

Paper title: *Hoisan-wa* reclaimed: Chinese American language maintenance in contemporary sociolinguistic perspective

While Mandarin Chinese is currently heavily emphasized in language teaching and heritage language arenas, little research has looked at how speakers of other Chinese languages negotiate their language choices and use in relation to this present pressure. This paper looks at the language and cultural maintenance efforts of a specific heritage of Chinese Americans: *Hoisan-wa* (Toishanese/台山話) heritage people. Considered a “dialect” of Cantonese that is around 70% mutually intelligible with Standard Cantonese (Szeto, 2000), *Hoisan-wa* is one of the languages linking nearly all early Chinese immigrants in the U.S.; not only has its status been slowly devalued due to standard Chinese’ (Mandarin, Cantonese) existence in the U.S., it has also been perpetually overlooked in educational research for the last 150 years.

Data come from 100 sociolinguistic interviews of Hoisan heritage people in California. Interviewees, ranging from ages 6-97, many of whom belonging to different generations of the same family, were asked to talk about various issues of language maintenance, including ways *Hoisan-wa* is used in the family, intergenerational communication, and perceived challenges. While domain analysis (cf. Fishman, 1968) of language choice across three generations shows languages shifting from monolingual *Hoisan-wa* grandparents to multilingual *Hoisan-wa*, Cantonese, and English parents to mostly monolingual English children, *Hoisan-wa* language resources available in some families seem to also have been reordered and specialized into functional social spheres (cf. Blommaert, 2010). That is, despite ongoing changes in context of use and esteem, *Hoisan-wa* is still significant to these families in ways that have diverged across generations. Contemporary *Hoisan-wa* in the U.S. diverges sociolinguistically and phonologically from *Hoisan-wa* in China or Cantonese in Hong Kong. Examples include three-way codeswitching (*Hoisan-wa*, Standard Cantonese, English) and use of a variety of words that are considered part of the Taishan substratum lexicon (Yue-Hashimoto, 2005) and so-called “Chinatown Chinese” (Dong & Hom, 1980), which are all distinct characteristics of diasporic speakers and their descendants. Despite broader discourses that *Hoisan-wa* is a “dying” language, data also show that the voiceless alveolar lateral fricative [ɬ], arguably one of the most salient and iconic markers of *Hoisan-wa*, is still used and talked about across all generations.

Looking squarely at *Hoisan-wa* illuminates local understanding of language use in ways that starting from majority languages like Standard Cantonese or Mandarin cannot, and language use of Hoisan heritage people in the U.S. offers implications for the study of the Yue subgroup. As this paper shows, ignoring “dialect” groups like *Hoisan-wa* disregards not only linguistic diversity but also Chinese American history, as speakers and people of this heritage are continually reappropriating and reclaiming the language and the heritage in meaningful ways.

#### References & Works Cited

- Blommaert, J. (2010). *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dong, L. & Hom, M. (1980). Chinatown Chinese: The San Francisco Dialect. *Amerasia*, 7(1): 1-29.
- Fishman, J. (1968). Sociolinguistic perspective on the study of bilingualism. *Linguistics*, 39: 21-49.
- Szeto, C. (2000). *Testing intelligibility among Sinitic dialects*. Proceedings of ALS2K, the 2000 conference of the Australian Linguistic Society.
- Yue-Hashimoto, A. (2005). *The Dancun dialect of Taishan*. Hong Kong: Language Information Sciences Research Center, City University of Hong Kong.