The interaction of age, L2 type and multilingualism in Zauzou community

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This paper provides an overview of the multilingualism patterns in Zauzou community in Southwestern China, a small ethnic group consisting of about 2100 speakers of Zauzou, a Lolo-Burmese language. The majority of Zauzou population resides in five villages located along the LanCang River in the Tu'e township, Lanping county, Yunnan province, China. The widespread practice of multilingualism in the Zauzou community involves languages with varying degrees of typological proximity/distance. Zauzou has been in contact with one Lolo-Burmese language (i.e. Lisu), which is linguistically closest to Zauzou, two unclassified Baic languages (i.e. Bai and Lama), and one sinitic language, namely Mandarin Chinese.

Multilingualism is the norm in the broad area of Lanping County. Most Zauzou L1 speakers are reported speaking 3 to 5 L2 languages. Based on a demographic survey we conducted in the Zauzou village of Jiangmo, multilingualism patterns in this village exhibit significant distinctions that are governed by age and L2. In general, multilingualism in Zauzou community is declining, as young Zauzou L1 speakers are nowadays speaking less number of L2s than their parents and grandparents due to the overwhelming influences from Mandarin. As has been captured by Table 1, an increasing number of young Zauzou community members (<30) become Zauzou/Mandarin bilinguals, while the majority of speakers above 30 speak at least three L2s. What behind this is the different socio-economic status and lifestyles between the two age groups.

Different L2s also play different roles in the multilingual ecology in the Zauzou community. The multilingualism patterns involving Lisu, Bai, and Lama are practiced earlier by the same community, while Mandarin is much more powerful than other languages in the whole area, even though it has a much shorter contacting history with Zauzou. As a result, the use of Mandarin by Zauzou speakers is more reciprocal (Lüpke 2016). A large number of concepts that have been incorporated in the Zauzou lexicon are imported from Mandarin via loan words. Consequently, Mandarin-Zauzou code-mixing is very pervasive and sometimes obligatory in naturalistic Zauzou speech, while code-switching between these two languages are far more rare. In contrast, the multilingualism patterns involving Lisu, Bai, and Lama are primarily borrowing and code-switching, but loan words from these three languages are more likely to be lexical variants of the corresponding Zauzou words (e.g. the Zauzou deixis system has its Lisu variant). Contact-induced phonological changes are only restricted to Lisu and Bai, but not Mandarin. Code-switching involving Lisu/Bai is much more common than Mandarin, which is basically conditioned by ideology, depending on whom the speaker is communicating with. Table 2 describes the settings that trigger the use of a different code. The statistics clearly shows that L2s (Mandarin is inactive in all of these settings) of Zauzou speakers are actively used outside the village. Since code-switching is highly indexical of specific social identities (Gerald &Kofi 2015), the above facts seem to suggest that Zauzou community members give up claiming their ethnic identity when they step outside of their own community.

In sum, in Zauzou community, multilingualism patterns are sensitive to age groups and the L2 language. These patterns are further driven by a dynamic interplay between socio-interactional mechanisms.

Table 1: the proportion of bilingual and multilingual speakers in young (<30) vs. old (>30) Zauzou L1 speakers

Age group	L2 Num=1(M)	L2 Num>1						Total num of speakers
		B+M	L+M	B+L+M	B+L+M+Lama	B+L+M+Lama+Y	Sum	
<30	**3 (60%)**	1	1	1	0	0	**3 (12%)**	6
>30	**2 (40%)**	1	0	9	11	1	**22 (88%)**	24
Total	5	2	1	10	11	1	25	30

Note: B=Bai, M=Mandarin, L=Lisu, Y=Yi

Table 2: Zauzou L1 speakers' L2 uses in different settings

Levels of frequency	With neighbors	With coworkers	With classmates	With people in market	With children in household
never	21 (68%)	1	1	0	15 (50%)
rarely	1	3	0	0	2
occasionally	3	3	3	3	3
often	3	10	16 (53%)	17 (55%)	4
always	3	13 (43%)	10	11	6

References:
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