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Universal marking in accent formation: Evidence from Taiwanese-Mandarin and Mandarin-Taiwanese

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses two types of accents between two Chinese dialects, Taiwanese and Mandarin. The Taiwanese accent of Mandarin is referred to as Taiwanese-Mandarin, and the Mandarin accent of Taiwanese is referred to as Mandarin-Taiwanese. In this research, I establish two corpora and propose a marking-based model of accent formation, which considers universal marking a key to the emergence of accented forms. An accent occurs when unmarked forms emerge to replace some marked forms of the target language (L2). The speaker encountering an L2 constraint ranking may build his/her own ranking, which may or may not be identical to L2. In terms of Optimality Theory, a constraint in L1 may be promoted or demoted in the accented L2, and constraint mobility operates to achieve the unmarked.

1. Introduction

In the tradition of Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky, 1993/2004; McCarthy and Prince, 1993, 1994/2003, among others), language variation is explained through the notion of constraint reranking. One question that deserves serious attention then is the directionality of constraint mobility in accent formation. Namely, in what direction is a constraint reranked in an accent? This paper addresses the bidirectional phonological influences between two Chinese dialects, Taiwanese and Mandarin.[2] Both dialects have interacted in Taiwan for over sixty years, but are not mutually intelligible. I refer to the first type of the phonological influences as **Taiwanese-Mandarin** (hereafter, **T-Mandarin**),[3] a speaker of which produces Mandarin with a heavy Taiwanese accent. T-Mandarin is often produced by people who were born in the 1940s or earlier, known as the "old Taiwanese." The second type of the phonological influences is referred to as **Mandarin-Taiwanese** (hereafter, **M-Taiwanese**), in which Taiwanese is produced with a Mandarin accent. The speakers of M-Taiwanese are known as the "new generation," namely those who were born in the 1980s or later. In this paper, I look at these two types of accent from a constraint-based perspective, and argue that constraints are promoted or demoted to achieve universal unmarkedness. The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In section 2, I propose a marking-based model of accent formation, which allows forms that are universally unmarked to emerge in the accent. The phonotactic basics of Taiwanese

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[1] http://phonology.nccu.edu.tw/.
[2] Taiwanese refers to the Southern Min dialect spoken in Taiwan, also known as Holo. The term "Taiwanese" was initially used on the Voyager spacecraft in 1977. NASA approved the placement of a phonograph disc on the Voyager; the recording contained greetings from Earth people in 60 languages, called 'Sounds of Earth'. Taiwanese was among them. For relevant details, see Embree et al. (1984) and Hamilton (1995).
[3] The term "Taiwanese-Mandarin" used in this paper is different from the general term "Taiwan Mandarin." The latter usually refers to the Mandarin dialect used in Taiwan, but the former particularly refers to Taiwanese accented Mandarin spoken by the older Taiwanese people.

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and Mandarin are discussed in section 3, followed by an introduction of the corpora in section 4. Six patterns of T-Mandarin are observed in section 5, and four of M-Taiwanese in section 6. These two types of accents are analyzed in sections 7 and 8 under the framework of Optimality Theory. In section 9, I comment on the marking relation in terms of accent formation, and the conclusion is offered in section 10.

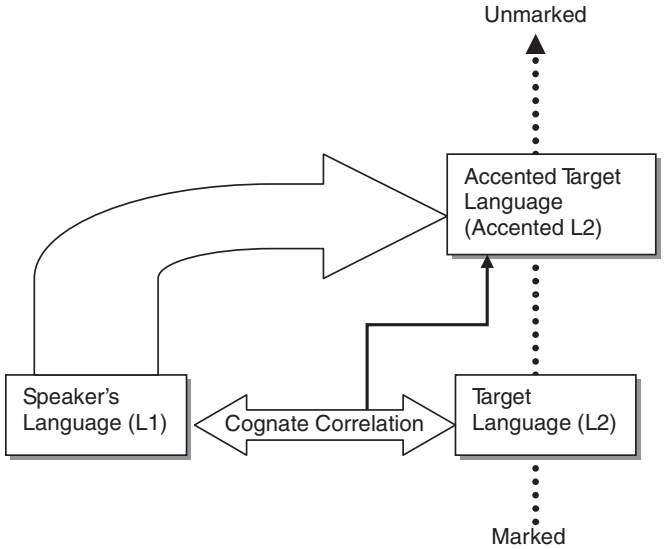
2. A marking-based model of accent formation

Accents are known as different manners of pronunciation of a language, which basically fall in two domains. One domain of accent is defined among native speakers of various regions, or from diverse social classes, etc. People from Texas would speak with an accent from the point of view of a New Yorker, and vice versa. The other domain of accent refers to the production of nonnative speakers, commonly characterized as a foreign accent. A Frenchman may speak English with a French accent. In this case, the accented English is influenced by the sounds of French, and the emerging phonological system is an interlanguage, which is interim and often idiosyncratic. The two types of accents in Taiwan, T-Mandarin and M-Taiwanese, are somewhere between these two domains: both involve systematic adjustments of segments and syllable structures.

The classic OT device that handles language variation is constraint reranking, and a grammar is considered a fully ranked constraint hierarchy (Kiparsky, 1993; Kroch, 1994; McCarthy and Prince, 1993/2004); reranking of certain constraints will produce multiple grammars or sub-grammars. At least three subsequent approaches have modified the generic idea of constraint reranking. First, the partial ranking approach (Anttila, 1997; Anttila and Cho, 2004) contends that the ranking of some constraints may be underspecified in a grammar, which is considered not a fully ranked but partially ranked constraint hierarchy. Any partial ranking is a possible grammar, and cophonologies (i.e., different constraint rankings) are assumed to capture diversity within languages (Anttila, 2002; Inkelas and Zoll, 2007). Second, the floating constraint approach (Nagy and Reynolds, 1996, 1997; Reynolds, 1994) also posits constraints that are underspecified in their rankings with others, and allows a floating constraint to move in its domain. In other words, various rankings are possible within a certain range. Finally, the stochastic approach (Boersma, 2000; Boersma and Hayes, 2001; Hayes, 2000) proposes that output variations are defined as gradient well-formedness, and constraints are assigned ranking values on a strictness scale. Under stochastic evaluation, the grammar generates variable selection points, which eventually lead to a range of output variants. These four approaches[4] to language variation have focused on two issues: namely, whether a grammar is a full or partial constraint ranking, and whether an analysis of variation is one of profound difference (the stochastic approach) or of analytical simplicity (the other three).

One question that has not been discussed but is worthy of notice is the directionality of constraint mobility in interlanguage. Precisely, what motivates promotion or demotion of certain constraints? What are the consequences of the ranking adjustments? This paper pursues these issues from the perspective of accent formation. I propose a marking-based model of accent formation in (1), which contends that accent is largely caused by avoidance of segments or syllable structures that are universally marked, and the adjustments of constraint ranking work towards the unmarked.

(1) A marking-based model of accent formation



In the schema above, the target language (L2) can be a local dialect or a foreign language. The speaker's language (L1) is the native language of the speaker. The accented target language (accented L2) is the default language used by the speaker.

[4] The four approaches refer to the classic OT and the three subsequent approaches.