

The *ʃayn* theory of Grade II in Middle Chinese

The origin of Middle Chinese Grade II is now beyond controversy: there is a contrast between Type A and Type B syllables in Old Chinese; Grade II syllables come from Type A (= Baxter-Sagart pharyngealized) syllables which have a *-r-* medial. On the other hand, there is no universally convincing theory about the value of Grade II in Middle Chinese.

In my opinion, a satisfactory theory of Grade II needs to account for the following facts and intuitions, which form the basis for the current competing theories about its nature:

- 1) Origin: Type A + *-r-*.
- 2) Ambiguous phonological nature: Grade II behaves like both a medial and a vowel quality.
- 3) *æ*-ness: Different evidence suggest that there is a front and very open vowel quality associated with Grade II.
- 4) Philoretroflexity: Grade II has an affinity with retroflex fricatives and affricates: Early Middle Chinese Division III syllables with a retroflex fricative or affricate initial becomes Rank II in Late Middle Chinese/Early Mandarin. In the ancestor of Southern Mandarin, in particular, retroflexity becomes associated with the Grade II vowel.

There is some terminological confusion around questions about uvularity and pharyngeality, which is not helped by the fact that the paradigmatic examples, like Arabic emphatics, often involve both. I cite with approval Sylak-Glassman (2014), which attacks some of the most ingrained problems concerning this confusion. In particular, Sylak-Glassman convincingly demonstrates that pharyngealization pulls the vowel quality towards *æ*.

This talk subscribes to Jerry Norman's pharyngealization theory under its Baxter-Sagart garb. However, in the light of the recent clarification of questions surrounding pharyngeality and uvularity, I propose that Chinese type-A-ness is in fact an instance of uvularity, either RTR or uvularization.

This talk proposes the *ʃayn* theory of Middle Chinese Grade II: Grade II involves a medial pharyngeal element *-ʃ-*, which comes from an earlier consonantal *-ʃ-* < **-rʃ-*.

Reference

Sylak-Glassman, John Christopher. 2014. *Deriving Natural Classes: The Phonology and Typology of Post-Velar Consonants*. Doctoral dissertation, UC Berkeley.