

Abstract

As a kind of dialect dictionaries, a monolingual dictionary of Cantonese contains a wide range of colloquial vocabulary. Lexicographers tend to assemble a large body of dialect words that occurs in relation to the head-character for one entry in the dictionary. As for reflecting the various pronunciations for one character, different pronunciations of lexical items are often presented in parallel columns.

However, in the event of colloquial-vs.-literary readings, all the parts of the entry would be mostly placed under the combination of several different pronunciations. As a result, dictionary-users might think that colloquial pronunciation is used in oral communication while literary one is used in formal expressions. In fact, a single character could be pronounced using both literary and colloquial pronunciations, whereas words (character combinations) might be read as either the literary pronunciation or the colloquial one. Hence, in most monolingual dictionaries of Cantonese published in the past, dictionary-users have great difficulty deciding whether to use the literary or colloquial pronunciation when reading words out.

Sound changes in expression are initiated by conforming to ancient sounds and/or language contact. These causes leading to the phenomenon of literary and colloquial readings have been studied by many scholars. They agreed that without context, it is hard to determine whether a character should be pronounced in the literary or colloquial way. However, when the Chinese characters are combined to form lexis, it is easier to determine its pronunciation. Such expression in speech is understood and adopted by numerous people in Cantonese-speaking areas.

The dictionary, *Guangzhouhua Zhengyin Zidian* (Dictionary of Standard Cantonese Pronunciation), is employed as a case study to explore these issues of literary and colloquial readings of lexicography. This paper attempts to seek a way for a clear policy to indicate accurately the literary-vs.-colloquial alternation by using suitable indicative labels. Moreover, recommendations for the case-based compilation are given in the discussion.