

A Brief Introduction to the Generation, Characteristics, and Influence of Shanghai Pidgin on Language and Society

Qinyi Xu^{1,a,*}

¹*School of English Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China, 200083*

a. xqy19105170532@163.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Language contact refers to a specific but universal linguistic phenomenon that almost anyone encounters, in the process of language contact. Language contact occurs not only between languages, but also between common languages and dialects, and between dialects and dialects. This paper focuses on the emergence, characteristics, and influence of Pidgin on society and language. The paper uses documentary analysis and case studies by finding linguistic examples. Based on previous research, it is concluded that Pidgin has a profound influence on the pronunciation and grammar of the Shanghai dialect, and on this basis, this paper concludes that "Pidgin" is a kind of deformed English produced in the old Chinese coastal trading ports. As a general language, it became a necessary tool for communication with foreigners at that time. Many of these words have survived and are still used in everyday conversation.

Keywords: Pidgin, Language contact, Linguistics, Shanghai dialect, Foreign language learning

1. Introduction

The Pidgin fully reflects the special cultural phenomenon caused by language contact in a specific context of the time, and it is worth exploring its origin, analyzing the reasons for its production and its influence on later generations. The emergence, characteristics, and influence of the Pidgin language will be studied in this paper. The "Yangjingbang" reflects the social and cultural characteristics of the mixed Chinese and foreign society in the Concession and was commonly spoken by people from different countries and residents in Shanghai before the establishment of English schools and higher universities [1]. In English, the so-called Yangjingbang language is known as Pigeon English, or Pidgin, which refers to the mixed language developed by people of different languages in commercial interactions. This paper searches for literature, linguistic examples, and the context of the times [2]. It is a variant of English that has been disturbed by Chinese phonetics, grammar rules, and expression habits. In China, Pidgin had existed for nearly two centuries and played an important role in modern foreign trade, diplomacy, and cultural contacts, its influence is extremely far-reaching. As a general language, it became a necessary tool for communicating with foreigners. Much of the Shanghai pidgin language still survives today and is integrated into people's daily conversations [3]. The study of Pidgin reveals the potential and variability of the phonological system in different social environments and historical needs, and further reveals the qualities of the language itself. This paper focuses on the origins of Pidgin in the

Shanghai area in the 19th century, the unique phonological features of Pidgin, the limited vocabulary and simple grammar of Pidgin, and two important reasons for the decline of Pidgin in the context of a developing, modernizing society. In the research process, two main methods are used in this paper. The literature analysis method is most predominantly used in this paper. The phonetic characteristics and communicative style of Shanghai Pidgin are summarized through the previous literature. It also uses a comparative study method to explore the differences between Pidgin and orthodox English, and to investigate the development trajectory and reasons for the decline of Pidgin. The significance of this paper is mainly to summarize the academic features of Pidgin, the linguistic characteristics based on the previous work, and to lay the foundation for future generations to continue to study the peculiarities of Pidgin in depth.

2. Production of Pidgin

Yangjingbang, is a tributary of the Huangpu River which is in Shanghai, and after the opening of the British and French Concessions one after another in At that time, the British merchants flocked to Shanghai At that time, British merchants flocked to Shanghai one after, and they did not speak the same language as the Chinese but had to communicate with each other to run their business, as a result, a new language was Pidgin for the location. It was a hybrid language used by Chinese and foreign merchants in the 19th century, with only a spoken form and no uniform written form, and many variants. It is a product of the combination of English and Shanghainese and is influenced to some extent by Ningbo and Cantonese [4]. Its grammar does not conform to English idioms and its phonology is influenced by Chinese. The language was popular in the area around Yangjingbang in Shanghai at the time, hence the name is established [5].

3. Linguistic Features of Pidgin

3.1. Limited Vocabulary

Charles Leland's "Pidgin English Sing-song", published in 1876, contains 441 words; It listed 234 words, 32 phrases and 10 phrases in Shanghai pidgin English; Wang Zhi in "A Brief History of English" listed 109 common English words and 10 phrases [6]. From the above data, it can be seen that the vocabulary of pidgin English is very small, so the word often has a variety of meanings, such as cachee out of getting, bring, find and other meanings, there is also the meaning of becoming; while referring to things often with the help of roundabout sayings, such as beard is called "grass belong face"; the verb "to be" and its various forms do not exist, all use "The words in pidgin English are few and crude; they are often made up of simple words that are easy to use and easy to pass on in communicative activities, but do not conform to the lexical laws of any one language [7].

3.2. Simple Phonetics

Influenced by Chinese phonetics, Chinese people often have difficulty pronouncing compound or word-final consonants, especially those words ending in clear consonant blasts. Therefore, in Pidgin, vowels are often added after such but to form easily pronounced syllables, such as make as makee, catch as catchee, save as savee, much as muchy, and so on; dialects and other regional features also have an important influence on the phonology of Pidgin. In southern China, R and L are indistinguishable; a Chinese rice merchant selling rice (Rice) to England is said to be selling lice (虱子)[8]. s and sh are also mixed, shpeakee i.e. to speak and shleep i.e. to sleep. Words ending in ld are often pronounced with the sound ending in lo, such as cold for colo, child for chilo, gold for golo, etc. In addition, the use of Chinese character notes also distorts the pronunciation of pidgin English to some extent. For example, the pronunciation of the numbers 1 to 12 is. 温, 都, 地厘,

和, 輝, 昔土, 西問, 噎, 年, 颠, 林, 打拉. It is not difficult to see that the above pronunciation is far from the correct English pronunciation, so it is not surprising that the pronunciation of Pidgin is fragmented and full of foreign faces. The pronunciation of Pidgin is simple and single, there is almost no complex pronunciation and combination, which is mainly to meet the biggest requirement of Pidgin, easy to understand and easy to communicate.

3.3. Created Grammar

The grammar of pidgin English is very simple, with many simplifications and deletions compared to real English, and does not form a complete grammar system. Variations in quantity, grammar, tense, form, tense, and person have all disappeared, and syntactic structure has been simplified to the greatest extent possible, with all words having only one form. The extensive use of quantifiers in Chinese has led to the frequent occurrence of the word "piece" in Pidgin; "a person" is used as "a piece of a person"; my is a common name for personal pronouns, such as I, we, mine, our, etc.; Chinese inflections are also embedded in a large number of sentences in Pidgin. Chinese "la, lo" is an intonation word indicating completion and is placed after the verb with lo to indicate this meaning, such as die-lo (die), say-lo (say); verb superimposition is also frequent in pidgin English, such as "look at" being called "looksee"[9]. The grammar of pidgin English is unlike any other language in that it is disorganized and confusing, yet it enables speakers and listeners to use it without barriers, minimizing the role of grammar in the language and requiring only intelligibility, not purity or systematicity of the language.

4. The Decline of Pidgin

4.1. Choice of Society

With the development of the times and the deepening of communication, the demand and requirements for English in Shanghai are getting higher and higher, and people are no longer satisfied with the simple communication and the lack of a pure language of Yangjingbang but turn to learn more systematic and pure foreign languages, such as English and French. Although the pidgin language can be used as a tool for communication, it cannot be systematically passed on and cannot produce native speakers, which inevitably brings about its decline, and its simplicity and ease of learning also determine its lack of complexity and creativity [10]. Over the past hundred years, with the passage of time and the formalization of English teaching, "pidgin English" has gradually disappeared into history. However, some of the words in "pidgin English" are still in use today. Society has opted for a more orthodox and systematic English.

Shanghai people are quite active in the use of foreign words, and often use them in their own way, for example, the word "differential head" is a transliteration of the word "charter", which originally meant "lease". The first taxi company in Shanghai, Xiangsheng Automobile Company, had only one car for charter when it first opened in the 1910s, and renting it out once was called "one charter" while traveling (that is, renting) three times a day was "three charters". Until the 1940s, rental cars were still called "business cars", where the word "business" meant "rental". It is easy to see that, as an international metropolis, the demand for English in Shanghai must have been growing.

4.2. Bias for Authenticity

When using foreign languages, people increasingly prefer English with a pure accent pronunciation. Although Shanghai's Pidgin serves a communicative purpose, it is very limited and unpleasant to listen to in terms of pronunciation aesthetics, and promotability. As times evolve and people's

thinking changes, it is natural for the new generation of Shanghainese to want their children to learn with a pure accent. Even Shanghainese is in decline today, let alone the lower level of the Yangjingbang language. English is treated as "the language of the other" in China, and "Chinese-accented English" has no basis of existence among the Chinese people, that is, there is no certain size group in China that uses Chinese-accented English as a daily language, which results in Chinese-accented English not being associated with anyone's self-identity, and at the same time, Chinese people have a certain worship of Anglo-Saxon. When these factors exist simultaneously, it is very reasonable and historically appropriate for Shanghainese to pursue a pure English accent and gradually abandon the Yangjingbang language.

5. The Meaning and Influence of Pidgin on Society and Language

5.1. Convenience of Communication

The Yangjingbang language is a system of symbols and words to refer to things (including objects, emotions, ideas, etc.) to express and convey meaning. It is more passive from an instrumental point of view, and its role is limited to objectively recording, expressing, and reflecting facts: reflecting the concretized physical objects around it can help to build an impression of the physical objects seen, and establish a way of understanding the society and world constructed from them [11]. As a special language, the Yangjingbang language maximized the ease and possibility of communication in a specific historical context. Many of the Shanghai pidgin languages still survive today and are integrated into people's daily conversations.

5.2. Richness of Corpus

As a living fossil of a historical language, Yangjingbang language has fully enriched the corpus. In recent years, the use of corpora to conduct more in-depth and reliable research on linguistic phenomena has received increasing attention from scholars. A corpus is a collection of electronically stored, coded linguistic materials collected for language research. It is a collection of naturally occurring samples of written or spoken language that represents a particular language or language variant. A scientifically selected and labeled corpus of appropriate size can reflect and record the actual use of language. Through the corpus, people can observe and grasp linguistic facts, analyze and study the patterns of the language system, and further delve into the study of Shanghai's Yangjibang language at that time.

6. Conclusion

This paper concludes from a review of previous studies that Pidgin played an important role in modern foreign trade, diplomacy, and cultural contacts, and its influence was extremely far-reaching. Shanghai pidgin reveals that the phonological system has its own potential and variability in different social environments and historical demands, and further reveals the language's own qualities. The weakness of this paper is that the discussion of the cases in this paper is still insufficient and not extensive enough, only exploring Shanghai Pidgin, which has certain geographical limitations, and revealing the evolutionary process in an incomplete manner. Further research should be conducted in the future to investigate the cues of Yangjingbang in everyday conversations and to further reveal the subtle but inescapable influence of language on society and human beings as a whole.

References

- [1] Gu, Yueqin. (2021). A peek into the teaching of "Pidgin" in the late Qing Dynasty: the example of miscellaneous words. *Journal of Nanjing Xiaozhuang College* (03), 118-122.
- [2] Sun Xing. (2021). A brief introduction to the inspiration of Chinese Pidgin for second language acquisition teaching. *English Square* (08), 80-82. doi:10.16723/j.cnki.yyg.2021.08.024.
- [3] Yang, H. B.. (2020). A study of modern Shanghai open-air general affairs. *Oriental Translation* (01), 36-40.
- [4] Xie Rongrong. (2019). A Study of the English Textbook of the Late Qing Dynasty under the Threshold of the English Textbook of the Yangjingbang River, "English Language Commentary". *Journal of Ningbo University (Humanities Edition)* (02), 7-12.
- [5] Yin Ke. (2018). Is Yangjingbang language a language pollution? (Master's thesis, Zhejiang University). <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201802&filename=1018130791.nh>
- [6] Shen, C.-H. & Sun, G.-L. (2015). A glimpse into the characteristics of Yangjing-bang English and its influence during the Qing Dynasty. *Lantai World* (10), 33-34. doi:10.16565/j.cnki.1006-7744.2015.10.019.
- [7] Wang, L. & Gong, D.F.. (2014). Exploring the English learning situation of Shanghai businessmen and its significance. *Lantai World* (34), 79-80. doi:10.16565/j.cnki.1006-7744.2014.34.027.
- [8] Zhou Zhenhe. (2013). The formation of Chinese Yangjing English. *Fudan Journal (Social Science Edition)*(05),1-18+153.
- [9] Cui Can & Luo Lin. (2013). An analysis of the crisis of Chinese purity nowadays--From "Yangjingbang". *Science Popular (Science Education)* (09), 136-137+144. doi:10.16728/j.cnki.kxdz.2013.09.047.
- [10] Wang, Huining. (2012). The inspiration of "Yangjingbang" English for English learning. *English Knowledge* (09), 5-6.
- [11] Zhu Hailing. (2010). Pidgin in the late Qing Dynasty. *Journal of Qingyuan Vocational and Technical College* (05), 62-64.