Abstract

This study aims to examine the reality of the correspondence between the different readings and different meanings of the same graphs (word) in actual Mandarin speech. A total of 102 lexical items of 67 graphs were chosen for the survey, largely based on the 1963-85 Revisions of the Standard Pronunciation by Mainland China.

Attempting to make comparisons of readings by respondents from across a spectrum of regions and ages, the survey was conducted on 120 informants from Mainland China and Singapore, from the two age groups of 20-30 and 40-50 years old.

The informants were categorized into six groups of 20, with the informants from Mainland China further categorized according to their dialectal background (northern or southern).

Results of the survey are listed below:
1. Many informants do not make a distinction between the different readings (as indicated in the dictionary) of the same word.
2. The reading of the same lexical item often differs in the speech of people from different regions or age groups.
3. Different lexical items of the same graphs with a same reading indicated in standard pronunciation are often read differently by the same person.

Findings from the survey indicate that the purported reading-meaning correspondence may be more assumed than real. The apparent correspondences between the different readings and meanings of a graph may very well be a transient phase in the tonal change of the graph.