŋ-jo] (2)	伢唧[ŋa-tɕi] (21)	伢唧[na-tɕie] (1) / 男孩[nã-xaj] (3)	阶崽唧[ke-tse-tɕi] (6) / 阶唧[ke-tɕi] (2)	伢伢子[ŋa-ŋa-tsɿ/tse] (12) /伢子家[ŋa-tsɿ-ka] (2)
4	NA	伢子[ŋa-tsɿ] (4) / 小朋友[ɕia p^həŋ-jo] (2)	伢子[ŋa-tsɿ] (4)	NA	伢伢[ŋa-ŋa] (12) / 伢子家[ŋa-tsɿ-ka] (3)
5	NA	伢唧[ŋa-tɕie] (9)	伢子[ŋa-tsɿ] (2)	NA	NA

6	NA	NA	小朋友[ɕiao pən-jo] (1)	NA	NA
7	NA	NA	细□ [ɕi-pe] (4)	NA	NA

Table 2. Items for ‘girl’ by speaker and locale

Speaker	YuY	YY	CS	HY	SY
1	小女生 [ɕiao ny-sen] (3)	妹唧 [mei-tɕi] (1)	妹子[mei-tsɿ] (2)	妹唧[mei-tɕi] (2)	NA
2	女的 [ny-ti] (1)	NA	妹子[mei-tsɿ] (3)	妹崽唧 [mei-tsai-tɕi] (1)	NA
3	妹子[mei-tsɿ] (1)	妹唧[me-tɕi] (4)	女孩 [ny-xaj] (1)	妹崽唧[me-tse-tɕi] (3)	NA
4	NA	NA	妹子[mei-tsɿ] (1)	NA	妹子（家） [mei-tsɿ-ka] (3)
5	NA	妹唧[me-tɕi] (2)	NA	NA	NA
6	NA	NA	美女 [mei-ny](1)	NA	NA
7	NA	NA	妹子 [mei-tsɿ] (2)	NA	NA

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