

Semantic Shift and Variation in Formosan Languages

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Semantic shift and variation are found across Formosan languages. There are variations between different dialects in each Formosan language, such as the ones reported for Rukai (Li 1977), Paiwan (Ho 1978), Puyuma (Ting 1978), Tsou (Li 1979), Bunun (Li 1988), and Atayal (Li 1998). These variations are mostly phonological although a few lexical variations are also mentioned. Variations of Formosan languages, in fact, can be found at all levels of language, including lexical, phonological, morph-syntactic, and semantic. There are very few studies of morpho-syntactic variations in Formosan languages, such as Huang's (1995) comparison of the syntactic structure of two Atayal dialects and Teng's (2011) study of the noun phrase conjunction in three Puyuma dialects. There is none on semantic variations.

Variations can also be found due to age (Li 1982a), sex (Li 1982b), or social classes (Rau 2000) in the same speech community. Work of this type has only been done on the Atayalic group and Yami so far. Similar variations may be found in the other Formosan languages. This requires further investigation.

In this paper I shall examine various types of semantic shift and variation in Formosan languages.