

The Dawei Dialect and Domestic Language Contact

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Abstract

This paper focuses on changing linguistic features in the Dawei dialect because of the occurrence of language contact. Phonological, lexical and grammatical changes in the Dawei dialect due to its contact with other varieties of the language of the same origin are highlighted in this paper. Sociological tactics and theories are applied in this study.

Key words: dialect, language contact, domestic language contact, phonological changes, lexical changes, and grammatical changes.

Introduction

Occurrences of language contact are common in any communities. Such a language contact that occurs in a community results in changes in usual phonological, lexical, grammatical and semantic entities existing in the community. In Dawei community which uses the Dawei dialect, there also occurs a language contact between the dialect and the standardized Myanmar language. This domestic language contact leads to changes in phonological, lexical, grammatical and semantic features, and these are studied from sociological points of view in this paper.

What is language contact?

When two or more languages or language varieties interact each other, language contacts occur. There are three basic causes:

- (a) political cause
- (b) economic cause
- (c) social cause

The language contact caused by political reasons

Changes in politics or communication often lead to a language contact between two languages. This can be termed as the language contact caused by political reasons. It results in the replacement of the language of the ruler into that of the ruled. Such type of language contact is also known as the one caused by colonialism.

The language contact caused by economic reasons

Business relationships between two different regions or nations often give ways to a language contact between two different languages. This type of language contact can be defined as the one caused by economic reasons. Trading between two different regions or areas or nations results in language contacts. This is what has been termed as economic language contact.

The language contact caused by social reasons

The social interactions between two communities which speak different languages also result in language contact. This type of language contact is called social language

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contact. It involves types of language contacts caused by cultural, religious, and educational reasons. Therefore, a particular language contact can be caused by one or all of the reasons mentioned above. A language contact can take place between two dialects or two foreign languages when two communities or societies concerned interact or get in touch with one another.

The Dawei dialect and its language contact

According to the eminent linguists, Myanmar language has descended from Tibeto-Burman originated in Tibeto-Chinese. The Dawei dialect is one of the varieties of Myanmar language. There are many varieties of Myanmar, and one of them has been officially recognised as the standardised language or the Received Pronunciation.

In the paper titled “On Language” by Aung Myint Oo (2010; p 232) the standardised language is defined as follows:

- “- Being printed as the standardised spelling and vocabulary in officially recognised dictionaries;
- Having grammatical and syntactic rules and patterns which are officially recognised;
- Having standardised pronunciations;
- Having the standard of being used in the constitution;
- Being used by general public in important matters;
- Being in accordance with the literary disciplines;”

The term used in this paper “Domestic language contact” does not refer to the interaction of and consequent changes in two different languages which have the same origin. It refers to original or parental language which has developed into various dialects. This paper emphasizes on the changes in the characteristics of the Dawei dialect in accordance with its contact with the standardised Myanmar language.

The Language Contact between the Dawei Dialect and the Standardised Myanmar

The language contact between the Dawei dialect and the standardised Myanmar has already occurred domestically due to economic, social, cultural, literary, and aesthetic reasons. The language contact is found to have caused by following reasons:

- a. Because the standardised Myanmar is the official language;
- b. Because those who speak the standardised Myanmar move to Dawei district, where transportation and communication have become more convenient and reliable, for various reasons;
- c. Because of the marriages between the standardised Myanmar language users and the Dawei dialect users;
- d. Because of the settlement of the Dawei dialect speakers in big cities like Yangon for educational or social or business reasons;

These are the major causes of the easy and direct language contact between the Dawei dialect and the standardised Myanmar language. This domestic language contact increases the rate and speed of linguistic changes in the Dawei dialect. The main reason of these rapid linguistic changes is the fact that the Dawei dialect is basically of only a spoken form.

According to U Tin Hla (1968; p-215), “A spoken sentence, or an utterance, cannot be heard again once it is uttered. Unless it is memorised, it is gone forever. But the written language is recorded in symbols so that it lasts longer than the spoken language.”

As such, Mg Khin Min (Danuphyu) (2009; p-112) writes in his “On linguistics and literature” as follows:

“It is natural that both spoken and written language forms evolve over the ages. However the written form of a language is naturally slower than its spoken form in case of linguistic changes caused by language contact. Therefore, the rapid changes in the features of the Dawei dialect, which occur only in spoken form, are quite natural and reasonable. Most of the linguistic changes in the dialect occur especially in urban areas of the district. It is because the government offices, major business and trading centres are located in those urban areas where most people need to use scientific or technical terms.

Therefore, the Dawei dialect speakers try to practise the standardised Myanmar language in order to avoid misunderstanding, or to maintain smooth communication, when dealing with those in urban areas who speak the standardised Myanmar. That is why the linguistic changes in the Dawei urban areas are faster than those in rural areas.

In “The illustrations of Myanmar Language and Literature”, the scholar Mg Khin Min (Danuphyu) (2004; p-100) remarks on it as follows:

“ When Myanmar language speakers settle down in different regions, those who live in the areas with limited external contacts, have relevantly fewer phonological, lexical, and grammatical changes in the language they use and those in the areas with easier and more convenient accesses to the other regions have relatively faster linguistic changes in their original language.”

Therefore the majority of linguistic changes in the Dawei dialect in this paper are those found in the urban areas of the district. The presentation is divided on phonological, morphological, and grammatical changes in the dialect. The phonological symbols used for the dialect are those used in “Fundamental Phonology and Linguistics” by U Tun Myint.

Phonological changes

Phonological features in the Dawei dialect change, have changed, and are changing because of language contact. The study of this involves both phonological and morphological changes in the dialect.

Vowel changes

The syllables which are made up of the vowel / ì / in the standardised Myanmar were originally pronounced in the vowels / è / and / é /. However, these original vowels are found being pronounced in the vowel / ì / nowadays as those in the standardized language.

Standard	Original dialect	Changed dialect
မိဲ=တန့ (stick/sticky)	မမ=တန့ (stick/sticky)	မိဲ=တန့ (stick/sticky)
/ sì ka□ /	/ sè ka□ /	/ sì ka□ /
မတ့ =တန့(discipline)	မမ=တန့(discipline)	မတ့ =တန့(discipline)
/ sì kã /	/ sè kã /	/ sì kã /
ဝဲ =ထိတ့ (to hit/toplay)	ဝဲ ထိတ့ (to hit/to play)	ဝဲ =ထိတ့ (to hit/to play)
/ tì lai□ /	/ t é lai□ /	/ tì lai□ /

And there are many other such vowel changes in the words of the dialect. In addition, the original vowel / -ã / in some words of the dialect is now being pronounced as / ï / as it is in the standardised Myanmar.

Examples:

Standard	Original dialect	Changed dialect
ဝါ (think/suppose) / -thĩ /	ဝါ (think/suppose) / -thã /	ဝါ (think/suppose) / -thĩ /
နီဝါ(original) / -pĩ gò /	နီဝါ(original) / -pã gò /	နီဝါ(original) / -pĩ gò /
ဝံဝါ(Bangalore) / bĩ g lá /	ဝံဝါ(Bangalore) / bã g lá /	ဝံဝါ(Bangalore) / bĩ g lá /

There are many other words in the dialect changed in this manner.

As such, the original vowel in some words of the dialect / u / is nowadays being pronounced as / au / as in those of the words in the standardised Myanmar.

Standard	Original dialect	Changed dialect
ခနာ(ခ(=fold) / khau jò /	ခနာ(ခ(=fold) / khu jò /	ခနာ(ခ(=fold) / khau jò /
ခေတု(ခ(=mattock) / pau tù /	ခေတု(ခ(=mattock) / pu tù /	ခေတု(ခ(=mattock) / pau tù /
ခေတု(ခ(=be arrogant) / mau mā /	ခေတု(ခ(=be arrogant) / mu mā /	ခေတု(ခ(=be arrogant) / mau mā /

These are some examples of vowel changes in the dialect.

Consonant changes

Language contact also causes consonant changes in morphemes spoken in the Dawei dialect. Examples:

Standard	Original dialect	Changed dialect
ခေတု(=school) / tcàũ/	ခေတု(=school) / klàũ/	ခေတု(=school) / tcàũ/
ခေတု(=rivulet) / tchàũ/	ခေတု(=rivulet) / khlàũ/	ခေတု(=rivulet) / tchàũ/
ကျွန်(=knife/sword) / dà /	ကျွန်(=knife/sword) / thà /	ကျွန်(=knife/sword) / dà /
မ္လိ(=river) / mji /	မ္လိ(=river) / mli /	မ္လိ(=river) / mji /

ဆာဇော်=(elder son)	ဆာဇော်=(elder son)	ဆာဇော်=(elder son)
/ □à dz ‘i/	/ □à g ‘i/	/ □à dz ‘i/
လူနှစ်(twin)	ပွဲနှစ်(twin)	လူနှစ်(twin)
/ □ hmwā/	/ bwā/	/ □ hmwā/

These are some examples of consonant changes in the morphemes of the dialect. The original consonant sounds in the dialect are found to be changing into those in the standardised Myanmar language. Some words in the dialect are changed in both consonant sound in morpheme and the number of morphemes.

Lexical Changes

It has been found that the original words in the Dawei dialect are being replaced with those from the standardised Myanmar language. The major cause of this is the language contact between the dialect and the standardised language.

Examples:

Standard	Original dialect	Changed dialect
တူဇော်(boast/brag) / tcwà /	အိုဇော်(boast/brag) / m̃ ù zà /	တူဇော်(boast/brag) / tcwà /
၂ သီ(ဇ (clock or watch which is out of order) / n ā ji ja □ /	၂ သီခေ (clock or watch which is out of order) / n ā ji □ e/	၂ သီ(ဇ (clock or watch which is out of order) / n ā ji ja □ /
အိမ်စု(to have electrical power failure) / m̃ i pjε □ /	အိမ်ခေ (to have electrical power failure) / m̃ i □ e/	အိမ်စု(to have electrical power failure) / m̃ i pji □ /
ဖ အလုံစုံ (to have the rice boiled enough) / th □ m̃ i ò sū/	အိုလုံစုံ (to have the rice boiled enough) / hm̃ ã ò ū /	အိုလုံစုံ (to have the rice boiled enough) / hm̃ ã ò sū/
(ဇ (.. (movie/biscope) / jou? -ci /	(ဇ (.. (movie/biscope) / ji kà bwé /	(ဇ (.. (movie/biscope) / jou? -ci/
ဗြာစ. ဗြာစ. ထု. ထု. (be cheerful/clearly) / tci tci -li -li /	မမ့မမ့ထု. ထု. (be cheerful/clearly) / si □ si □ la □ la □ /	ဗြာစ. ဗြာစ. ထု. ထု. (be cheerful/clearly) / tci tci -li -li/
၂ စ. ဒိ စ. =(small/bit of/ less) / nè nè /	၂ မ့ဆာ(=small/bit of/ less) / di □ □ à /	၂ စ. ဒိ စ. =(small/bit of/less) / nè nè /
လှူလှူ လှူလှူ =(excessively) / □ -lū □ m̃ i/	၂ လှူ လှူ ဆီ(excessively) / shū □ i’ sh □ □ i’ /	လှူလှူ (excessively) / lū’ -lū/

ခါ သဘူဉ္စေည	(. . နါ . နှိ ဣသ	ဝူဝူ နှိ
(tease/make a joke of)	(tease/make a joke of)	(tease/make a joke of)
/ nau -pjaũ/	/ jε kh ã pj /	/ nu -pjũ/

These are some examples of lexical changes in the dialect. It can be seen that most of the lexical changes occur in nouns and adverbs whereas verbs have the lowest tendency of changing. As for the verbs that have been changed, the verb "to die", which is normally used for the animate is originally used also for the inanimate like "watch, clock, fire" in the dialect. However such verbs in the dialect are now being replaced with those in the standardised Myanmar as a result of the language contact. As for nouns and adverbs which have been changed, some are found to be pronounced as those in standardised Myanmar, and the others are still being pronounced in original vowel sounds. Due to the influence of the standardised Myanmar, the original words in the dialect such as / shū □i' sh□ □i' / and /jε khã pj / have been replaced with the words in the standardised Myanmar / □ -lū □ mĩ / and / nau? -pjaũ/. However, they are still being pronounced / lū -lū / and / nu? -pjũ / as in original phonetics of the dialect.

There can be found many archaic words in the Dawei dialect. The existence of such archaic words can be regarded as one of the characteristics of a dialect. However such archaic words in the Dawei dialect are now being replaced with modernised words in the standardised Myanmar. Some examples of this are:

Standard	Original dialect	Changed dialect
၍ ခ (tide)	ဋ္ဌဇ (tide)	၍ ခ (tide)
/ di je /	/phjà je/	/ di je/
နီဉ္စ-ယီဉ္စ (armpit)	ဝူဝူ တအဲ = ယဇ (armpit)	ယီဉ္စ (armpit)
/ dzãi /	/ la □ kà di dzà /	/ dzãi/
ခဝ သဲ (forest/jungle)	ယီဉ္စ (forest/jungle)	ခဝ သဲ (forest/jungle)
/ tḁ /	/ g □ -naĩ /	/ tḁ/

In this way, it has been found out that many archaic words in the Dawei dialect are declining because of the linguistic influence posted by standardised Myanmar.

Grammatical changes

Language contact also results in grammatical changes in the Dawei dialect. Grammatical change involves the changes in grammatical words and syntax. In the case of the Dawei dialect, only changes in grammatical words have been found. The study of such grammatical change in the dialect is based on the spoken form of the standardised Myanmar. Some examples are -

- Standard	- ခတတု အံ အံ ဝ တု (Do you go to school regularly?)
	/ tcãũ-hmã-hma tε □ jε' là /
- Original dialect	- / kl ã-hmã-hma ta □ bε hã /
- Changed dialect	- / kl ã-hmã-hma ta □ bε là /
- Standard	- နီဉ္စ ` (Do you have enough money?)
	/ pai □ -shã ci' jε' là /

- Original dialect - / ka□ ci' bε' hā/
- Changed dialect - / pi□-shā ci' bε' lā /
- Standard - ' . =နထူ ဧ-အူဝဲအေ့ . ဝ (I'll go there only after cooking.)
/ h`ĩ tchε□ pji hmá θwà mε /
- Original dialect - / h`ã ci□ b`i hā θwà mε /
- Changed dialect - / h`ã ci□ b`i hmá θwà mε /

It can be seen that the original grammar words in the dialect are being uttered as those in the standardised Myanmar. However, only minority of the local people speak in such ways. Such speakers, or language users, are those who have frequent accesses to big cities like Yangon and have frequent social or business contacts with the speakers of the standardised Myanmar. So these can be regarded as the causes of grammatical changes in the Dawei dialect.

Overview

Language contact can occur in any societies. In the Dawei community, domestic language contact between the Dawei dialect and standardised Myanmar language has been found to be taking place. This kind of domestic language contact results in phonological, lexical and grammatical changes in the dialect.

Phonological change in the dialect refers to the fact that the original pronunciations of the words in the dialect are being replaced with those from the standardised Myanmar language because of its influence into the dialect. It is common that difficult pronunciations of words in a language tend to be changed into easier ones of the similar words from another language when the two languages contact one another. However, this is not true in the case of phonological changes in the Dawei dialect. It is reasonable that speaking the dialect is more convenient for the locals as their articulatory organs have already been more familiar with the phonological and phonetic features of the speech sounds in the dialect since childhood. Nevertheless, the locals in the region who speak the dialect have to imitate the pronunciations of the similar words from the standardised Myanmar. This is because of the improvements and developments in transportation and communication which make the region more accessible for anyone who belong to any other ethnic groups in the nation. The standardised Myanmar language serves as the trade language, or the comprehensible one, for anyone from any ethnic communities living in the country. This may be a reason why the locals in Dawei region are using the pronunciations of the words in standardized Myanmar instead of those in their dialect.

Lexical change in the Dawei dialect is found to be faster and higher than phonological and grammatical changes. In every language, words are the basic units both for spoken and written forms. Hence, basic words are mostly used for social relationship and interactions between two individuals, or two communities, or two societies. This happens when the Dawei community speaking the Dawei dialect and another community speaking the standardised Myanmar interact each other due to various socio-economic reasons. Then words from the standardised Myanmar, which is being used more widely than the dialect, may take the places of the original words in the dialect. The adoption of new words, which do not exist in the dialect, can develop the characteristics of the dialect. To prevent this, the locals who speak the Dawei dialect are responsible to conserve the lexical resources of the dialect.

As for grammatical change in the Dawei dialect, there has been found not much syntactic changes. But there are slight changes in grammatic words. In this way,

phonological, lexical, and grammatical changes in the Dawei dialect due to domestic language contact have been studied.

Conclusion

Language is very important for social relationship and interaction. As such, when two communities who speak different dialects in the same language community interacts each other, language still remains as an essential tool for communication. That is why language contact between the Dawei dialect and the standardized Myanmar as two language varieties has occurred for various reasons. Therefore it is quite evident that changes in the Dawei dialect stem from the influence of the standardized Myanmar due to its wider use.

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န . ဒု . ဗဒေအနုကွယ်ခြား ဂျၢၤဒါး အဲ အဲတဲအဲ အဲ အဲသဂ္ဂဒဲတဲသ) နီ တဲအဲ (၂ . တဲ ဗကွဲၤခွဲၤနီၤပဲာ်တဲာ်

န . ဒု . ဗဒေအနုကွယ်ခြား ဂျၢၤဒါး ဘိ သဲသဂ္ဂဒဲ မဲသဂ္ဂဒဲ ဝ (၂ . တဲ ဗကွဲၤခွဲၤနီၤပဲာ်တဲာ်

ပၤ . ထဗျီ = ခ ကး ဂါ ဘိ သဲသဂ္ဂဒဲအဲစ . ဝုဒဲသု = ထဗျီ ပ . ဆဲသဆဲခိ သဲဆဲစ . ဝ

ပ တွဲဆဲတဲစစ သဲ) ဆဲသဆဲသုဗလပူၤဂ္ဂုဗလနီၤဒဲ = ဖိ + ဝ (၂ . တဲ ဗကွဲၤခွဲၤနီၤပဲာ်တဲာ်

ခလညု ဒုၤ (ဗဲ) ထုပ သ ဂျၢၤဒါး ဘိ သဲသဂ္ဂဒဲအဲစ ပါ (၂ . တဲ ဗကွဲၤခွဲၤနီၤပဲာ်တဲာ်