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Fāngyán 方言

The *Fāngyán* 方言 ('Dialect', 'Topolect'), usually attributed Yáng Xióng 揚雄 (53 BC–18 CE), a famous famous *fù* 賦-poet and philosopher, is a collection of dialectal and regional expressions compiled during the end of the Western Hàn period (206 BC – 9 CE, Norman 1988:185). It is the first attested study on linguistic geography and dialectology in China, possibly even worldwide (Wáng 1980[2006]:17, Lǐ 2004:1). Published under the baroque title “Dialectal Expressions from Foreign States and Glosses on Words from Extinct Eras Collected by the 'Light Chart Officials'” (*Yóuxuān shǐzhě juédài yǔ shì biéguó fāngyán* 輶軒使者絕代語釋別國方言, for details regarding the title see Behr 2005: 23 and n. 36), the work is a remarkable witness of early linguistic diversity in China, and it is likely that the modern Chinese term *fāngyán* 方言 “dialect” goes back to the title of the work.

Time of Creation and Authorship

According to his own account, Yáng Xióng collected the data during a period of 27 years from soldiers and candidates for imperial examinations who entered Cháng'ān 長安, the capital at that time, from all parts of the country (Wáng 1980[2006]:17, Lǐ 2004:1). Given Yáng Xióng's biographical data and the long time that he invested into the collection of the data, the compilation of the *Fāngyán* is usually assumed to date back to the early 1st century CE (Wáng 1980[2006]:17). Some scholars, however, have raised doubts whether Yáng Xióng was the real author of the book after all, since he is not mentioned as such in the earliest historiographical records (Liú et al. 1992:9–16, Huá 2007a:60-61). Despite these uncertainties, however, it seems safe to assume that the book was compiled towards the end of the Western Hàn period, some time before 24 CE.

Structure

In its basic structure the *Fāngyán* somewhat resembles the *Ěryǎ* 爾雅, a collection of semantic glosses compiled before the Qín dynasty (221–206 BC, Malmqvist 1995:224-225). In contrast to the *Ěryǎ*, the characters do not belong to the same but to different lexical strata, including dialectal (Wáng 1980[2006]:1) and occasionally also diachronic strata of older varieties of Chinese (Lǐ 2004:19-20). Based on semantic principles which are generally rather loose (for a detailed account on the principles see Huá and Xú 2013:150), the semantic glosses of the *Fāngyán* were originally collated into 15 chapters, of which 13 survive in the extant editions (Lǐ 2004:18, Huá and Xú 2013:150, Yōng 2010: 31). Different *dialect words* (1666 in total, Wáng 2011b:37) are usually first listed and then explained with help of a more common gloss word (367 in total, Wáng 2011b:37), following the scheme:

甲、 乙、 丙， 某 也

jiǎ, yǐ, bǐng, mǒu yě

‘A, B, and C are [all] X’.

In a second step, the dialect words are assigned to dialect locations or regions, following the template:

甲地， 乙地 （之間） 謂 之 某

jiǎdì, yǐdì (zhījiān) wèi zhī mǒu

‘in (the area of) place A and place B one says X’,

as illustrated in (1). This principle, however, is not being strictly followed in all of the glosses.

Sometimes words are only glossed without giving specific geographic information; sometimes

the assignment of words to dialect locations precedes the actual glossing, and sometimes, the dialect words are not specifically listed, as shown in (2). Apart from the basic structure of the glosses in the *Fāngyán*, the examples in (1) and (2) also illustrate how difficult it is to interpret the work, given that the Chinese writing system provides only limited, since indirect, use in reflecting the actual pronunciation of the dialect words. As a result, one needs to rely upon reconstructions of older stages of Chinese in order to obtain an approximate pronunciation, like Middle Chinese (here rendered in Baxter's 1992 transcription system) or Old Chinese (here cited in the reconstruction of Baxter and Sagart 2014).

(1) 黨、曉、哲，知也。楚謂之黨，或曰
 dǎng, xiǎo, zhé, zhī yě. Chǔ wèizhī dǎng huò yuē
 曉，齊宋之間謂之哲。
 xiǎo, Qí Sòng zhījiān wèizhī zhé.

‘The words *dǎng* (MC **tangX* < OC **t^ɕaŋ?*), *xiǎo* (MC **xewX* < OC **q^hew?*), and *zhé* (MC **trjet* < OC **tr[e]t*) all mean “know, understand”. In Chǔ they speak of *dǎng*, or alternatively call it *xiǎo*. In the regions of Qí and Sòng they speak of *zhé*.’ (*Fāngyán*: 1.1)

(2) 貔，陳楚江淮之間謂之□□，北燕朝鮮
 pí, Chénchǔ Jiāng Zhǔn zhījiān wèizhī lái, Běiyān Cháoxiān
 之間謂之□□，關西謂之狸。
 zhījiān wèizhī péi, Guānxī wèizhī lái.

‘For “wild cat” (*pí* 貔), one says *lai* □□ (< MC **lai* < OC **r^ɕəj*) in Chén, Chǔ, Jiāng, and Zhǔn, in the area of Běiyān and Cháoxiān one says *péi* □□ (< MC **pji* < OC **brəj*), and in Guānxī one says *lai* 狸 (< MC **loi* < OC **p.rə*)’. (*Fāngyán*: 8.2)

Editions

The first known commentary on the *Fāngyán* was written by the famous Eastern Jin scholar Guō Pú 郭璞 (276–324) and the oldest complete editions which are still preserved today are from the Sòng 宋 dynasty (960–1279). For a long time, Zhōu Zǔmó's 周祖謨 (1914–1995) *Fāngyán Jiàojiǎn* 方言校箋 [Collation and Annotation to the *Fāngyán*] of 1956 served as an authoritative edition for contemporary investigations. Zhōu closely followed the edition of the Sòng scholar Lǐ Mèngchuán 李孟傳 (1136–1219) compiled in 1200 (Wáng & Huá 2006:163), supplemented by a great deal of the rich commentary literature on the *Fāngyán* which was produced during the Qīng dynasty (1636–1911). During the last two decades, several shortcomings of Zhōu's edition were noted and criticized, including an insufficient treatment of the diverse commentaries and an improper treatment of additional sources (Huá 2007b). In two recent editions of the *Fāngyán*, scholars have been trying to overcome these problems. The edition by Satō (1998) compares Lǐ Mèngchuán's edition with three additional ones from the Sòng dynasty, two of which were not included in Zhōu's edition from 1956. A more recent edition by Huá (2006) additionally includes Wáng Niànsūn's 王念孫 (1744 – 1832) commented version of an old *Fāngyán* edition from the Míng dynasty which was long thought to be lost.

Terminology

The specific terminology which is used in the *Fāngyán* is still not fully understood and has instigated multiple debates in the world of Chinese linguistics. Apart from geographic and administrative terms which are used in order to assign words to dialect areas and regions, many discussions center around a couple of terms in the *Fāngyán* which further specify and

characterize the usage of dialect words. The term *zhuǎnyǔ* 轉語 (literally something like ‘twisted expressions’), for example, occurs six times in the *Fāngyán* and is usually thought to refer to “reading variants”, that is, reading differences resulting from diachronic and diatopic variation (Wáng 1989:24). This chimes well with the opinion of many scholars, that at least part of the word collections in the *Fāngyán* are in fact sets of etymologically related words (Wáng 1980[2006]:24-25, Wáng 1989:24-25, Serruys 1962:321-322). The term lived on in the tradition of *Fāngyán* commentaries and inspired later Chinese scholars, like for example, Qián Yì 錢繹 (1770-1885) in his Commentaries to the *Fāngyán* (*Fāngyán jiānshū* 方言箋疏), to carry out detailed etymological studies of the word entries in the *Fāngyán* (Behr 2007). The usage of the term in the *Fāngyán* itself, however, does not necessarily justify such an interpretation: In entry 10.6 in the *Fāngyán*, for example, *huǐ* 𤇑 (MC *xwojX < OC *[q^wh]^ɿəjʔ) is described as a *zhuǎnyǔ* of *huǒ* 火 ‘fire’ (MC *xwaX < OC *[q^wh]^ɿəjʔ) in the region of Chǔ 楚. In entry 10.44, however, *xiè* 𦉳 (MC *sjet < OC *sat), *mò* 末 (MC *muwk < OC *m^ɿat), and *jì* 紀 (MC *kiX < OC *k(r)əʔ) are glossed as *xù* 緒 ‘thread’ (MC *zjoX < OC *s-m-taʔ) and also labelled as *zhuǎnyǔ* in the Chǔ region. While an etymological relation between the two words in the former case (10.6) can be safely assumed, even solely based on Middle Chinese readings, this is clearly not the case for the latter example (10.44), where neither Middle Chinese nor Old Chinese readings point to etymological relations between any of the words. Even when disregarding the question whether people in Hàn times had a sufficiently clear idea of the historical dimensions of linguistic diversity, it seems thus rather unlikely that the term was used to denote *etymological* relations, and this seems also to hold for the use of the term in the commentaries of Guō Pú (judging from the data reported in Wáng 1986). Wáng (2011a:103) proposes that the term *zhuǎnyǔ* was occasionally used to denote semantic similarity between words, but this does not seem very likely either, given that semantic similarity should hold for all dialect words occurring in the same gloss in the

Fāngyán, while only six cases out of more than 300 cases are marked as *zhuǎnyǔ*.

Another term that is frequently used in the *Fāngyán* is *tōngyǔ* 通語 ‘common language’ which occurs 34 times and is used as a label for specific dialect words, following the glossing template

甲、 乙, 通語 也

jiǎ, yǐ tōngyǔ yě

‘A and B are *tōngyǔ*’.

Many scholars assume that *tōngyǔ* refers to a “standard language” of Hàn times which served as the basic language to explain the dialectal variants (Zhōu 1956:IX, Lǐ 1990:60). Some scholars even take the term itself as evidence that a standard language existed during Hàn times (Wáng 1980[2006]:20f). However, the term is only used sporadically, often even in contexts which are not in concordance with the idea of a common standard language (Liǔ 2007:155f), and it seems at least equally likely that the term was simply used to denote “popular wordings” (*tōngxíng de shuōfǎ* 通行的說法, Liǔ 2007:155f) *within* the various dialect regions mentioned in the *Fāngyán*.

Dialect Geography

Mapping the dialect data of the *Fāngyán* to dialect areas faces certain obstacles. Not only is the terminology for place names far from coherent, including names of states and fiefdoms from the Zhōu dynasty, administrative terms of Hàn times, terms of physical geography (rivers and mountains), and terms comprising larger areas (Serruys 1959:78-85, Wáng 1980[2006]:18-19, Liú *et al.* 1992:107f). It is also not very precise, since it mixes terminology from different times to denote a complex formation of geographic regions that may intersect, overlap, even include each other. Given that the dialect words in the *Fāngyán* themselves

also may reflect speech traditions from different times (Wáng 1980[2006]:19f), it is difficult to use the *Fāngyán* directly to draw dialect maps as they are common in modern dialectology.

Starting with the studies of Lín Yǔtáng 林語堂 (1895–1976), e.g. Lín 1933 (a Chinese translation of a chapter from his now lost 1923 Leipzig dissertation entitled *Altchinesische Lautlehre*), scholars have repeatedly tried to identify the dialect areas which are mentioned in the *Fāngyán*. Since multiple dialect regions are often summarized in one entry, following the schema

甲, 乙, 丙 之間 jiǎ, yǐ, bǐng zhī jiān

‘in the area of A, B, and C’,

it is possible to count how often specific regions overlap, and use these frequencies to cluster the distinct places into larger dialect areas. Unfortunately, the dialect areas which have been proposed so far, differ greatly from each other, both in their structure and their size. While Lín (1933) postulates fourteen dialect areas, Lúo and Zhōu (1958) postulate seven, Serruys (1959) six, and Liú *et al.* (1992) and Lǐ (2004) twelve (see the summary in Liú *et al.* 1992: 104-106). Behr (2010: 571), further groups the 12 areas of Liú *et al.* (1992) into three major zones, depending the origin of the respective dialect vocabularies (predominantly Sinitic, mixed, or predominantly non-Sinitic). One major reason for these differences is probably that all analyses are based on intuitive data inspection, rather than strict and formal clustering principles. A formally stricter approach is presented in Matsue (2013:191-194) where dialect maps of the *Fāngyán* gloss words are used to calculate the degree of linguistic continuity and discontinuity between the major dialect areas in the *Fāngyán*. It seems, however, that this approach needs to be further enhanced by using more sophisticated approaches to modeling and visualization.

Character Use

Not only the aphonetic nature of the Chinese writing system, but also the way Chinese characters are used to denote dialect pronunciations make it difficult to interpret the data in the *Fāngyán*. Apart from regularly used characters which were taken to reflect the pronunciation of specific words (*jiǎjièzì* 假借字 'loan characters' according to the classical *liùshū* 六書 classification of Chinese characters), the *Fāngyán* also shows a considerable amount of extremely rare and even unique character variants (*qízì* 奇字, i.e. 'rare' or 'hapax characters', Huá 2000a:45). While scholars assumed for a long time that most of the *hapax* characters were specifically created by Yáng Xióng in order to represent dialect readings (e.g. Luó 1956:II), research on excavated sources has shown that many of the rare characters are variants of paleographically attested ancient characters (Huá 2000a:46f). A closer inspection of the relation between phonetic components and actual readings (usually derived from *fǎnqiè* 反切 spellings in Guō Pú's commentary) seems to provide further evidence that the majority of the *hapax* characters were created *before* the *Fāngyán* was compiled (Huá 2000b:47), reducing the number of unresolved *hapax* characters from originally around 300 to about 100 (Huá 2000b:48, Wáng 2006:42-54). Whether these characters were actively created for the purpose of dialect documentation remains an open question.

A further challenge for the investigation of character use in the *Fāngyán* is the phonological interpretation of words denoted by two character-entries (also called *binoms*), since it is not always clear whether they were used to denote monosyllabic words with consonant clusters, or pure multisyllabic words (Serruys 1959: 103-120). The majority of these cases is still not well understood, and in some cases there is even no agreement whether certain two-character-sequences correspond to one word or two. As an example, consider the case of the dialect word *qián-xuān* 虔儼, OC *gran-qwhen (*Fāngyán* 1.2),

glossed as *hui* 慧 ‘wise’, which Bái (1990:18) analyses as one word, while Zhōu (1956) analyses it as two separate words. A first explicit attempt to resolve two-character-words in the *Fāngyán* was made by Serruys (1959:102-140), who proposed to distinguish “dimidiation binoms”, binoms resulting from clitisation, and pure compounds of two independent words or morphemes. Dimidiation is hereby understood as a process by which bisyllabic words evolve from the simplification of complex syllable onsets, such as the *Fāngyán* word for “locust” in the Nánchǔ 南楚 area, *zhènmǎng* 蟪蛄 < MC **tsyaeH-mangX*, which Serruys (1959: 108) reconstructs as a reflex of an OC form **ts-manj* (transliteration of Serruys was adjusted according to Baxter and Sagart 2014). Clitisation is described as a process by which syllabic elements are added before or after monosyllables, such as *cānggē* 鶻駟 < MC **tshang-ka*, a *Fāngyán* word for “goose” in the Nánchǔ area, which Serruys (1959:110) analyses as an enclitic expansion of an older word **ts^hanjk*. Unfortunately, these analyses were not pursued further by later scholars, and a full critical account of Serruys at times very idiosyncratic proposal is still pending. Wáng (2011a:90-94) investigates to which degree monomorphemic two-character words already occur in older texts. The study provides interesting statistical accounts, but does, unfortunately, not include a phonological investigation of the data.

Phonological Investigations

Apart from Serruys (1959) no further exhaustive phonological investigations of the *Fāngyán* have been carried out so far. In a couple of studies, however, scholars have tried to identify which linguistic varieties are reflected in the *Fāngyán*, and whether they can be compared with the contemporary Chinese dialects. The studies are very diverse both regarding scope and methodology. The reconstruction systems for older character readings vary greatly, with most studies being restricted to Middle Chinese readings (e.g. Yáng 2008 and Lǐ 1987) and

some studies even disregarding the phonological aspects completely (e.g. Càì 2003 and Dù and Gāo 2012). Given the large time span between the compilation of the *Fāngyán* and the Chinese dialects spoken today, all studies which restrict themselves to sporadic matches between modern dialect words and the dialect readings which occur in the *Fāngyán* have to be taken with a considerable amount of care, since with a limited number of comparanda it is difficult to control for the possibility of chance resemblances. As an example, consider the proposal by Lǐ (1987:67) who identifies the *Fāngyán* expressions *lǐfù* 李父 (MC *liX-pjuX < OC *C.rəʔ-p(r)aʔ) and *lǐěr* 李耳 (MC *liX-nyǐX < OC *C.rəʔ-nəʔ) with the words [li³¹pu³¹] ‘tiger’ and [li³¹ŋ₁i³⁵] ‘tigress’ in Tǔjiā 土家, an unclassified Sino-Tibetan language spoken in South-Central China. Although the similarity between the words seems to be striking, both regarding their phonetic and semantic similarity (at least in Middle Chinese), this word comparison can, unless more matchings are found, by no means be taken as proof that the *Fāngyán* really documents an ancestor of the Tǔjiā language (Wang 1996:242-243, Zhào and Huáng 1998). The situation is similar for the proposal by Zhào and Huáng (1998:107), who trace *Fāngyán* entries for “wild cat” (*Fāngyán* 8.2), as illustrated in (2), back to Hmong origin, proposing that lateral reflexes, like *lái* ㄌㄞ, and labial reflexes, like *péi* ㄆㄞ, reflect former complex consonant clusters of [p] and [l] which are still preserved in some Hmong varieties, such as Chuanqiandian Miao, where “cat” is pronounced as [pli]: As long as these examples remain single instances, not backed by larger numbers, it is hard whether they are just chance resemblances or reflect real language history. As Baxter and Sagart (2014:112-116) illustrate for dialect expressions in the Hàn glossary of paronomastic glosses *Shímíng* 釋名 (Bodman 1954, Xū 1989, Wú 2010), a thorough comparison of dialect data from Hàn times with proposed reconstructions for Hàn time readings can yield valuable insights into the dialect diversity of China's past. Regarding the *Fāngyán*, this work has yet to be done.

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