

The She Dialect of Luoyuan County

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The language described in this paper is a Kehjia dialect spoken by the She minority in Luoyuan county, Fwujiann. At present there are almost 400,000 She in South China, the largest concentrations being in Fwujiann and Jehjiang. The vast majority of them speak varieties of Kehjia. Only about 1,000 speakers of the original She language survive in Goangdong province. While definitely a variety of Kehjia, the dialect described here has a number of features not found in non-She varieties of Kehjia. A few words related to the Miao language of the She in Goangdong suggest that these She are descended from forebearers who formerly were speakers of a type of Miao.

I. Introduction¹

The She 畬 are a widely dispersed minority group found mainly in northeastern Fwujiann 福建 and southern Jehjiang 浙江. Smaller groups are found also in Goangdong 廣東 Jiangshi 江西 and Anhuey 安徽. According to the 1982 Chinese census, the She minority numbered 368,000 people, of which approximately 200,000 lived in Fwujiann (Mau and Meeng 1986). Linguistically, the She are divided into two groups: the vast majority of the She, including all those living in Fwujiann, Jehjiang, Jiangshi and Anhuey

1 Material for this article was collected while I was in Luoyuan in September 1987 on the Visiting Scholar Exchange Program of the Committee on Scholarly Exchange with China of the National Academy of Sciences. My two able native-speaking collaborators were Lan Jiannkang 藍建康 and Lan Mingluh 藍明祿. In addition Mr. You Wenliang 游文良 of the Luoyuan county administration provided invaluable aid in every aspect of my investigation. I would like to express my deep gratitude to all these individuals.

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speak dialects of a Kehjia 客家 type; approximately 1,000 She living in the Goangdong counties of Bwoluo 博羅, Tzengcherng 增城, Hueydong 惠東 and Haefeng 海豐 speak a non-Hann language belonging to the Miao language family (Mau and Meeng 1986).

In September 1987, I was able to spend several days recording the She dialect of Luoyuan 羅源 county in the Miindong 閩東 region.² The language of this She community is clearly of the Kehjia variety. Due to the shortness of my stay in Luoyuan, my field notes are rather sketchy and may not be totally accurate on a few points, but since there is so little information on the She and their languages currently available (especially in languages other than Chinese), I believe it will be worthwhile to present a summary of my findings here.

II. Luoyuan She Phonology

The initial inventory is as follows:

p	t	ts	tɕ	k	○
ph	th	tsh	tɕh	kh	
m	n l			ŋ	
		s	ɕ		h

The nasals tend to be pronounced as prenasalized voiced stops [m^b, n^d, etc.] when the syllables in question are pronounced in isolation, at the beginning of a polysyllabic word or at the beginning of phrase; otherwise they are ordinary nasals. Luoyuan She distinguishes a series of plain alveolar sibilants (ts, tsh, s) from a prepalatal set (tɕ, tɕh, ɕ); a prominent feature of my informants' speech was that /s/ was pronounced as a plain alveolar sibilant fricative [s] as well as a voiceless lateral fricative [ɬ], apparently in free

2 The most important sources on the She and their language are Fwujiannsheeng bianjyitzuu (1986), Shetzwu jeanshyi bianshieetzuu (1980), Mau and Meeng (1986), Luo (1980), Hwang and Lii (1963), and You (1985).

variation, but with the latter pronunciation predominating.

The finals which I recorded are the following:

a	ai	au	an	aŋ	aʔ	ia	ua	iaŋ	iaʔ	uai	uan
				uaŋ	uaʔ						
e	ei	eu	eŋ	eʔ	ieŋ	ieʔ					
o	oi	[øy]	ou	oŋ	oʔ	uo	ioŋ	ioʔ	uoŋ	uoʔ	
ɔ	ɔŋ	ɔʔ									
i	iu	iŋ	iʔ								
u	ui	un	uŋ	uʔ							
y	yn	yŋ	yʔ								
ɿ											

This dialect in a few cases seems to preserve a distinction between final -n and -ŋ, but due to strong influence from the local Miin 閩 dialect of the Luoyuan area, there is clearly strong pressure to eliminate final -n altogether.³ This is reflected in tendency on the part of my informants to alternate between forms having -n and -ŋ for the same word. In my transcription I will give such forms a final -n if I recorded it thus at least once; it should be kept in mind, however, that forms ending in -n and -ŋ are probably in a process of merger.

The She dialect of Luoyuan has seven tones:

1. inpyng—high falling [52]
- 1b. inpying—high level [55]
2. yangpyng—low level [22]
3. shanqsheng—high rising [35]

3 I was told by Mr. You, who has done extensive field work on She dialects, that all the She of Luoyuan county are bilingual in their own She dialect and in the local Miin dialect of Luoyuan. Even from my limited contact with Luoyuan She I could see that it has been profoundly influenced by the Luoyuan Miin dialect at every level of its structure.

6. yangchiuh—low falling [21]
7. inruh—high falling abrupt [ʔ54]
8. yangruh—low falling abrupt [ʔ32]

In this dialect there are two values for the inpyng; a majority of words belonging to the historical inpyng and inchiuh tone categories have merged into a single inpyng category which has a high falling contour. A very few words, however have a distinct high level tone; historically they may come from the inpyng, inruh or yangshanq categories. I will designate the more common type as tone 1 and the second, rarer, type as 1b.

Due to my limited contact with the dialect, I was unable to make detailed notes on tone sandhi; in a few cases, I observed that the shanqsheng became falling (35→53) before low tones, specifically before the yangchiuh and yangruh tones, but my rather limited data do not allow me to say whether or not this is a general rule.

Below examples of the initials and finals are given; all forms were elicited as actual words in the spoken language and not merely as character readings;

Initials

p	八 pa ^{ʔ7}	搬 puan ¹	筆 pi ^{ʔ7}	餅 pian ³
t	刀 tou ¹	戴 toi ¹	膽 tɔŋ ³	等 ten ³
ts	灶 tsau ¹	租 tsu ¹	簪 tsɔŋ ¹	糟 tsou ¹
tɕ	豬 tɕy ¹	煮 tɕy ³	竹 tɕy ^{ʔ7}	照 tɕiu ¹
k	割 kɔ ^{ʔ7}	雞 kei ¹	渠他 ky ¹	勾 kou ¹
○	鑊 uo ^{ʔ8}	油 iu ²	鹽 ien ²	禾 uo ²
ph	皮 phi ²	白 pha ^{ʔ8}	被 phi ¹	別 phe ^{ʔ8}
th	湯 thon ¹	痛 thun ¹	剃 thai ¹	天 than ¹
tsh	千 tshan ¹	柴 tshai ²	草 tshou ³	茶 tshɔ ²
tɕh	長 tɕhion ²	唱 tɕhion ¹	車 tɕhia ¹	出 tɕhy ^{ʔ7}
kh	倚 khi ¹	橋 khiu ²	輕 khian ¹	裙 khun ²

m	帽 mou ⁶	米 mai ³	馬 mɔ ³	麥 ma ⁷⁸
n	尿 nau ⁶	泥 nai ²	濃 nyn ²	暖 nɔŋ ¹
l	老 lou ³	犁 lai ²	冷 lan ¹	力 li ⁷⁸
ŋ	牙 ɲɔ ²	我 ŋuai ¹	耳 ɲi ³	艾 ɲei ¹
s	三 sɔŋ ¹	山 san ¹	衫 san ¹	掃 sou ³
ɕ	上 ɕion ¹	舌 ɕie ⁷⁸	手 ɕiu ³	水 ɕy ³
h	去 hy ¹	下 ho ⁶	鞋 hai ²	褲 hu ¹

Finals

a	阿爹 a ¹ tia ¹		
ai	矮 ai ³	細 sai ¹	拜 pai ¹
au	小 sau ³	炒 tshau ³	飽 pau ³
an	邊 pan ¹	錢 tshan ²	癩 tan ¹
aŋ	行 haŋ ²	睛 tshaŋ ²	打 taŋ ³
a?	狹 a ⁷⁸	百 pa ⁷⁷	席 tsha ⁷⁸
ia	蔗 tɕia ¹	蛇 ɕia ²	寫 sia ³
ua	花 hua ¹	畫 ua ⁶	話 ua ⁶
iaŋ	病 phiaŋ ⁶	城 ɕiaŋ ²	店 tiaŋ ¹
ia?	赤 tɕhia ⁷⁷	削 sia ⁷⁷	射 ɕia ⁷⁷
uai	個 kuai ¹	麻 muai ²	簸箕 puai ¹ ky ¹
uan	半 puan ¹	滿 muan ³	盤 phuan ²
uaŋ	橫 huaŋ ²		
iau	貓 ɲiau ^{1b}		
ua?	發 hua ⁷⁷	活 hua ⁷⁸	袜 ua ⁷⁸
e	□背孩子 pe ¹	西 se ¹	阿奶 a ¹ ne ³
ei	艾 ɲei ¹	雞 kei ¹	街 kei ¹
eu	頭 theu ²	斗 teu ³	樓 leu ²
eŋ	崩 peŋ ¹	面 meŋ ¹	牽 heŋ ¹
e?	黑 he ⁷⁷	蜜 me ⁷⁸	賊 tshe ⁷⁸
iei	快 hiei ¹		
ien	變 pien ¹	扇 ɕien ¹	箭 tsien ¹

ie?	尺 tɕhie?	熱 ie?	□絲 lie?
o	阿哥 a ¹ ko ¹	鎖匙 so ³ ɕi ²	
oi	代 thoi ⁶	帶 toi ¹	催 tshoi ¹
ou	好 hou ³	多 tou ¹	狗 kou ³
oŋ	碰 phon ⁶	桑 son ¹	霜 son ¹
o?	殼 ho?	薄 pho?	綠 lo?
io	茄 khio ²	癩腳 khio ² kio?	
uo	禾 uo ²	□賊 kuo ³ , uo ³	
ioŋ	轉 tɕioŋ ³	近 khioŋ ¹	癢 ioŋ ³
io?	着 tɕio?	腳 kio?	藥 io?
uo?	國 kuo?	闊 hu?	
ɔ	瓦 ŋɔ ³	掛 kɔ ¹	罵 mɔ ¹
ɔŋ	酸 sɔŋ ¹	斷 thɔŋ ¹	卵 loŋ ³
ɔ?	辣 lo?	鴨 ɔ?	脫 thɔ?
i	地 thi ⁶	二 ŋi ⁶	起 hi ³
iu	手 ɕiu ³	酒 tsiu ³	久 kiu ³
iŋ	人 ŋiŋ ²	緊 kiŋ ³	淋 liŋ ²
u	火 hu ³	兔 thu ^{1b}	苦 hu ³
ui	嘴 tsui ³	開 hui ¹	海 hui ³
un	門 mun ²	寸 tshun ¹	墳 phun ²
uŋ	膿 nuŋ ²	黃 uŋ ²	東 tuŋ ¹
u?	穀 ku?	窟 hu?	毒 tu?
y	魚 ŋy ²	住 tɕy ⁶	箸 tɕhy ⁶
yŋ	船 ɕyŋ ²	蟲 tɕhyŋ ²	弓 kyŋ ¹
y?	六 ly?	出 tɕhy?	
ŋ	五 ŋ ³	□不 ŋ ⁶	

III. Classification

At present there is virtually universal agreement that the Hann-speaking She speak a variety of Kehjia. In 1986 I delivered a paper at the Second

International Conference on Sinology in Taipei on the classificatory criteria for Kehjia dialects. In this section I would like to examine the Luoyuan She dialect in light of the most important Kehjia features as outlined in my earlier paper.⁴

1. Chingchwen 輕唇 initials. Like other Kehjia dialects Luoyuan She retains a significant number of unshifted bilabials in words which in other Chinese dialects (with the exception of Miin) have become labiodentals. Following are the forms which I elicited: 飛 *pui*¹, 斧頭 *pi*³ *theu*², 吠 *phui*⁶, 伏 (brood, hatch) *phiu*⁶, 飯 *phuan*⁶, 分 (divide) *pun*¹, 糞 *pun*¹, 放 (release) *pion*¹, 縛 *phu*⁷, 紡 *phion*³, 墳 *phun*², 丈夫 *tɕhion*¹ *pu*¹, 新婦 (daughter-in-law) *sin*¹ *phiu*¹, 腹龍 (back, spine) *pu*⁷ *lyn*², 風 *pyn*¹.

2. Shershanq 舌上 initials. Most Kehjia dialects retain a few examples of words from the Chiehyunn 切韻 shershanqin 舌上音 as dental stops. The most important of these is the word 知 'know', Meishiann *ti*¹. Luoyuan She does not use this word in the sense of 'to know' but uses in its place 曉得 *ɕiu*³ *ta*⁷ and 𠵿𠵿 *mai*¹ *ɕia*⁷ in the negative.⁵ Most words belonging to the shershanqin category appear as affricates in Luoyuan She: 茶 *tsho*², 重 *tɕhyŋ*¹, 豬 *tɕy*¹, 蟲 *tɕhyŋ*², 長 *tɕhion*², 箸 *tɕhy*⁶, 孿 *tɕhy*⁶, 轉 *tɕion*³, 直 *tɕhi*⁷, 鋤 *tɕhy*², 着 *tɕio*⁷. The only form recorded with a stop initial which also has a stop initial in other Kehjia dialects is 中 *tun*¹, cf. Haeluh 海陸 *tun*¹, Yeongding 永定 *tun*¹. Other cases of stop initials for the shershanqin are almost certainly loans from the local Miin dialect: 陳 *tin*², 池 *tie*², 埕 *tian*², 賺 *thin*².

3. Upper register sonorants. As pointed out in my 1986 paper, Kehjia dialects show an interesting pattern of upper and lower register tones in

4 Forms from non-She varieties of Kehjia are taken from my 1986 paper; references to sources may be found there.

5 I cannot explain the irregular palatalization of the original velar of 曉 (xieu: in Karlgren's reconstruction of the Chiehyunn system); *ɕia*⁷ appears to be a fusion of *ɕiu*³ *ta*⁷.

words with nasal and lateral initials (tsyhjwo 次濁 in traditional terminology). Luoyuan She for the most part conforms to this pattern as the following examples illustrate; Meishiann and Yeongding forms are given for comparison.

Luoyuan She	Meishiann	Yeongding
毛 mou ¹	mau ¹	mou ¹
籃 lon ¹	lam ¹	(lan ²)
龔 lun ¹	lun ¹	lun ¹
罵 mo ¹	ma ⁵	ma ³
問 mun ¹	mun ⁵	mun ³
露 lu ¹	lu ⁵	lu ³
面 men ¹	mien ⁵	mien ³
艾 nei ¹	nei ⁵	nei ³
目 mu ⁷	muk ⁷	mu ⁷
六 ly ⁷	liuk ⁷	liu ⁷
額 na ⁷	niak ⁷	nia ⁷

4. Development of the yangshanq category. The behavior of words in the yangshanq category provides one of the best diagnostic tests for a Kehjia dialect. Words with voiced obstruent initials (chyuanjwo 全濁) become inpyng in words of popular origin: 倚站 khi¹, 重 tɕhyŋ¹, 坐 tshou¹, 被 phi¹, 淡 thɔŋ¹, 近 khion¹, 是 ɕi¹, 丈 tɕhion¹, 斷 thɔŋ¹, 解 (can) hai¹, 鱸 ɕin¹. Since this feature is also found in some Gann 贛 dialects like that of Nancherng 南城, it is important to examine yangshanq words with nasal and lateral initials. Here we find the same sort of split seen in the case of similar words in the other three tonal categories, i. e. a part of the words behave like obstruent initial words, receiving a inpyng tone, while another set receive a inshanq tone. This pattern is strikingly similar from one Kehjia dialect to another and in my opinion provides the best criterion for identifying a Kehjia dialect. Below a representative sample of such words is

given along with Meishiann and Yeongding forms for comparison.

Luoyuan She	Meishiann	Yeongding
懶 lɔŋ ¹	lan ¹	lan ¹
冷 lan ¹	lan ¹	lɛn ¹
鯉 li ¹	li ¹	li ¹
尾 mui ¹	mi ¹	mei ¹
馬 mɔ ¹	ma ¹	ma ¹
暖 nɔŋ ¹	non ¹	lɔn ¹
我 ŋuai ¹	ŋai ²	ŋai ²
五 ŋ ³	ŋ ³	ŋ ³
瓦 ŋɔ ³	ŋa ³	ŋa ³
米 mai ³	mi ³	mi ³
卵 lɔŋ ³	lon ³	lɔn ³
耳 ŋi ³	ŋi ³	hn ³

The features examined above show conclusively, in my opinion, that Luoyuan She is a Kehjia dialect. While it clearly is to be classified as Kehjia, it has a number of peculiar features that will be examined in the following section.

IV. Some Peculiarities of Luoyuan She.

1. Phonological traits.

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of this dialect is the loss of final consonants; whereas a Kehjia dialect like that of Meishiann has retained six final consonants (m, n, ŋ, p, t, k), Luoyuan She has only three—n, ŋ, ?—and one of these, n, appears to be in the process of merging with ŋ. The process of reduction of final consonantal contrasts can be observed throughout the entire Miindong area. The Fwuan 福安 dialect, for example, in the not too distant past distinguished seven final consonants —m, n, ŋ, p, t, k, ?—as can be seen from the dictionary of Ibañez (1941-43); at the present time

the vast majority of Fwuan speakers distinguish only ɲ and ʔ.

Luoyuan She lacks labiodentals altogether. This is clearly another case of assimilation to an areal model; all the surrounding Miin dialects lack labiodentals. It seems likely that the dialect under discussion here once had labiodentals (like most other Kehjia dialects) but has lost them under the influence of the local Luoyuan Miin dialect.

A lack of high front rounded vowels is often said to be a feature of Kehjia and indeed many, if not most, of the Kehjia dialects spoken in Goangdong and southwestern Fwujiann do lack such sounds. The presence of a high front rounded /y/ in Luoyuan She raises the interesting question of whether this also is a case of Miindong influence. The fact that Luoyuan She possesses such vowels in forms which have no Miin counterparts, suggests that the vowel y is inherited in Luoyuan She from an earlier form of Kehjia. The third person pronoun 渠 ky¹, for example, has no counterpart in the Miindong dialects where 伊 is used in this sense; yet the high front rounded vowel is etymological in this form: cf. Jiann'ou 建甌 ky⁴. Most Kehjia dialects have an unrounded vowel in this form: Meishiann ki², Yeongding ki². It is difficult to see how the etymologically correct vowel could be restored without the presence of a model in the local Miin dialect. The form hy¹ 去 is also interesting in this regard; the local Miin forms do not have a high front rounded vowel: Fwujou 福州 kho⁵, Fwuan kho⁵, etc. Moreover, the She form shows the typical Kehjia (and Yueh 粵) shift of kh to h. It is also interesting to note that the She dialects of Chaurjou 潮州 and Fengshuenn 豐順 have hiu¹ for 去 showing that a rounded element is present in a regions where no exterior model for a high front rounded vowel can be found (You 1985). One is led to conclude that high front rounded vowels in this dialect are not due to local areal influence but are inherited from proto-Kehjia.

A typical tonal merger found in She dialects is that of the inchiuh and inpyng. In three dialects reported by You (1985) this merger can be seen.

In the three dialects, You gives evidence for, the merged inpyng/inchiuh category is a high level tone ([44] or [55]). Luoyuan She also has this typical merger; a peculiar feature of this dialect, however, is that the vast majority of words belonging to the merged category have a high falling configuration ([53]), probably due to influence from the local Miin dialect. There is a small residue pronounced with the more typically She high level tone: 兎 *thu*^{1b}, 有 *hau*^{1b}. Evidently this is a sound change still in progress, or at the very least, a sound change somehow impeded before being carried through completely.

2. Lexical traits.

Below a number of She lexical traits will be examined. Most of these forms are different from those found in mainline Kehjia dialects. Of especial interest are several words which may reveal connections with the non-Hann She language spoken in Goangdong.

MEAT 𦍋 *pi*³. 𦍋 *tɕy*¹ *pi*³ 豬 𦍋 'pork', *pi*³ *iu*² 𦍋油 'lard'; this word perhaps has some connection to She *kwei*² (Mau and Meeng 1986: 108).

HOUSE 寮 *lau*². Non-She Kehjia dialects use 屋 in the sense of 'house': Meishiann *vuk*⁷.

GARDEN 菜畝 *tshoi*¹ *ɕia*². In the She language itself, 畝 would seem to have the sense of 'dry field' as opposed to a wet rice field. It is interesting to note that the Luoyuan She refer to their own language as 畝客話 *ɕia*² *ha*⁷ *ua*⁶.

LOOM 𦍋機 *nɔŋ*² *ky*¹. The first element of this compound is of unclear origin.

BUY, SELL 𦍋 *un*⁶. The etymological origin of this word is unclear.

SHINE 皓 hau⁶. This seems to agree in sound and meaning with the Goangyunn 廣韻 gloss 胡老切明也.

KILL □ loʔ⁷. This word is apparently limited to the She dialects.

ABLE 解 hai¹. (Goangyunn 胡買切曉也.) This form is uncommon in most Kehjia dialects but is cognate to the usual Miin form: Fwujou ha⁶, Fwuan hɛ⁶, Shawwu 邵武 hie³. The tone shows the common Kehjia shift of the yangshanq to inpyng; this demonstrates that it is a native form and not a loan from Miin. The corresponding negative form is mai¹, a fusion of ¹ɲ⁶ (earlier *m⁶) and hai¹; similar forms are widespread in Miin: Fwujou ma⁶, Fwuan me⁶,.

EYE 眼□ nien³ khi⁷⁸. Kehjia dialects, like Miin, generally use the form 目珠 (Meishiann muk⁷ tsu¹). The second syllable of the She form is etymologically unclear.

CENTIPEDE □ khiu¹. Mau and Meeng (1986) compare this form to Buhnuu 布努 form chɤu⁵ 'id.'. The Buhnuu are classified as a Yau people but their language is clearly a member of the Miau branch of the Miau-Yau family. Mau and Meeng apparently see a close connection between the non-Hann She language of Goangdong and the Buhnuu, who are found in Hwunan 湖南 Gueyjou 貴州 and Goangshi 廣西 (Mau, Meeng and Jenq 1982).

PORCUPINE □ min³. This word bears a clear relation to the corresponding native (non-Hann) She word ta¹ min³ (Mau and Meeng 1986: 97). The element ta¹ may be the word ta¹ 'earth, soil, mud' or alternatively some sort of prefix or presyllable; compare the following She forms given in Mau and Meeng: ta¹ ɔn⁶ tan¹ 'swallow (the bird)', ta¹ phui³ 'ant', ta¹ mun⁴ 'mosquito'.

3. Pronouns, demonstratives and place words.

The Luoyuan She personal pronouns are given below.

<u>singular</u>	<u>plural</u>
1. 我 ɲuai ¹	我人 ɲuai ¹ ɲiŋ ² (excl.) 自家人 tɕi ¹ kɔ ¹ ɲiŋ ² (incl.)
2. 你 ɲi ¹	你人 ɲi ¹ ɲiŋ ²
3. 渠 ky ¹	渠人 ky ¹ ɲiŋ ²

Note that the etymological tone of 我 is tone one (inpyng); the tones of the second and third persons have assimilated to the tone of the first person.

The demonstratives are illustrated in the following forms.

個個 kuai ³ kuai ^{1b}	this (one)
□個 ɲi ⁶ kuai ^{1b}	that (one)
哪□個 na ⁶ ni ³ kuai ^{1b}	which (one)?
個邊 kuai ⁶ pan ¹	here
□邊 ɲi ⁶ pan ¹	there (proximate)
那邊 nai ⁶ pan ¹	there (distant)

The place words of the Luoyuan She dialect are very distinctive as the following forms illustrate.

目頭 mu ⁷ theu ²	top, above
那底 nai ⁶ tai ³	id.
那倒 nai ⁶ tɔ ³	under, below
家下 kɔ ¹ hɔ ⁶	id.
□行 thi ¹ han ²	front
□行 sei ¹ han ²	id.
屎頭 ɕi ³ theu ²	behind
□□ ɲi ⁶ noi ³	inside
外□ ɲia ⁶ mou ³	outside

V. Conclusion

The She dialect of Luoyuan is seen to possess several distinctive Kehjia features and there is no doubt that genetically it should be assigned to this group. At the same times it differs from other Kehjia dialects in a number of interesting ways. A small number of lexical items point to links with the non-Hann She language spoken in Goangdong province. In addition to the forms suggested by Mau and Meeng, I have added the word for 'porcupine', *miŋ*³. The She dialects provide us with an excellent opportunity to study substratum influences in Chinese dialects. One hopes that a substantial description of one or more of these dialects will soon be made available to the scholarly world.

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本文所描寫的語言是福建省羅源縣畬族說的一種客家方言。據 1982 年的人口普查，中國南方約有三十萬畬族：集中於福建和浙江兩省。畬族絕大多數操客家話；只有廣東省幾個地點約有一千人仍會說原來的民族語言；據研究，這種語言與苗語有密切的關係。羅源的畬語雖然確實是一種客家方言，但它仍具有一些其他客家方言所無的特點。羅源畬語仍然保留幾個非漢語詞彙，與廣東苗語支的畬語有關係。據此，可以證明羅源的畬族原先也用一種苗語支的語言。