ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the first comprehensive study of the Yulin dialect, a variety of Yue spoken in Guangxi, China. It is composed of extensive original data and detailed analyses of its phonology, lexicon and grammatical features, with emphasis on its phonology. The thesis is divided into five parts.

Part One of the thesis provides a brief history and critique of various works in the field of Yue dialectology. Part Two, which constitutes the core of the thesis, is a fine-grained treatment of the Yulin phonology. Topics discussed in this part include: Yulin phonological system, patterns of tone sandhi, a comparison between the Yulin dialect and the Standard Cantonese, derivations from Middle Chinese to Yulin pronunciation, diminutive tone change in Yulin and its bearings on relevant issues of morpho-phonological interface in Standard Cantonese, variant pronunciations, etc.

Part Three, a study on the Yulin lexicon, comprises three chapters. Chapter One contains a list of about 1,300 lexical items in Yulin, in conjunction with their counterparts in Guangzhou and Yangjiang dialects, two varieties of Yue, and Meixian Dialect, the standard Hakka. Chapter Two presents a lexical comparison of the four dialects, with statistics suggesting a close affinity between Guangzhou and Yulin. Chapter Three discusses sound symbolism, an iconically motivated phenomenon, as manifested in the Yulin lexicon.

Part Four studies some prominent grammatical features in Yulin. Topics covered include: word order, complements with the marker de, aspect markers, disposal constructions, passives and causatives, possessive constructions, and negative markers.

Part Five reviews the recent controversy over the classification of the Yulin
dialect. Drawing evidence from a comparison between Yulin and other dialects in Guangxi and Guangdong, it argues against the recent proposal that Yulin should be classified into Pinghua rather than Yue. It concludes that Yulin is a Yue variety with at least two linguistic substrata: a deeply embedded Tai (Zhuang) substratum, and a Pinghua substratum.