Morpho-syntactic Typology of Chinese Negatives:

A Cross-dialectal Survey

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This talk aims at a cross-dialectal survey of Chinese negatives in terms of morpho-syntactic features. The main observations are as follows.

1. It has been a universal rule in Chinese to have different words for general negation and possession/existence negation respectively. Yet there is a distinction between the North (and the Middle) with [p-/f-] for general negation and [m-] for possession negation respectively, and the South with [m-] for both kinds of negation. New dialectal facts reveal a tendency for a possession negative to grammaticalize into a cover negative for both general and possessive negation.

2. There are two pairs of competing factors influencing the size and semantic division of a negative lexicon. One pair is grammaticalization vs. lexicalization. The former generalizes a negative and consequently lessens the size of a negative lexicon, whereas the latter has negatives fused with other words (as well as other semantic categories) and brings about new negatives. The other pair is frequency-caused weakening vs. stress-motivated reinforcement of negative forms.

3. Negative-predicate ordering has been the only order in Chinese over time and across dialects. Some seemingly complicated cases are discussed and explained.

4. The correlation between word order and negation scope is basically well observed in Chinese. However, in Northwestern dialects including Donggan, the negative strongly tends to be put immediately before the predicative verb/adjective despite the fact that adverbials/auxiliaries before the negative are actually within the scope of negation, e.g., 'very not good' means 'not very good'. This should be an effect of head-attraction of clitics, a wide-attested phenomenon in human languages. Altaic influence might be a factor causing this regional characteristic.

5. While Old Chinese employs *bu* and *fou* for the English adverbial *not* and replying *no* respectively, the Mandarin negative *bu* serves both functions. In some cases, *bu* can be analyzed either way. The double analyses could have lead to the reanalysis of *bu* for *not* into *bu* for *no*. However, in many southern dialects, there are no negatives for *no*. It might be because adverbial negatives in those dialects never serve as a short reply thus cannot be reanalyzed into negatives for *no*. This constraint reflects a more general rule in these dialects, i.e., a verb, adjective or adverb alone can hardly serve as a short sentence without the help of certain particles or other adverbs.