Jeopardized Lingui Dialects

Shiwen Pan

Guangxi University

Abstract

This paper examines linguistic features of Lingui dialects, a group of linguistic variants spoken currently by about half a million rural people in the vicinity of Guilin City. Data of the study lead to the conclusion that Lingui dialects were related to Old Cantonese. Unlike contemporary Cantonese, Lingui dialects are non-standard vernaculars with a low status and there have been deeply-rooted negative attitudes towards them. Due to little mobility of the population resulting from the self-sufficient agricultural economy, Lingui vernaculars have miraculously survived to the present day. In the past centuries, a large part of their speech communities have converted to Guilinese. Nowadays, speakers of the dialects are experiencing a speedy language shift to Guilinese and their speaking population is rapidly shrinking. It is predicted that Lingui dialects, like many endangered languages in the world, can hardly survive this century unless effective language preservation measures are taken.

1. Introduction

Lingui dialects refer to the different vernaculars spoken in Lingui and Linchuan Counties, which are located in the Northeast part of Guangxi Autonomous Region China, covering an area of about 2500 square kilometers. Linchuan County lies to the east of Guilin City and Lingui County to its west. Linchuan used to be part of Lingui County before it became an independent county in 1950s. The two counties have a total population of around 680,000 (Lingui County has approximately 290,000 and Linchuan County 390,000), composed chiefly of peasants and handicraftsmen. Interestingly, people of their surrounding counties speak a sub-standard Guilinese instead. As illustrated by the attached map, the habitats of Lingui dialect speakers are geographically sandwiched by Guilinese speaking areas: Guilin City in the center and counties of Xing'an, Guangyang, Gongcheng, Yangshuo, Lipu and Yongfu from outside. Guilin became a city of the Qin Empire in 214 BC, following a successful completion of the Lin Canal which connects the watercourses of Yangtze River and the Pearl River. Contacts between people in this region and non-Cantonese speaking people from the north have thus become frequent. The imported northern language, the ancestor of Guilinese, gradually established as a prestigious local standard and exerted great influences on the local population.

Lingui dialects are an endangered language species on which very little research has been done so far. The purpose of the study is to investigate the linguistic features and system of Lingui dialects, as well as their changes and preservation. The study also made attempts to

explore social, political and education factors that have caused a continuous decline of their speaking population in the past.
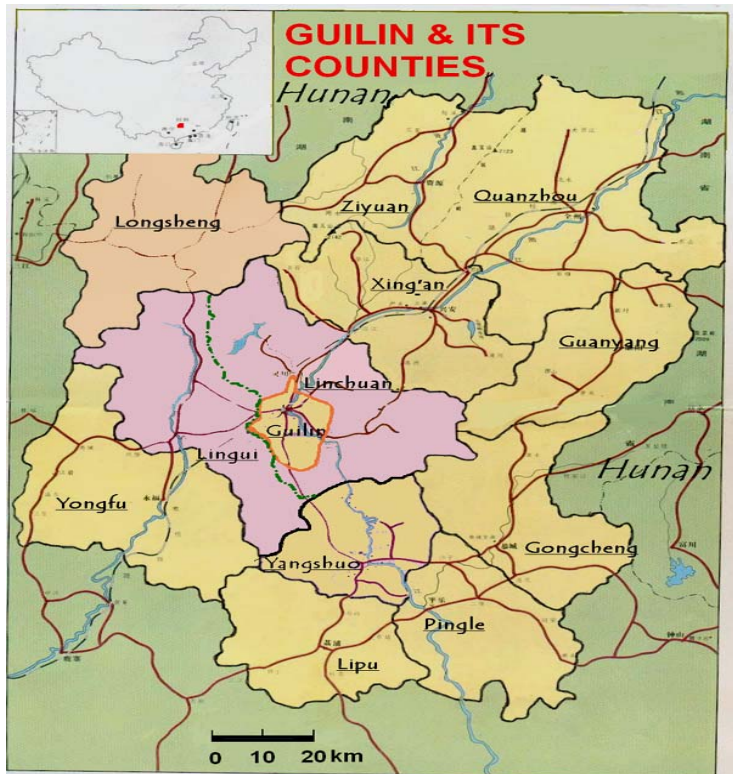
2. Data collection

I conducted interviews in Guilin City from Jan. 2002 to July 2002 to collect information of seven major Lingui variations. They are dialects of Chaotian, Putao, Qifengzhen, Sitang, Dabu, Wutong and Miaotou. Inflows of a large number of peasants from Guilin's neighboring counties in recent years enabled me to easily find subjects for each dialect species in the city. A qualitative method was employed in this study, which began with identifying speakers of Lingui dialect species, followed by interviews. Subjects, especially those who earned a decent status such as a store-owner or a manager of a business, were normally quite reluctant to 'downgrade' themselves before their customers and inferiors by speaking Lingui dialects. Due consideration was given to subjects' sensitivity about the low status of these dialects. I managed to conduct most of the interviews in a location without a third party nearby so that it could be completed more efficiently without causing unnecessary embarrassment to my subjects.

Each interview was conducted in either Putonghua or Guilinese, the lingua franca for the people living and working in Guilin. Subjects were first asked questions about their ethnicity, the village they lived in, the age to learn a second language, the medium of instruction at schools, TV programs that villagers watch, and their attitudes toward both Guilinese and their dialect. The interview would then be focusing on the subject's native tongue. A list of linguistic items, which included words, expressions and sentences, was prepared (see

Appendix 1). These linguistic items were designed to elicit linguistic features of each species. Subjects were asked to pronounce each of the linguistic items in their native vernacular and their responses were transcribed into IPA. An interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. A total of eight subjects speaking various Lingui vernaculars participated in the interviews and their linguistic data were used for the study.

3. Findings
Sound System

   Having sorted and analyzed the collected data, I found that Lingui dialects have a sound system extremely similar to that of Cantonese. Table 1 below lists vowels of Lingui dialects in comparison with vowels of both Cantonese and Putonghua. It shows Lingui dialects have the mid-vowel /œ/and its allophone [ɛ], which are sound markers of Cantonese to distinguish itself from Putonghua, Guilinese and other Chinese dialects.

Table 1. Vowels of Lingui Dialects, Cantonese and Putonghua

Lingui Dialects	Cantonese	Putonghua/Guilinese
i ü u e ə ɛ œ ɔ a	i ü u e ə ɛ œ ɔ a	i ü ɰ u e ə ɔ a

   A comparison of the diphthongs of the three systems shows that Lingui dialects have the same set of diphthongs that Cantonese has, i.e. ai, ei, ao, ou, iu, ua, ui, ɔi. In other words, Cantonese and Lingui dialects have an extra ɔi, which is absent in Putongua and Guilinese.

Table 2. Consonants of Lingui Dialects and Cantonese

	Stop	Affricate	Fricative	Nasal	Oral
Bilabial	pʰ(p) p (b)			m (m)	w (w)
Labiodentals			f		
Coronal	tʰ (t) t (d)	tsʰ (c) ts(z)	s(s)	n (n)	l (l)
Palatal		tjʰ(q) tj(j)	ś (x)		j (y)
Retroflex					
Velar	kʰ (k) k(g)		h(h)	ŋ(ng)	

Table 2-(1). Consonants of Putonghua (for Comparison)

	Stop	Affricate	Fricative	Nasal	Oral
Bilabial	pʰ(p) p (b)			m (m)	w (w)
Labiodentals			f		
Coronal	tʰ (t) t (d)	tsʰ (c) ts(z)	s(s)	n (n)	l (l)
Palatal		tjʰ(q) tj(j)	ś (x)		j (y)
Retroflex		**tʂʰ (ch) tʂ(zh)**	**ʂ (sh)**		**ɻ (r)**
Velar	kʰ (k) k(g)		h(h)	ŋ(ng)	

Notes: 1.   Letters in brackets are symbols of *pinyin* used in P.R China.

2. Letters in bold are retroflex Putonghua sounds, which exist in neither
Lingui dialects nor Cantonese.
3. To avoid confusion with palatal ś which is x in Chinese *pinyin*, /h/ is used for
the velar fricative /x/ in Table 2, Table 2-(1) and examples afterwards.

Similarities with Cantonese

In addition to the commonness discussed above, similarities between Lingui dialects and contemporary Cantonese are found in abundance at levels of lexicons, phonology and lexicon-syntactic structures.

Lexicon-syntactic

Two word formation particles which are used productively in both Lingui dialects and Cantonese, while Putonghua, Guilinese and other Chinese dialects have quite different counterparts. (Note: In each example below IPA is used in slashes beneath its *pinyin* counterpart, while the word in brackets is the geographic location of the dialect.)

•*de (di)* is used as a plural particle, while Putonghua and Guilinese have
men/mən/ as their plural particle, e.g.

	Lingui	**Cantonese**	**Putonghua**	**Guilinese**
'we'	ngodi	ngode	women	women
	/ŋɔdi/ (Sitang)	/ɔdɛ/	/wɔmən/	/wɔmən/
	ade			
	/adɛ/ (Putao)			
'you'	neide	neide	nimen	nimen
	/neidɛ/(Putao)	/neidɛ/	/nimən/	/nimən/
	neidi			
	/neidi/ (Sitang)			
'they'	taide	koide	tamen	tamen
	/taidɛ/(Chaotan)	/kɔidɛ/	/tamən/	/tamən/
	taodi			
	/taudi/ (Sitang)			

•*ga* is the particle for an adjective ending in both Lingui dialects and Cantonese, while its counterparts are *de* /də/ for Putonghua and *di* /di/ for Guilinese respectively, e.g.

	Lingui	**Cantonese**	**Putonghua**	**Guilinese**
yellow'	wongga	wongga	huangde	huangdi
	/wɔŋga/	/wɔŋga/	/huaŋdə/	/huaŋdi/
	(Putao)			
'red'	**hongga**	**hongga**	**hongde**	**hongde**
	/hɔŋga/	/hɔŋga/	/hɔŋdə/	/hɔŋdi/
	(Putao)			

Phonological

Velar nasal initial /ŋ/ appears in words of both Lingui dialects and Cantonese, but initial /ŋ/ does not exist in Putonghua and Guilinese, e.g.

	Lingui	**Cantonese**	**Putonghua/Guilinese**
'five'	ng	ng	wu

	/ŋ/(all samples)	/ŋ/	/wu/
'ox'	ngiau	ngau	niu
	/ŋiau/ (Sitang)	/ŋau/	/niəu/

Lingui dialects share with Cantonese a number of consonants. They are marked phonological features that differentiate Lingui dialects from other Chinese dialects such as Putonghua and Guilinese.

Putonghua/Guilinese		**Lingui Dialects/Cantonese**
j /tj/	↔	g /g/
k /k/	↔	h /h/
h /h/	↔	f /f/ or w /w/

	Examples:	**Putonghua Guilinese**	**Lingui**	**Cantonese**
j /tj/ ↔ g /g/	'speak'	jiang /tjiaŋ/	gong (Qifenzheng) /gɔŋ/	gong /gɔŋ/
	'nine'	jiu /tjiəu/	giou (Chaotian) /giəu/	gou /gəu/
k /k/ ↔ h /h/	'cry'	ku /ku/	hau (Sitang) /hau/	ham /ham/
	'open'	kai /kai/	hai (Wutong) /hai/	hoi /hɔi/
h /h/ ↔ f /f/ or w /w/	'fire'	huo /huɔ/	fu (Sitang,Putao) /hu/	fo /hɔ/
	'speech'	hua /hua/	wo (Putao/Wutong) /wɔ/	wa /wa/

Lexical

A large number of words and expressions that are identical/similar to Cantonese are found in the collected data. Examples:

Table 3. A list of Lexical Items

	Lingui	Cantonese	Putonghua	Guilinese
'two'	yi /ji (Wutong)	yi /ji/	er /ər/	e /ə/
'five'	ng /ŋ/ (All)	ng /ŋ/	wu /wu/	wu /wu/
'seven'	tsa /tsʰa/(Putao)	Tsa /tsʰ a/	qi /tjʰi/	qi /tjʰi/
'ten'	sa /sa/ (Putao)	sap/sap/	shi /ʂɯ/	si /sɯ/
'speak'	gangwa(Sitang) /gaŋwa/	gangwa /gaŋwa/	shuohua / ʂuɔhua/	jianghua /tjiaŋhua/
'yesterday'	tsanye (Putao) /tsʰanjɛ/	tsanye /tsʰanjɛ/	zhuotian /tʂuɔtien	zuotian /tsuɔtien
' we'	ngodi (Sitang) / ŋɔdɛ/	ngodi / ŋɔdi/	women /wɔmən/	women /wɔmən/
'you'	neide (Putao) /neidɛ/	neide /neidɛ/	nimen /nimən/	nimen /nimən/
'tiger'	fu (Dabu) /fu/	fu /fu/	laohu /lauhu/	laohu /lauh /
'stomack'	tou (Wutong) /təu/	tou /təu/	duzi /dutsɯ/	duzi /dutsɯ/
'eye'	ngan (Wutong)	ngan	yan	yan

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	/ ŋan/	/ ŋan/	/jan/	/jan/
'do'	zou (Sitang)	zou	zuo	zuo
	/tsəu/	/tsəu/	/tsɔu/	/tsɔu/
'come'	lei (Sitang)	lei	lai	lai
	/lei/	/lei/	/lai/	/lai/
'and'	tong (Sitang)	tong	he/han	ho
	/tɔŋ/	/tɔŋ/	/hə/, /han/	/hɔ/
'chicken'	gei (Wutong)	gei	ji	ji
	/gei/	/gei/	/tji/	/tji/
'flower'	fa (Chaotian)	fa	hua	hua
	/fa/	/fa/	/hua/	/hua/
'dog'	gao (Sitang)	gao	gou	gou
	/gau/	/gau/	/gəu/	/gəu/
'open'	hai (Wutong)	hoi	kai	kai
	/hai/	/hɔi/	/kai/	/kai/

As demonstrated, Lingui dialects have numerous phonological rules and a large lexical repertoire that are similar to Cantonese. Do these similarities reflect a genetic kinship between Lingui dialects and Cantonese or are they merely borrowed elements from Cantonese through language contact? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine rules governing language borrowing and to look at geo-political and sociolinguistic conditions that might contribute to linguistic changes in these dialects. Borrowing occurs when people speaking different language varieties engage in contact. It involves loaning lexical items from one language system to another for purposes of convenience, novelty, fashion, or identity. When one language borrows from another, its elements are likely to be borrowed too, though a low language form tends to borrow more from a high form (Fishman, 1999). Borrowing may involve loaning phrases, sentence patterns or even sounds from one system to another, but borrowing does not involve borrowing a complete sound system – when that happens, language shift may occur.

Turning to the similarities, we may not exclude the possibility that some lexical items were loaned from Cantonese in recent centuries. However, the bulk of the linguistic data has revealed similar systems inherited from a shared parenthood. It is unlikely that the sound system and syntactic patterns shown above were borrowed from Cantonese speakers. The conclusion is therefore Lingui dialects were from a prototypal language that was also the ancestor of contemporary Cantonese. Let's call this prototypal language Old Cantonese to distinguish it from Old Mandarin at about 2200 years ago.

A review of the regional history also sheds lights on this issue. Guilin district used to be ruled by kings of Yue State whose capital was in the vicinity of Canton. It was cut off from its Cantonese connections in 214 BC when Guilin became a new city ruled by Northerners of the Qin Empire. Due to political reasons and transportation difficulties, contacts between Cantonese speakers and Lingui dialect speakers were drastically decreased. Although Canton areas later became a part of China's territory under emperors of various dynasties, Guilin district since then has belonged to Guangxi Province, a political administration independent of Canton, and this situation lasts to the present time.

On the other hand, inflows of Guilinese elements to Lingui dialects through language contact continued from generation to generation. Influences from Guilinese have partially caused deviations in Lingui dialects, which gradually became a group of mutually unintelligible variations. The following list exemplifies some lexical deviations of the dialects:

Table 4. Lexical Deviations in Lingui Dialects

	Putonghua	Dabu	Sitang	Chaotian	Wutong	Putao	Cantonese
'we'	wo /wɔ/	wo /wɔ/	ngo /ŋɔ/	o /ɔ/	wu/wu/	nga /ŋa/	o /ɔ/
'two	er /ər/	yi /ji /	ni /ni/	yi /ji/	yi /ji /	yi /ji/	yi /ji /
'five'	wu /wu/	ng /ŋ/	ng /ŋ/	ng /ŋ/	ng /ŋ/	ng /ŋ/	ng /ŋ/
'hundred'	bai /bai/	bie /biɛ/	ba /ba/	ber /bə/	be /bɛ/	bi /bi/	ba /ba/
'sun'	taiyang /taijaŋ/	wode /wɔdə/	niadao /niadau/	noidi /nɔidi/	wodao /wɔdau/	taiyang /taijaŋ/	taiyeung /taijœŋ/
'yellow'	huang /huaŋ/	weng /wəŋ/	wong /wɔŋ/	wong /wɔŋ/	wang /waŋ/	wong /wɔŋ/	wong /wɔŋ/
'thing'	shi /ʂɯ/	si /si/	si /si/	si /si/	si /si/	si /si/	ye /jɛ/
'roach'	zhanglang /tsaŋlaŋ/		saogo /saugɔ/	saoga /sauga/	seigo /seigɔ/	saogo /saugɔ/	gaza /gatsa/
'chopstick	kuizi /kuitsɯ/	dü /dy /	dü /d y /	kuige /kuigə/	diao /diau/	dui /dui/	faizi /faitsi/
'yesterday'	zhuotian /tʂuɔtien/	jiyie /tjijiɛ/	zao'ngie /tsau ɲiɛ/	tsangnie /tsʰaŋniɛ/		tsanye /tsʰanjɛ/	tsanye /tsʰanjɛ/

Notes: 1. Only five variations are selected to fit in the space of the above table.
Putonghua and Cantonese counterparts are included for comparison.

2. Data are missing for the two blank slots of Dabu and Wutong.

Differences from Contemporary Cantonese

In addition to lexical differences exemplified above, lack of plosive endings in Lingui words is a major difference from contemporary Cantonese. Historical record shows that Old Chinese, including Old Mandarin had consonant endings of '-p', '- t', '-k', which were dropped by Mandarin gradually. But they are preserved by contemporary Cantonese (Sima, 1391). There is little doubt that Lingui dialects had the above-consonant endings before and after it was severed from the rest of their Cantonese sisters and brothers. For reasons unknown, they dropped the consonant endings at certain stage of its development.

When siblings of a language scatter at different locations, each one is likely to drift apart from the prototype because of either influence by other linguistic forms through language contact or a nature course the language takes arbitrarily. Contemporary Cantonese is no exception. Its speakers had more contacts with the outside world in the past centuries. In contrast, Lingui dialects had little contact with other language species and their chance of being influenced is expected to be less than contemporary Cantonese and Mandarin. Lingui dialects have dozens of variations preserved in seclusion. Each of the variations is a precious linguistic fossil that carries more or less historical linguistic information about Old Cantonese and Old Chinese. Data of these dialects may help us making judgments about linguistic changes of contemporary Cantonese. For instance, data in Table 4 above suggest that *ng* ('five') and *tsenya* (' yesterday') could have been spoken unchanged in Cantonese for two thousand years, while the high frequency Cantonese word *ye* ('thing') on the other hand, could be a word coined or borrowed fairly recently, as it does not appear in any variety of Lingui dialects. The data also suggest that Cantonese could have borrowed 'chopsticks' and 'sun' from Mandarin, which are *faizi* and *toiyeung* respectively. Lingui dialects are probably the only living vernaculars that have preserved the ancient monosyllabic pronunciation 'dü/dy/ for 'chopsticks'.

3. Analysis
Diglossia Relationship

There is a diglossia situation in Guilin district, where Guilinese is a prestigious high form regarded as 'Guanhua' (official language) by Lingui dialect speakers and the Lingui dialects are regarded as a low form without an official status. Unacceptable in offices, schools and mass media, Lingui dialects are mainly used within villages or between neighboring villages. Speakers acquire a Lingui vernacular as their first language (L1) in childhood. Every Lingui dialect speaker needs to attain a speaking ability of Guilinese, an indispensable lingua franca for schooling, business and communication outside of the village. An adult Lingui dialect speaker is usually a bilingual (Lingui dialect + Guilinese) or trilingual (Lingui dialect + Guilinese+ Putonghua).

Guilinese on the other hand is used in Guilin City and counties other than Lingui and Linchuan. Belonging to Southwest Mandarin in Chao's classification (Chao, 1976), this local language standard is intelligible to other Southwest Mandarin speakers living in a vast area of Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunan. As is common in many diglossic communities, speakers of the low variation tend to learn the high variation for social mobility or a favorable identity. This is what happens in Guilin. Speakers of Lingui dialects express great enthusiasm to learn Guilinese, while native Guilinese speakers do not need to learn Lingui dialects. Instead, they learn Putonghua, a more prestigious language standard belonging to North Mandarin (Chao, 1976). Media of education at schools play an important role in second language learning. It is interesting that most schools in the two counties, according to my subjects, use Guilinese as a medium of instruction, while in Guilin City the only medium of instruction is Putonghua. As shown above, Guilinese is similar to Putonghua in almost all aspects except for the tonal system for words. Guilinese speakers do not experience too much difficulty in attaining a speaking ability of Putonghua. However, learning Guilinese by a Lingui dialect speaker is a much harder task, as Guilinese is so different from their native dialect in major linguistic aspects. The adoption of Guilinese instead of Putonghua as the medium of instruction in the two counties is a matter of practicality and urgency. To those Lingui dialect speakers who crave city life, Guilinese appears to be the first language barrier they must remove on their way leading to their goal, whereas Putonghua to them is only a luxury that does not directly affect their livelihood.

Table 5. Diglossia Relationship

Guilinese	Lingui Dialects
high	low
L1 &L2	L1 only
Its native speakers learn Putonghua as L2	Their native speakers learn Guilinese as L2

Language Attitude

There have been prevailing negative attitudes toward Lingui dialects and their speakers. Named as **Pinhua** ('Flat Toned Speech') by speakers themselves and as **Xiangxiahua** ('Country Folks' Language') by Guilin City residents, Lingui dialects are considered inferior linguistic forms. A stereotyped view on their speakers still prevails: uneducated, poor and ignorant. Speakers of Lingui dialects easily sense negative reactions or even discrimination when in contact with non-Lingui dialect speakers. They mostly have negative attitudes towards their own language and feel ashamed to admit they are speakers of **Xiangxiahua,** and are eager to hide or abandon their mother tongue to avoid unfairness incurred to them (cf. Fishman, 1999: 26). This dilemma was felt during interviews. Once I interviewed a business

owner and her father inside their flower store when they had no customer to take care of. They first showed curiosity at my limited ability to speak words of Lingui dialects, which I learned from my previous subjects, and they cooperated well at the beginning. However, they immediately stopped talking their native dialect when a customer entered the store. I tried to finish the interview with the father alone while his daughter was waiting on the customer, but he refused to utter any native word in front of the customer for fear of betraying their identity. I had to come back a second time to complete the interview when there was no customer to observe us. Subjects generally believed their native speech was both uncultivated and linguistically inferior while Mandarin is cultivated, accurate and beautiful. At another time, I sensed an obvious difference between Putao's pronunciation of 'dog' and its Guilinese pronunciation. I asked my subject to repeat the word, which is pronounced /gœ/. She blushed in embarrassment. She kept saying in Guilinese "Suanle, suanle, hao nanting." ('Forget it, it's so unpleasant to our ears.') She did not know the so-called 'unpleasant' sound /œ/is a high frequency vowel in both Cantonese and French.

The unfavorable view of Lingui dialects and their speakers is deeply rooted in Guilin society. The negative attitudes towards them were not improved at all after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. For better control of the population, the government promulgated a series of measures to restrict movement of the population. Among them the Census System ('Hukouzhi'), and the Food Ration System ('Liangshi Dingliang') adopted in 1950s have further widened the gap between agricultural population and urban population. The Food Ration System was running for about three decades and it effectively made sure food and food products were distributed only to lawful city dwellers on City Census list ('Chengshi Hukou'), while a peasant had to produce food to feed himself and his family. A city resident is thus in a more advantageous position than a peasant, the latter could hardly live in the city because he did not have a food ration to maintain a living. At present, the Food Rations System is lifted, but earning a lawful urban resident status is still a lifetime goal for many Lingui peasants, as well as millions of others elsewhere in China. This social disadvantage of Lingui peasants seemed to subtly transfer to add negative implications to their dialects. Lingui dialects and their speakers are indeed less fortunate: girls in Guilin City do not want to be married to a Lingui peasant and no native Guilinese speakers would like to learn any ill-fated Lingui dialect.

The government's efforts to promote Putonghua as a national standard since 1950s constitute probably the second most significant linguistic campaign in Chinese history, which is comparable to the one masterminded by Qin's Minister Li Si to unify Chinese written system in 220 B.C. (cf. Karlgren, 1949:22). When the government has successfully made Putonghua a lingua franca among people of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, a large number of minority languages and dialects were put in jeopardy as they began to be looked down upon as inferior and less functional non-standard species (Saville-Troike, 1995: 188-189). In a striking contrast with Putonghua, which dominates all types of news media in China, Lingui dialects and the rest of the non-standard vernaculars do not have any significant linguistic role to play outside their speaking communities. Their enthnolinguistic vitality becomes extremely low since there is practically no institutional support of whatever kind to sustain their existence.

Maintenance and Death of Lingui Dialects

The survival of the present Lingui dialects was largely due to a prolonged state of isolation without language interference. The self-sufficient agricultural economy and lack of transportation facilities gave people little incentive to venture out of their habitats. But this

linguistic oasis was finally destroyed last century. The following are significant events and changes that had effects on Lingui dialect speakers:
- 1935:   The first train went through Guilin and Lingui County when the Qiangui Railway Line was completed.
- 1940s: A number of 'standard roads' were constructed to reach Lingui and its neighboring counties; A few cars began to run on Guilin streets.
- 1950s: Government campaign to promote Putonghua began in cities.
- 1960s: Loudspeaker broadcast in Guilinese reached most households of Lingui County through wire.
- 1970s: Radios and cassette players came to some well-to-do households; Lingui dialect speakers first came into contact with Putonghua through radio broadcasts.
- 1980s: Black-and-white TV sets began to send Putonghua-only programs a few hours a day to some affordable households in each village;
          The Food Ration System lifted; Young peasants began to find jobs in Guilin, where they switched to Guilinese.
- 1990s: Color TV sets entered the households of most villages, bringing in Putonghua-dominant programs and some English teaching programs;
          Guilin Prefecture, which used to govern all the 12 counties, merged with Guilin City; Young people went to cities in large numbers for seasonal or permanent jobs - they needed to speak Guilinese or Putonghua.
- 2000s: Color TV becomes a household must and a few households begin to access internet.

It should be pointed out that rapid changes in the past twenty years are direct or indirect consequences of the ownership reform carried out in the countryside around 1978. By dissolving the socialist-style production teams established by Mao and redistributing land to individuals on family basis, peasants have opportunities to leave their villages to venture elsewhere for new business, employment and amusement.

The merger of Guilin Prefecture and Guilin City in 1990s has greatly expedited changes of the linguistic environment. Guilin City has since become the administrative center of all its neighboring counties, which in turn are now subject to its urban development plans, tourism and industry relocation. Recently more expressways have been constructed to reach all Lingui dialect speaking areas. The state of isolation in those areas finally comes to an end. The consequence of this change is linguistically catastrophic. Areas having frequent contacts with city population shift to Guilinese at an amazingly fast speed. For instance, Ertang, the county town of Lingui County where Lingui dialects used to prevail twenty years ago, completely shifted to Guilinese in recent years.

Overall, the environment, which the existence of Lingui dialects used to depend on, has been greatly altered in the past decades. To remain in isolation free from outside linguistic interference is no longer possible for these speech communities.

5. Conclusion

The study was sought to investigate and categorize Lingui dialects, and we have basically achieved this goal. Due to limited time and resources, the study confined to a few major Lingui dialects involving a limited number of subjects. A large scale of study involving field work with more subjects appears necessary in order to have a panoramic view of this linguistic group and more linguistic insights into each dialect variation.

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        The study reveals a kinship between Lingui dialects and contemporary Cantonese and finds evidence of preserved linguistic data of Old Cantonese in these dialects. Historically, Lingui dialects were not lucky enough to be chosen as a linguistic standard at any stage. They have a very low status, which in turn has derived unfavorable attitudes and social injustice to their speakers. Prevailing negative language attitudes and linguistic injustice have motivated speakers to make a shift to Guilinese by abandoning their 'stigmatized' vernaculars. In the new century, Lingui dialects are facing a difficult challenge to avoid extinction. The rapid expansion of Guilin City and the ever-increasing influences of the Putonghua-dominant news media have been tolling a death knell for these dialects. Judging from the worsening linguistic environment for language maintenance, Lingui dialects are unlikely to escape extinction in the near future.

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Appendix 1. **List of Linguistic Items for Interview on Lingui Dialects**

Words		
	Pronouns	we, you, he, she, we, you (plural), they (ma), they (feminine)
	numerals	one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, ten, hundred, thousand, ten thousand,
	family & relatives	father, mother, uncles (father's younger brother; father's older brother), uncle (mother's brother), grandmother (father's mother), grandmother (mother's mother), elder brother, younger brother, man, woman, sister
	body	hand, eye, teeth, stomach, tongue, nose, heart, palm, brow, hair
	animals & insects	cattle, pig, goat, horse, lion, tiger, duck dog, chicken, worm, cockroach
	objects	salt, tree, hill, sun, moon, sea, river bank, match, seed, leave, silver, chopstick, bamboo, star, flower, cloud
	event	birthday
	adjectives	yellow, read, black, blue, scarce, near, far, polite, happy, short, left, right, slippery
	verbs	drink, sleep, stand, eat, cry, bite, breathe, fear
	adverbs	Here, there
Phrase & Expressions		
	verb+object	read a book, attend a county fair, stop eating
	prep+object	at right, in here
	neg.+verb	don't know
	adj.+noun	red cloth, blue sky, dark cloud,
Sentences		
	questions	What are you doing? What did you do yesterday? Where did you go with him? Who came? Where did happiness come from?
	imperatives	Don't speak. Don't eat. Open the door. Give me.
	narratives	(I) heard this story. (We) began to work.

(Note: The original list was in Chinese)