

Analysis of the Inflected *-k* Coda of Personal Pronouns in the Xinhui Dialect

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The morphological system of Chinese is generally considered to be unproductive. Take the concepts of plurality, for example; while Indo-European languages may turn to inflectional methodology, Chinese prefers the lexical strategy: Mandarin has a plural marker *men* 們 suffixed with its preceding pronouns, while Cantonese takes a corresponding *tei* 哋.

(1) Person	Singular Pronoun			Plural Pronoun		
	Mandarin	Cantonese		Mandarin	Cantonese	
first	我	我	‘I/me’	我們	我哋	‘we/us’
second	你	你	‘you _{singular} ’	你們	你哋	‘you _{plural} ’
third	他/她	佢	‘he/him/she/her’	他/她們	佢哋	‘they/them’

In Contrast to most Chinese dialects, Xinhui, a sub-branch of Yue, employs an inflected *-k* coda to express plurality and possession for personal pronouns. Xinhui is located in the southwestern area of the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province, China. As a Yue sub-branch that is mutually unintelligible with standard Cantonese, the *lingua franca* in the entire Yue-speaking area, the Xinhui dialect has received relatively less attention in previous studies. This paper seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of this inflected *-k* of personal pronoun structure in Xinhui.

First of all, the three personal singular pronouns in Xinhui have their corresponding inflected *-k* counterparts respectively, as listed in (2).

(2) Person	Singular Pronoun		<i>-k</i> Inflected Structure	
first	我 [ŋɔ]	‘I/me’	[ŋɔk]	‘we/us/my/our’
second	你 [nei]	‘you _{singular} ’	[niak]	‘you _{plural} /your _{singular} /your _{plural} ’
third	佢 [k ^h ui]	‘he/him/she/her’	[k ^h iak]	‘they/them/his/her/their’

In denoting plurality, the *-k* suffix is fairly similar to the plural marker *-men* 們 in Mandarin, except that *-k* is more strictly distributed. While *-men* 們 can attach to personal pronouns, proper names, and some animate nouns such as titles or professionals, *-k* can only be suffixed to personal pronouns.

The *-k* inflection structure bears a possessive reading when followed by several specific nouns, such as locations, professionals, kinships, etc, indicating both singularity and plurality.

There are also cases that the *-k* inflected structure can be interpreted as either plurality or possession, where the head noun determines the grammaticality of each reading. The more animate the head noun is, the more the sentence will have a plurality reading.