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To cite this version:

Katia Chirkova, Yiya Chen. Běijīng, The Language of. Encyclopedia of Chinese Languages and Linguistics, I, Brill, pp.275-283, 2017, 978 90 04 18643 9. hal-00724219

HAL Id: hal-00724219

https://hal.science/hal-00724219v1

Submitted on 20 Aug 2012

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Běijīng Mandarin, the language of Běijīng

1. General

Běijīng Mandarin (Běijīnghuà 北京話, Pekingese, hereafter BM) is a language spoken in the city of Běijīng (Peking) by its natives. The development of BM in this definition is essentially influenced by two factors: the special status as capital that the city enjoyed almost uninterruptedly for nearly a millennium, and the normative language(s) of its successive ruling elites.

Situated for many centuries in the borderlands between China proper and the Altaic peoples to its north, the predecessor cities of present-day Běijīng served as capital to many non-Chinese dynasties, such as Jīn 金 (1115-1234), Yuán 元 (1260-1368), and Qīng 清 (1644-1911). Each dynasty had an impact on the city's demographics. It was inhabited at different times by the Jurchen, Mongolians, and Manchus who respectively ruled those three dynasties. At the same time, the city always remained home to Hàn-Chinese speakers. Especially during the Míng 明 period (1368-1644), the transfer of the capital to Běijīng in 1421 led to a sizeable migration from the central linguistic zone of China to the new capital. The normative language of the city elites changed along with these developments. It accumulated non-Sinitic features under the non-Chinese dynasties. It became more oriented towards Jiāng-Huái 江淮 dialects during the Míng (cf. Coblin 2007) (see *Jiāng-Huái Mandarin*). Finally, under the Qīng, it developed a more northern-oriented standard, based on the Mandarin as spoken by descendants of Manchu, Mongol

and (essentially Shāndōng 山東-based) Chinese military garrisons or "bannermen" (e.g. Astraxan *et al.* 1985: 7-33).

The 20th century brought new changes to the language of Běijīng, following (i) the unprecedented territorial expansion of the city beginning in the 1960s, (ii) the changing population, characterized by a considerable influx of migrants from all over the country, bringing with them their native dialects and languages, and (iii) the large scale promotion of a new normative standard, Standard Mandarin (currently known in Chinese as Pǔtōnghuà 普通話), based on the dialect of Běijīng (hereafter, SM; see *Standard Mandarin*).

Under the common assumption that BM is identical to SM (e.g. Li and Thompson 1981:1, Norman 1988:136-7), the former is arguably the best researched of all Chinese dialects, as the latter is outlined in many normative grammars and dictionaries (e.g. Chao 1968, Li and Thompson 1981, Huáng and Liào 1997). However, in actual fact BM and SM are far from identical, as important differences can be observed in all linguistic sub-systems (Astraxan *et al.* 1985: 19-33, Zhū 1987). Even the phonological organization of SM, the one sub-system that is established by definition as akin to BM, does not directly reflect any of the three distinct sub-varieties of BM (West-City, East-City, and Outer City) that were still spoken in Běijīng at the time of the introduction of SM (Astraxan *et al.* 1985: 22, Lín 1987: 167).

As the language of education and administration, SM is defined as based on the speech of educated BM speakers and it is closely related to the literary language (e.g. De Francis 1950: 76, 228-229; Chao 1976a: 79-80; Kratochvil 1968: 21, see *National language and dialects*). By contrast, the local spoken idiom BM is essentially restricted to

those Běijīng natives who have lower education and socio-economic status. Consequently, this spoken BM traditionally has lower prestige and is much less studied. Existing studies include collections of articles by Hú (1987, 1992) and Zhōu (2002), and outlines of BM by Hóu *et al.* (1998) (accompanied by tape recordings), Zhōu (1998), and Shi (2004). Lexicon is arguably the most researched facet of the (spoken) language of the capital, with numerous dictionaries of Běijīng colloquial idioms published to date, e.g. Lù (1956), Jīn (1961), Xú (1990), Jiǎ (1990), Cháng (1992), Zhōu (1992), Chén *et al.* (1997), Gāo and Fù (2001).

Earlier attestations of BM can be found in a number of textbooks of the late 19th century (e.g. Wú and Zhèng 1881, Wade and Hillier 1886). This variety can also be glimpsed at through literary works by Běijīng authors, such as *Hónglóumèng*《红楼梦》[A dream of red mansions] by Cáo Xuěqín 曹雪芹 (1715?-1763?), the oeuvre of Láo Shě 老舍 (1899-1966), or comic sketches (*xiàngsheng* 相声), most importantly by Hóu Bǎolín 侯宝林 (1917-1993) (e.g. Hóu 1980). More recent attestations of BM include a few corpora collected since the 1980s (e.g. Cháng *et al.* 1992, Nakajima 1995, Chirkova 2003). Unfortunately, most of these corpora are of limited extent and availability. In sum, BM as actually spoken by Běijīng natives remains poorly researched and requires further documentation and analysis.

The description below outlines features held to be characteristic for spoken BM, and comments on the relationship between BM and SM in matters of grammar.

2. Description of the language

2.1. Phonology: BM and SM

The phonological system of BM is the basis for that of SM, as codified in *Hànyǔ pīnyīn fāng'àn*《漢語拼音方案》 (1958/1978) [*Scheme for the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet*]. In normative descriptions (e.g. Chao 1968: 18-57, Li and Thompson 1981: 3-9, Norman 1988: 138-151, Huáng and Liào 1997: 36-165, see also *Modern Mandarin phonology*), BM has 21 consonants, /p, pʰ, t, tʰ, k, kʰ, ts, tsʰ, tʂ, tʂʰ, m, n, ŋ, f, s, ʂ, x, w, j, ɹ, l/, of which /ŋ/ only appears in coda position. Three additional consonants (alveopalatals [tɕ, tɕʰ, ɕ]) occur only before the high front vowels /i, y/ (and their corresponding glides /j, ɥ/), and are therefore in complementary distribution with the velars /k, kʰ, x/, the dentals /ts, tsʰ, s/, and the retroflexes /tʂ, tʂʰ, ʂ/ (e.g. Hóu et al. 1998, Lee and Zee 2003). Their phonemic status is debatable (see further discussion on this issue in *cross-reference*).

Vowels exhibit a wide range of surface realization with most vowel sounds occurring in a rather narrow range of contexts. This has led to different treatments of the number of underlying vowels and consequently, the relation between the surface vowel realizations and the phonemic vowel categories (e.g. Chao 1968, Wang 1993, Lee and Zee 2003). For simplicity, we here focus upon the vowel surface realizations, treating them as separate phonemes. In open syllables, BM has /i, y, ɛ, a, ɜ, u, o, ə/ (e.g., *dí* 敵 'enemy', *lǔ* 驢 'donkey', *dá* 答 'answer', *gē* 哥 'brother', *dú* 毒 'poison', *bō* 波 'wave'), among which /ɛ/ occurs only after the glides /j, ɥ/ (as in *miè* 滅 'extinguish', *yuè* 月 'month'). /i, u, y/, when occurring before another vowel, are often considered as glides (/j, w, ɥ/) and part of the syllable onset (e.g., *liǎ* 倆 'two', *guā* 瓜 'melon', *jùn* 俊

‘handsome’). Diphthongs in open syllables include /ei, ɛi, au, əu/ (as in *lèi* 類 ‘type’, *lái* 來 ‘come’, *lǎo* 老 ‘old’, *lòu* 漏 ‘leak’). /a, ɛ, i, y, ə/ occur before an alveolar nasal coda (as in *kàn* 看 ‘look’, *diàn* 店 ‘store’, *jìn* 近 ‘near’, *jùn* 俊 ‘handsome’, *lùn* 論 ‘argue’), and /ɑ, ə, i, o/ occur before a velar nasal coda (as in *kàng* 抗 ‘resist’, *kēng* 坑 ‘hole’, *tīng* 聽 ‘listen’, *dòng* 動 ‘move’). In addition, BM has the retroflex vowel /ɚ/ (as in *ěr* 耳 ‘ear’). After the dental sibilants and retroflexes, there are two apical vowels ([ʐ̩] and [ʂ̩] respectively), conventionally transcribed as *ɿ* and *ʅ*.

Syllable structure is (CG)V(N), where V can be a monophthong or a diphthong, N stands for an alveolar or velar nasal, and elements in brackets are optional. In addition, most syllables can be suffixed with the sub-syllabic retroflex suffix [ɻ], which often causes changes in the final of the preceding syllable (Chao 1968: 46-52).

The standard form of BM has a total of 403 syllables, which can be further differentiated by tone. The four lexical tones are: high level [55], rising [35], low or dipping [214], high falling [51], also conventionally referred to as the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th tone, respectively (see *Tone*). In addition, BM has neutral tone syllables, which do not occur in initial position and surface with different pitch contours essentially depending on the lexical tone of the preceding syllable (see *Neutral tone*).

In view of the large number of lexical items containing neutral tone syllables, BM is commonly analyzed as having stress. Unstressed neutral tone syllables are reduced in their segmental articulation. For example, in a bi-syllabic item *zhīdao* /tʂʅtau/ 知道 ‘know, understand’, in which the second syllable /tau/ takes the neutral tone, the voiceless /t/ is often realized as voiced (i.e. [d]), and the vowel is centralized. In addition,

neutral tone syllables are realized with shortened duration and less intensity (Lín and Yán 1980). Neutral tone syllables also show weak F0 realization, as manifested in their great variability after different lexical tones and the fact that it takes two to three consecutive neutral tone syllables for the neutral tone pitch target to surface (Chen and Xu 2006).

The issue of whether bi-syllabic words with two full lexical tones also have stress is unsettled. Existing proposals include both trochaic and iambic stress patterns (e.g. Kratochvil 1964, Wáng and Féng 2006). While some perceptual data suggest that native BM listeners are able to detect prominence differences in iambic vs. trochaic stress patterns, much variability is observed both across and within listeners (Lín *et al.* 1984). Notably, the differences in many minimal pairs claimed to differ only in stress may be attributed to their different morpho-syntactic constituency.

Compared to other Chinese dialects, BM has a relatively simple system of tone sandhi, which includes (i) the low tone sandhi, where a low tone is realized with a rising pitch contour when followed by another low tone; and (ii) the rising tone sandhi, where a rising tone is realized with a level pitch contour when it occurs in the medial, unstressed position of a tri-syllabic constituent, preceded by a high-ending tone (Chao 1968: 26-27). The low tone sandhi is by far the best studied. While it applies consistently within a disyllabic word, its application across linguistic boundaries above the word level is determined by a number of factors such as syntactic structure and speaking rate (Speer *et al.* 1989, Shěn 1994, see Chen 2000 for review, see also *Tone sandhi*). Early impressionistic descriptions and corpus data suggest that the sandhi rising tone and the lexical rising tone are not the same (e.g. Hockett 1947, Kratochvil 1984), but the difference between them is so subtle that listeners often fail to perceive it reliably (Wang

and Li 1967). Recent psycholinguistic evidence suggests that native speakers of BM do process the two rising tonal contours differently (Chen *et al.* 2011). It is conceivable that due to the explicit classroom instruction of the low tone sandhi change into a lexical rising tone, speakers of SM have the same representation for the sandhi rising tone and the lexical rising tone, which is different from that of native BM speakers.

Finally, the lexical items *yī* 一 'one', and *bù* 不 'not' surface with a rising tone when followed by a 4th tone syllable (e.g. *yí kè* 一克 'one gram', *bú qù* 不去 'not go'), and with a falling tone when followed by a syllable with any other tone (e.g. *yì diǎn* 一点 'a little', *yì xiē* 一些 'a number of').

2.2. Some features of BM not included in the definition of SM

Some additional and mostly sporadic features of BM that set it up apart from SM include (based on Chao 1968: 27-29, 45, 52-56, Táng 1974, Hú 1987, Xú 1991: 3-4, Chen 1999: 37-41):

(i) realization of the initials /ts tsʰ s/ as [tθ tθʰ θ] for some speakers

(ii) realization of the initials /tɕ, tɕʰ, ɕ/ before the high front vowels /i, y/ as /ts, tsʰ, s/, respectively. For example, /tɕia^{55}/ *jiā* 家 'home, family' can be realized as [tsia^{55}], and /ɕia^{51}/ *xià* 下 'down' can be realized as [sia^{51}]. This feature is commonly attributed to young female speakers and is known as *nǚguóyīn* 女國音 'female SM pronunciation'

(iii) variable realization of the approximant /w/: (a) as a bilabial approximant /w/, typically before /o/ (e.g. *wǒ* 我 'I'), and (b) as a labial-dental approximant /ʋ/, which seems to be more preferred before other vowels (e.g. *wǎn* 晚 'late')

(iv) extensive use of rhotacization, which is much greater than that in SM (see below)

(v) syllable shapes that do not make part of the standard syllable inventory of SM, such as *diǎ* 嗲 'coy, childish', *sēi* 塞 'fill in, to stuff', *béng* 甭 'there is no need to', *tēi* 忒 'very'.

In addition, some morphemes have pronunciation or tone values that are different from their normative pronunciations as codified, for instance, by the character readings given in *Xīnhuá Zìdiǎn* 《新華字典》 [New China character dictionary]. For example, older BM speakers tend to pronounce the disposal marker *bǎ* 把 as *bǎi*, *gàosu* 告訴 'tell' as *gàosong*, and *jiéshù* 结束 'end, conclude' as *jiésù*. *Shì* 室 'room' is commonly pronounced in BM with the 3rd tone (as in *jiàoshǐ* 教室 'classroom') instead of the normative 4th tone. In a similar fashion, *jiào* 酵 'yeast' in BM is rendered as *xiào* (as in 發酵 *fāxiào* 'ferment'), and *zhǔ* 主 as *zhú* (as in *chū zhúyi* 出主意 'provide an idea').

Compared to SM, BM also exhibits more robust and recurrent weakening of articulation in unstressed (neutral tone) syllables, which include: (i) vowel neutralization, as in *zhīma* 芝麻 [-mə] 'sesame', *dòufu* 豆腐 [-fə] 'tofu', *gūniang* 姑娘 [-niəŋ] 'girl', (ii) loss of aspiration, as in *pípa* 琵琶 [-pa] 'lute', *hútu* 糊塗 [-tu] 'muddle, confused', (iii) lenition of affricates into fricatives, as in *máocè* 茅厕 [-sʐ] 'toilet', (iv) intervocalic realization of the voiceless retroflex *sh* /ʂ/ as a retroflex approximant [ɻ] in rapid speech tempo. This change in neutral tone syllables is accompanied by weakening and

disappearance of the vowel following /ʂ/. For example, in rapid speech tempo, the word *diànshitái* 电视台 'TV station' can be realized as [tiɛ̃ɻ^{51}tʰai^{35}].

Finally, BM has an additional tone sandhi for the words *qī* 七 'seven' and *bā* 八 'eight', which is similar to that for the words *yī* 'one' and *bù* 'not' in SM (see above).

2.2. Lexicon and morphology

Lexicon and morphology are two linguistic sub-systems that have long attracted scholarly attention. The notable features held to be characteristic of spoken BM are (i) distinct dialectal vocabulary, (ii) high frequency of words with the suffix *-r* 兒, and (iii) high frequency of words with neutral tone syllables (including many neutral tone suffixes) (e.g. Zhōu 1992:1-70, Hóu *et al.* 1998:51). All three features are currently on the decline (e.g. Péng 2005:20, 64). Many dialectal words typical for spoken BM (some of which are also shared with other Northern Mandarin dialects) are being progressively abandoned, e.g. *diānr* 顛兒 'slip away', *gěrle* 隔兒了 'die', *bànlǎ* 半拉 'half', *chǒu* 瞅 or *qiáo* 瞧 'watch, look', *kēi* 剋 'hit; scold', *tēi* (or *tuī*) 忒 'very'. At the same time, some words have been retained and have even been absorbed into the written language, e.g. *gēn* 跟 as the coordinative conjunction 'and', *béng* 甭, short for *bú yòng* 不用 'there is no need to', and *tǐng* 挺 'very'.

A similar trend is observed in the pronominal system, which in old BM included a distinct series of honorific pronouns, developed on the basis of plural personal pronouns: (i) the second-person form *nín* 您, and (ii) the third-person form *tān* 他 (Chao 1976b:

314), as well as (iii) the humilific first-person form [m̩²¹⁴] or [m̩²¹⁴mə⁴] 我們, in reference to the speaker (e.g. Xú 1990: 11). While the second-person form, *nín* 您, is firmly part of the standard language, the first and the third forms are all but obsolete.

Rhotacization (*érhuàyīn* 兒化音) refers to the addition of the retroflex suffix *-r* [ɻ] 兒 to the syllable final, causing the final to become rhotacized (see above, *Rhotacization*). It is often regarded as most typical for BM, e.g. 錢兒 *qiánr* 'money', *bǎndèngr* 板凳兒 'bench, stool', *diànyǐngr* 電影兒 'film'. In addition to its function as a diminutive suffix, which is shared by BM with SM (e.g. *bīnggùnr* 冰棍兒 'popsicle'), *-r* can be used in BM as a derivational suffix, deriving nouns from verbs, e.g. *jiǎngjiu* 講究 'demand' vs. *jiǎngjiur* 講究兒 'rule, custom' (Péng 2005:56).

The many neutral tone suffixes that used to be characteristic for the language of the city (e.g. Zhōu 1998:117-118) are also progressively falling out of use. The most commonly seen suffixes (some of which are also shared with other Northern Mandarin dialects) include: (i) verbal suffixes *ba* 巴 (e.g. *ānba* 安巴 'install'), *da* 达 (e.g. *liūda* 溜達 'take a stroll'), *la* (e.g. *huòla* 攉拉 'stir'), *ge* 咯 (e.g. *dāge* 答咯 'respond'); (ii) adjectival suffixes *ba* 巴 (e.g. *zhǎiba* 窄巴 'narrow'), *teng* 騰 (e.g. *nàoteng* 鬧騰 'noisy'), *labaji/lebaji* 了巴唧 (e.g. *zāng labaji de* 髒了巴唧的 'extremely dirty').

Related to tone and vowel neutralization in unstressed syllables typical for the phonological organization of BM is the development of many fused forms in this dialect. One example are the expressions *yí* 'one item, a specimen of', invariably pronounced with the rising tone, *liǎ* 倆 'two items', and *sā* 仨 'three items' (Chao 1936: 36-38, 1968: 571, Dù 1993: 142, Chirkova 2004). These forms are etymologically fusions of the

numerals *yī* ‘one’, *liǎng* ‘two’, and *sān* ‘three’, respectively, with the measure word *ge*. They arise through the following three steps (Chao 1936: 37). First, loss of nasal endings, which become only a nasalizing factor of the preceding vowel (*liã*, *sã*). Second, weakening of the intervocalic *g* into [ɣ], followed by its subsequent disappearance (resulting in the forms *liã-ə*, *sã-ə*). Three, loss of nasalization and dropping of *-ə*, due to the instability of the forms resulting from step 2 in the phonological system of BM. This type of fusion exemplifies two characteristic features of BM at once: on the one hand, its tendency to overgeneralize the use of the classifier *ge* ‘item’ (which phenomenon, broadly common in northern Mandarin, is ascribed by Hashimoto (1986: 93) to the influences of Altaic languages), and, on the other hand, the stress-based organization of BM lexicon. A parallel case is the independent form *bú* ‘not be’, the fusion of the negative marker *bù* ‘not’ and the copular *shì* ‘be’, in which the rising tone comes from the changed form of *bù*, i.e. *bú* (*shì*) (Wiedenhof 1995: 62-73).

2.3. Syntax

While the differences between BM and SM in phonology, lexicon, and morphology are relatively straightforward, the exact divergences between the two varieties in matters of syntax are more complex. One generalization can be made: while BM generally faithfully conforms to its neighboring northern Mandarin dialects, SM tends to be more composite, so that one construction or a particular function word may combine characteristics of northern and southern Mandarin dialects. In other words, BM is first and foremost a northern Mandarin dialect, whereas SM is by and large transdialectal, marrying syntactic

features of distinct linguistic varieties. For example, similar to the surrounding Héběi dialects (e.g. Lamarre 2003a, 2003b), spoken BM strictly distinguishes between the durative meaning for preverbal locative constructions and the terminative meaning for postverbal locative constructions, as in examples (1-2) (Chirkova and Lamarre 2005; unless otherwise specified, all examples are from Chirkova 2003), whereas SM exhibits a composite pattern, combining for the postverbal locative phrase with the verbs of posture and placement (such as *zuò* 坐 'sit', *zhàn* 站 'stand', *fàng* 放 'put', *guà* 掛 'hang') (i) the terminative interpretation, as in northern Mandarin, and (ii) the durative interpretation, as in the Mandarin dialects of the central linguistic zone (e.g. Wáng 1957, Jaxontov 1957, Li and Thompson 1981: 397-409, Zhū 1982: 182-184, Zhào 1995), as in examples (3-4), from Fàn (1982: 82-84).

(1) BM: 我們在城裡住，不在這兒住。

wǒmen	zài	chéngli	zhù,	bú	zài	zhèr	zhù.
1P	be.in	city.inside	live	not	be.in	here	live

'We live downtown, not here.'

(2) BM: 這《晚報》昨天我擱哪兒了？

zhèi	*Wǎnbào*	zuótian	wǒ	gē	nǎr	le?
this	evening.paper	yesterday	1S	put	where	PF

'Where did I put the *Peking Evening News* yesterday?'

(3) SM: 他一屁股就坐在沙發上。

tā	yí	pìgǔ	jiu	zuò	zai	shāfā	shang.
3	one	buttocks	just	sit	be.in	sofa	up

‘He flopped into the sofa.’, or ‘He sat with all his weight on the sofa.’ (change of location)

(4) SM: 他安安靜靜地坐在沙發上。

tā	ān’ānjìngjìng	de	zuò	zai	shāfā	shang.
3	quiet.quiet	SUB	sit	be.in	sofa	up

‘He was quietly sitting on the sofa.’ (durative)

One more example of divergence between BM and SM in matters of grammar relates to the expression of tense and aspect. The respective tense and aspect systems of the two varieties overlap only partially, whereas those markers that do overlap may have dissimilar meanings and functions. While SM is argued to have a purely aspectual system (e.g. Wáng 1955, vol. I, p. 282, Li and Thompson 1981: 13, 184), BM can express both temporal and aspectual distinctions (e.g. Dragunov 1952: 128-129, Jaxontov 1957: 73-164). Furthermore, BM lacks the SM progressive marker *zài* 在. Instead, to express the progressive meaning, BM uses a construction consisting of the verb *zài* ‘be in’ followed by the object *zhèr* 這兒 ‘here’ or *nàr* 那兒 ‘there’, which is in turn followed by another verbal phrase, i.e. *zài zhèr/nàr/nèr zuò shéme* 在這兒/那兒做什麼, literally ‘be right here/there (in the process of) doing something’, as in example (5):

(5) BM: 兩個人在那兒走要飯。

liǎng ge rén zài nàr zǒu yào fàn.

two item person be.in there walk want rice

‘Two people were (in the process of) walking and begging for food.’

Unlike in SM, the particle *ne* 呢 in BM not only marks the contextual relevance of the situation under discussion, but also expresses continuousness or durativity of an event (e.g. Liú 2001: 88, Zhū 1997: 209-211). In addition to its core functions of expressing subordination and nominalization (which are shared by BM and SM), the particle *de* 的 in BM also has an aspectual meaning when it is used with verbal phrases, either following a verb and its object or being infixed between a verb and its object. In such construction, *de* signals a situation resulting from an event that precedes the narrated time, e.g. *fā de cái* 發的財 generate/*de*/wealth ‘had made a good deal of money’ (Chirkova 2003:46-91). Finally, the aspecto-temporal particle *laide/laizhe* 來的/來著, which signals an event as having taken place in the absolute recent past and often also as being durative, is specific to BM (e.g. Wáng 1955, vol I, p. 292, Chao 1968: 810, Iljic 1983: 65), as in the following example:

(6) BM: 剛才說你來的。

gāngcái shuō nǐ laide.

just.now speak 2S RP

‘We were just speaking about you.’

In concluding this overview, it must be noted that the language of Běijīng, like most Sinitic languages, is insufficiently documented and researched. More corpus studies are required to contribute to a better understanding of its precise make-up and to a more coherent assessment of its relationship to other northern Mandarin dialects, and to the standard language of China.

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Abbreviations: RP: recent past.