

1. Introduction

Nanjing is located in the southern bank of the downstream Yangzi River (長江) and is the capital of Jiangsu (江蘇) Province. Previously called Jinling (金陵), Jianye (建邺) or Jiankang (健康), Nanjing started its name from the Ming Dynasty. Historically, ten dynasties established their capitals here, so Nanjing has always been one of the most significant political, cultural, and socioeconomic centers in China. Besides, when natural disasters and invading or civil wars broke out in northern China, a large amount of population kept on moving southwards in search of peaceful lives. On account of its convenient communication, excellent geographic location, and in particular, military advantage, Nanjing was not only a protective citadel for the refugees, but an aggressive target for those barbarians. The historically large-scale immigration concomitantly brought to the Nanjing dialect the “linguistic invasion” which gradually shifted its linguistic status and eventually transformed its membership from Wu to Mandarin.¹

In recent decades, strong policy to enforce Standard Chinese, because of a great number of immigrants from northern Jiangsu and neighboring Anhui, the present-day Nanjing dialect has undergone a swift change. It shows more and more linguistic features from Standard Chinese, like the split of [y] from [i], the distinction of [n/l], [an/aŋ], [ən/əŋ] and [in/iŋ] (please refer to Liu 1995, 4-11 for more discussion).² As a result, typical linguistic characteristics of the Nanjing dialect have faded out rapidly. Among these fading characteristics, the most remarkable one is the retroflex diminutives which have suffered from a severe decline of use.³ Nowadays, only the old preserve the

¹ The Nanjing dialect belonged to the Wu family before the East Jin Dynasty, but belongs to Jianghuai Mandarin now. The linguistic status change of the Nanjing dialect into the Mandarin family resulted mainly from the revolt of the Xiong Nu barbarians (匈奴) at the end of the West Jin Dynasty, an event historically called Yongjiazhiluan (永嘉之亂). This notorious war forced a great number of nobles and refugees in northern China to move southwards to the basin of the Yangzi River. At that time, the immigrants were even more in number than the original residents in Nanjing, so the languages of the northerners had a crucial influence upon the Nanjing dialect. Besides, there were still many other subsequent historical, usually negative, events that caused the change of linguistic status in the Nanjing dialect. For a brief and quick review, please see Liu (1995, 3-4).

² The Nanjing dialect can be roughly divided into two varieties in terms of speakers' generations. The old variety, spoken by those aged more than eighty and inhabiting in the Qinhuai, Baixia, and Jianye districts, is representative of the Nanjing dialect. This variety is in restrictive use now, and is predicted to disappear in the not-so-distant future. In contrast, the new variety is linguistically similar to Standard Chinese, and is used by the majority of residents in Nanjing, especially those under the age of fifty (Fu 2004; Lu 2000).

³ Most Mandarin dialects shape their diminutives by suffixing to the stems a retroflex morpheme (i.e., -r, -l) coming historically from [ʂ]. These diminutives initially denote meanings of smallness or hypocorism. However, the notion of smallness or hypocorism has degenerated in present-day use, and the use of diminutives has become a

retroflex diminutives which are the main focus of this study, while the young delete the retroflex suffix “er” [ɐʳ] or replace it with “zi” [tsɿ].⁴ In spite of the expected coming vanishment, retroflex diminutives in the Nanjing dialect show plenty of peculiar characteristics that are different from those in Beijing Mandarin, and, therefore, are worthy of further explorations.

The remainder of this study has the following organization. Section 2 reviews the formation of retroflex diminutives in the Nanjing dialect. Special attention is directed to the status of prevocalic glides in these diminutives. Section 3 provides an overview of Optimality Theory (OT) and its theoretical advantages. Section 4 applies OT to retroflex diminutives in the Nanjing dialect. Section 5 specifically discusses whether prevocalic glides are preserved or deleted in forming retroflex diminutives in the Nanjing dialect. Section 6 centers on two issues of the interaction between [tɕ], [tɕ^h], and [ɕ] and prevocalic glides [i] and [y] in the formation of retroflex diminutives among Mandarin dialects. Section 7 provides the conclusion of this study.

2. Retroflex Diminutives in the Nanjing Dialect

Retroflex diminutives extensively exist in the Mandarin dialects, and the most famous and best-studied case is Beijing Mandarin. In terms of retroflex diminutives, the Nanjing dialect is similar to Beijing Mandarin, but the former receives relatively less attention than the latter.⁵ As far as I know, only Liu (1995), Huang (2003a, 2003b, 2005) and Wang (2008) have some discussion towards this issue. Though these works are largely descriptive, the data they collected, with my own fieldwork survey, are the basis of the analysis in the present study.

Discussing retroflex diminutives in the Nanjing dialect requires an introduction to the canonical syllable structure among Chinese dialects, as structurally illustrated in Table 1. The maximal syllable

stylistic feature, instead of a grammatical one.

⁴ Traditionally, the retroflex suffix “er” is phonetically symbolized as [ɐʳ], but [ɐʳ] is used in this study in order to clearly manifest the retroflex feature [ʳ] deriving from the simplification of [ɐʳ].

⁵ The retroflex diminutives in Beijing Mandarin have appealed to a great multitude of related literature (Chao 1968; Li 1996; Lin and Wang 1992; Lu 1995; Peng 2004; Wang 2005, among others), and have been analyzed under different phonological frameworks, such as Linear Approach (Cheng 1973), Nonlinear Approach (Duanmu 1990; Goh 1997; Lin 1989), Feature Geometry (Wang 1997; Yin 1986, 1989) and Optimality Theory (Ma 2003; Zhou 1995). Based on Li (1986), retroflex diminutives in Beijing Mandarin can be divided into two types, the additive type and the fusional type. In the former, [ɐʳ] is added directly to the end of the stems because the stem rimes are unsuitable for retroflexion, like [tɕi] → [tɕiɐʳ] “chick.” In the latter, [ɐʳ] is incorporated into the stems as a retroflex feature, like [p^ho] → [p^hoʳ] “an old woman” and [ia] → [iaʳ] “tooth,” for the rimes and retroflexion are articulatorily compatible. However, unlike the Nanjing dialect, the stem rimes of the retroflex diminutives are never replaced by [ɐʳ] in Beijing Mandarin. This will become evident in the coming discussion of the retroflex diminutive in the Nanjing dialect.