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HUNG-NIN SAMUEL CHEUNG, *Cantonese: Since the 19th century*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2023. Pp. 361. Hb. \$55.

Reviewed by RYAN KA YAU LAI   
Department of Linguistics, South Hall 3432  
University of California Santa Barbara  
Santa Barbara, California 93106-3100, USA  
[kayaulai@ucsb.edu](mailto:kayaulai@ucsb.edu)

This volume showcases important works from a pioneer and veteran of Cantonese linguistics. It comprises eight previously published papers on different aspects of Cantonese. Though the book focuses on concerns of linguistic structure, discussions often address sociolinguistic and anthropological explanations of language change, and the language communities represented by the data and their day-to-day communicative practices are at the forefront of description and analysis. Half the chapters are largely synchronic, with the other half examining changes from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries using historical materials. Chapters 1–2 and 6 cover phonology, 3–5 morphosyntax, and 7–8 lexis.

The chapters on phonology tackle the difficult problem of inferring historical sound systems. Chapters 1 and 6 examine what variety was represented by the romanisation systems of two nineteenth-century sources: an English-Cantonese phrasebook and a map of Hong Kong. These exhibit features atypical of Guangzhou/Hong Kong Cantonese, which Cheung cautiously attributes to neighbouring language communities. Chapter 2 tests the *yunbu* categorisation method in historical linguistics, which infers the phonological structure of Chinese characters through rhyming patterns in poetry. Cheung demonstrates that the method produces misleading results when applied to the flexible rhyming system of twentieth-century Cantonese songwriting, compelling readers to rethink assumptions about past poetic traditions.

Chapters 3 and 4 trace the wax and wane of various completive and interrogative constructions from historical pedagogical sources. Chapter 5 describes modern-day variation between the pre-transitive and the regular transitive. Cheung describes the pre-transitive as wearing two ‘hats’: one obligatory and syntactically conditioned, the other flexible and pragmatically motivated—akin to the variationist’s envelope of variation. All three chapters are situated against the backdrop of contact with speakers of other Chinese varieties, including other Southern varieties and Mandarin.

The two chapters on lexis are of greatest interest to sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists. Chapter 7 unpacks Cantonese kinship terms into a set of feature-denoting morphemes and describes the probable pathways of change leading to the present-day system. It outlines the patriarchal forces and structures underlying many patterns of colexification and semantic change, alongside modern social


changes shaking up the system. Chapter 8 describes the linguistic mechanisms underlying Cantonese *xiehouyu*, bipartite expressions comprising a pithy ‘riddle’ and its solution which conveys the main message. These phrases are shaped by collective cultural knowledge as well as prejudices towards minority communities for which a content warning would have been advisable.

Cheung’s penetrating insight and painstaking meticulousness will inspire generations to come. He states that, of the varieties he commands, Cantonese is the most intimate to him, a sentiment that permeates the volume: Cantonese speakers will no doubt delight at the vividness of Cheung’s example sentences, and all readers will marvel at the wealth of linguistic and sociocultural insights that could only come from a perceptive, sophisticated member of the Cantonese-speaking community. Largely unmodified from the original journal articles, the chapters assume working familiarity with general and Chinese linguistics, but the occasional unexplained terminology and unromanised *hanzi* will hardly deter scholars willing to delve into the intricacies of Cantonese language and society.

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HEATHER BURNETT, *Meaning, identity, and interaction: Sociolinguistic variation and change in game-theoretic pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. 250. Hb. £95.

Reviewed by VALENTYNA USHCYNA   
Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University  
4, Serhiya Tymoshenka Str., Apt. 1, Lutsk, 43000 Ukraine  
[vushchyna@vnu.edu.ua](mailto:vushchyna@vnu.edu.ua)  
[v.uschyna@gmail.com](mailto:v.uschyna@gmail.com)

In linguistic anthropology, linguistic pragmatics, and sociocultural linguistics, numerous attempts have been made to explain non-linguistic aspects of communication more informally, while the book under review treats these phenomena within the field of formal linguistics. Unlike other works, in which formal mathematical modelling of language and variation is used, this work, rather than targeting grammatical or psychological aspects of change, is focused on the social ones. In its pursuit to formalize linguistic inquiry into such non-linguistic issues as pragmatic goals and intentions underlying verbal choices, the processes of meaning making, gender inequality, and identity construction, the book presents a new approach to studying the relation between language, the social world, and ideology. Linking linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour of language users to the analysis of social meaning and sociolinguistic variation, the author deploys mathematical frameworks of Decision Theory and Game Theory.