ABSTRACT

The retroflexive initials in Peking Mandarin have come from three series in Middle Chinese: 知 (t), 庄 (tʂ), 照 (tɕ); the dental initials have come from the 精 (tʂ) series. Instability of these two types of initials can be observed from Middle Chinese to Modern Peking.

This study attempts to sort out the characters that have undergone changes between the two types of initials and to analyse statistically the instability of the two types of initials by studying the two-reading characters in Middle Chinese and the changes of these initials from Middle Chinese to Modern Peking, as well as to three other northern Mandarin dialects, namely, Jinan, Xi-an, and Hefei, which have retained the retroflexive initials in different ways.

The Study also attempts a prediction of the future development of the retroflexed and dental initials. Based on statistical evidence, the prediction from this study is that in Peking Mandarin the retroflexes are gradually disappearing. The same tendency is also observed in those three northern Mandarin dialects studied.