



DOI: 10.2478/linpo-2020-0003

## How to choose the proper words? The process of vocabulary standardization in *Putonghua*

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**Abstract:** Maria Kurpaska, *How to choose the proper words? The process of vocabulary standardization in Putonghua*. The Poznań Society for the Advancement of Arts and Sciences, PL ISSN 0079-4740, pp. 41-53

As with most fields of life, China can trace its history of word standardization back to ancient times, when the first dictionaries (such as *Erya*, ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) appeared. Modern Standard Chinese used in Mainland China – Putonghua – has been subject to standardization since its proclamation as the official national language of China in 1956. The definition states quite clearly that its base is formed by the Northern dialects. This statement concerns also vocabulary.

However, it is not a simple matter to make a choice of words which are to be used throughout the country. On the one hand, the so-called “Northern dialects” are spoken by almost 70% of the Han Chinese population, i.e. by about 800 million people. Although the Northern dialects are said to be quite uniform, the vast area that they cover must bring diversity in vocabulary. On the other hand, the remaining 30% of the Han Chinese speak a range of mutually unintelligible tongues, which are bound to penetrate the Northern dialects.

The aim of this paper is to show how the lexicon of Putonghua is being codified. An attempt will be made to reveal how the basic vocabulary was selected during the forming of Putonghua in the 1950s. Some of the tools used by the State Language Commission in order to control the process of vocabulary standardization will be described. Moreover, the paper intends to describe the ongoing changes in the Chinese lexicon. It will show the sources of new words that are gradually accepted into the authoritative dictionaries of modern Chinese.

**Keywords:** Standard Chinese; Putonghua; language standardization; codification of vocabulary; language policy

### 1. Introduction

The standardization of *Putonghua* is a process which started long before its official proclamation as a national standard language in 1955. The works on language normalization involved a unification of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. So far, the only fully codified aspect of *Putonghua* is its phonology (cf. Norman 1982: 138). Vocabulary and grammar are constantly changing and the State Language Commission (*Guojia Yuyan*

*Wenzi Gongzuo Weiyuanhui* 国家语言文字工作委员会), the official organ of the PRC, must take measures to control these changes.

The aim of this paper is to show how the base of the lexicon of today's *Putonghua* has been formed, which words were chosen, which were rejected; how the standard absorbs new words. It will also try to describe what means are used in order to codify the vocabulary of *Putonghua* and how these means work in reality. The intention of the author is mainly to systematize the existing knowledge on the subject in order to allow further deeper research on the problem of vocabulary standardization.

Vocabulary as an integral part of any language undergoes constant changes. Victoria Fromkin et al. (2004: 510-516) in the book *An Introduction to Language* enumerate the following universal types of lexical change:

- Addition of new words;
- Borrowings or loan words;
- Loss of words;
- Semantic change.

All four kinds of lexical change are, naturally, also present in the national standard language of China. Although relatively young and artificially designed, *Putonghua* is subject to the same rules as any language.

There are many reasons for language change, depending on the changes in the society and also on the nature of language itself (cf. Crystal 2003: 335). Many of the social causes for vocabulary development in Chinese are combined with new phenomena, which occur in different spheres. They can be due to the replacement of social systems or to political transformations, such as the reforms and opening-up in China (since 1978). They can also be a result of the introduction of new technology and other novelties (Ge 2018: 190-193).

Another important factor of change in Chinese vocabulary is the contact with other languages: both dialects of Chinese and foreign languages. The Chinese languages have always existed in the neighbourhood of the languages of other ethnic groups. In the history of China, there have been three periods of massive borrowings from other languages: the time when Buddhism was introduced to China (from the Eastern Han to the Song dynasty); the phase of activity of Jesuit missionaries in the late Ming and early Qing dynasty; and the past 150 years, which have been crucial for the present state of the Standard Mandarin Chinese. The last of these periods has brought unprecedentedly strong influence of foreign languages, a very intense contact with other cultures, and through that the emergence of new ideas (concerning science, technology, politics, economy, society) (Chen 2004: 100-101; cf. Ge 2018: 192-193).

The process of real standardization of the vocabulary began with the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Normalization has also been one of the rigid policies of the Communist Party since 1949 (Zhang 1995: 88).

## 2. Beginnings of *Putonghua*

The standard language in the People's Republic of China since 1955 is *Putonghua* 普通话. The definition, as formulated by Zhou Enlai in 1956, states plainly:

*Putonghua* is the standard form of Modern Chinese with the Beijing phonological system as its norm of pronunciation, and Northern dialects as its base dialect, and looking to exemplary modern works in *báihuà* 'vernacular literary language' for its grammatical norms (translation: Chen 2004: 24).

What is translated into English as Northern dialects, is in Chinese called *Beifanghua* 北方话 (Zhou 1956), and it denotes the Mandarin dialects. Li Yuming, the former Director of the Department of Language Information Administration of the Ministry of Education in PRC, articulates the reference point of standardization: "The authoritative regional dialect is the Northern dialects as represented by Beijing dialect. The authoritative social dialect is the social language used by more educated class of the society" (Li 2015: 221-222). The Northern dialects are accordingly the core of vocabulary.

All the three aspects of language (i.e. phonology, vocabulary and grammar) must be combined in the process of standardization, it is not enough for example to read a character representing a dialectal word according to the sound system of Beijing to make it standard, it must be first incorporated into the standard. Later, dialectal words which enter *Putonghua* are pronounced according to the codified sound system of *Putonghua* (cf. Tan 2000: 198).

In *Putonghua*, pronunciation and grammar are considered to be quite fixed, the changes are minor. But its vocabulary is changing constantly, most dynamically of all features of language (Chen 2005: 291). That is why it needs constant revision and standardization.

It is not a simple matter to make a choice of words which are to be used throughout the country. On the one hand, the so-called "Northern dialects", which were chosen as the base for vocabulary of *Putonghua*, are spoken by almost 70% of the Han Chinese population, i.e. by about 800 million people. Although the Northern dialects are said to be quite uniform, the vast size of the area that they cover must result in diversity in vocabulary (cf. Tian 1995: 86). On the other hand, the remaining 30% of the Han Chinese speak a range of mutually unintelligible tongues, which are bound to penetrate the Northern dialects. The vocabulary system of *Putonghua* is continuously open to other dialects, the Northern dialects are just the base (Tan 2000: 202).

### 2.1. Symposium on the Standardization of Modern Chinese 1955

In 1955 the Symposium on the Standardization of Modern Chinese (*Xiandai Hanyu Guifanhua Xueshu Huiyi* 现代汉语规范化学术会议) was held in Beijing. The principles which were decided upon were (Chen 2004: 111):

– The rejection of some words characteristic to the Beijing dialect (*Beijinghua* 北京话), and the choice of those "that had wider circulation in Northern Mandarin area" (Chen 2004: 111; cf. Tan 2000: 201-202; see Table 1).

Table 1: Examples of words in Beijing dialect rejected in *Putonghua* (cf. Tan 2000: 202)

English	<i>Beijinghua</i>	Putonghua
‘sun’	老爷儿 <i>lǎoyér</i>	太阳 <i>tàiyáng</i>
‘match’	取灯儿 <i>qǔdēngr</i>	火柴 <i>huǒchái</i>
100 RMB	老头儿票 <i>lǎotóur piào</i>	一百元人民币 <i>yībǎi yuán rénminbì</i>

– The rejection of words characteristic of the non-Northern Mandarin areas and the choice of Northern-Mandarin expressions (Chen 2004: 111), e.g.:

水泥 *shuǐní* rather than 洋灰 *yánghuī* (from the Wu dialect area) – ‘cement’ (Chen 2004: 105).

– Among translations or borrowings from other languages – the choice of semantic translations, rather than transliterations (Chen 2004: 111; see Table 2).

Table 2: The choice of semantic translations with regard to loanwords from foreign languages (Chen 2004: 112)

Earlier forms	Present forms	English
德莫克拉西 <i>démòkèlāxī</i>	民主 <i>mínzhǔ</i>	‘democracy’
普罗列塔利亚 <i>pǔluóliètǎliyà</i>	无产阶级 <i>wúchǎnjiējí</i>	‘proletariat’

– Transliteration of proper names with characters which do not mean anything unintended (Chen 2004: 111; see Table 3).

Table 3: Transliteration of proper names (Chen 2004: 111)

Earlier form	Present form	English
莫三鼻给 <i>Mòsānbǐjǐ</i> (‘not-three-nose-supply’)	莫桑比克 <i>Mòsāngbǐkè</i> (‘not-mulberry-than-can’)	Mozambique

3. Tools for controlling the lexicon

3.1. Legislature

In order to control the development of the national standard, the Chinese Government has implemented a set of norms and regulations. The most important of these is the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language,

valid since 2001 (National People's Congress... [n.d.]), hereafter for brevity called *the Language Law*.

Article 6 of *the Language Law* declares:

The State promulgates standard norms of the spoken and written Chinese language, administers its use in the community, supports the teaching of and scientific research in the language in order to promote its normalization, enrichment and development (National People's Congress... [n.d.]).

In order to facilitate the application of the Language Law, in 2004 six subcommittees of the National Language and Script Standardization Technical Committee 国语言文字标准化技术委员会 were set up, among them the Subcommittee of Chinese Vocabulary (*Hànyǔ yǔhuì fēnhuì* 汉语语汇分会) (Li Yuming 2015: 313-314; Ministry of Education... 2004). The subcommittee has sixteen members, among them Zhou Jian 周荐, professor at Nankai University (Tianjin) as the chairman. He is the author of many publications concerning Chinese vocabulary (e.g. Zhou 2004; 2011).

### 3.2. Normative dictionaries

As with most fields of life, China can trace its history of word standardization back to ancient times, when the first dictionaries (such as *Erya* 尔雅, ca. 3rd century B.C.) appeared. Throughout the ages, many dictionaries and rhyme books have been compiled. These works are all regarded as tools for the codification of vocabulary.

At present, the State supervises the editing of normative dictionaries, which summarize the trends in vocabulary development and establish standards. The most authoritative of them is *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* 现代汉语词典 – *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan... 2002; Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan... 2016; cf. Lü 2002: 237; Tian 1995: 86), regularly updated and reissued since 1978<sup>1</sup>. This dictionary is edited by The Dictionary Department of the Institute of Linguistics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (*Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan Yuyan Yanjiusuo Cidian Bianjishi* 中国社会科学院语言研究所词典编辑室. Its first edition had 56,000 entries, the seventh – 70,000 (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan... 2016).

*Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* includes the most widespread vocabulary, used not only in Mainland China, but also in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, as well as among overseas Chinese (Tian 1995: 86; 2007: 1).

Another important dictionary is *Xiandai Hanyu Guifan Cidian* 现代汉语规范词典 – *The Standard Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese* (Li 2004; 2014). Until now it has had three editions (2004, 2010, 2014). Many prominent linguists have been its editors and consultants, including Li Xingjian 李行健 (chief editor) and Lü Shuxiang 吕叔湘, Li Rong 李荣, Xu Jialu 许嘉璐 (consultants) (cf. Tian 1995: 86-87). The third edition has over 70,000 entries and it was the first dictionary written according to the *Table of*

<sup>1</sup> Since the first edition the next were: 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1983, 3<sup>rd</sup> in 1996, 4<sup>th</sup> in 2002, 5<sup>th</sup> in 2005, 6<sup>th</sup> in 2012. The newest is the 7<sup>th</sup> edition published in 2016 (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan... 2016).

*General Standard Chinese Characters (Tōngyòng Guīfàn Hànzì Biǎo 通用规范汉字表)* (see 4.3 below).

### 3.3. Lists of characters

In order to clarify and promote the rules, several lists of Chinese characters have been published. These serve mainly as a tool of popularizing the normalized Chinese script, yet they also play an important role in the spreading of standard lexicon.

In 1988 the *List of Commonly Used Characters in Modern Chinese (Xiandai Hanyu Tongyongzi Biao 现代汉语通用字表)* (Quanguo Renda 2001: 211-250) was published. It contains 7000 characters. This list was replaced in 2014 by the *Table of General Standard Chinese Characters (Tongyong Guifan Hanzi Biao 通用规范汉字表)* (Ministry of Education... 2013). There are 8105 characters in the new list, divided into three categories. The first two categories contain 6500 characters of most common use, while the remaining 1605 characters in category three are those used in surnames, place names, science, etc. The *Table of General Standard Chinese Characters* was implemented in the *Xiandai Hanyu Guifan Cidian 现代汉语规范词典 – The Standard Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese* (see 4.2. above; Ministry of Education... 2014).

A different list was published in 2001. It was *The First Series of Standardized Forms of Words with Non-standardized Variant Forms (Di-yi pi Yixingci Zhengli Biao 第一批异形词整理表)* (Ministry of Education... 2001). The purpose of this list is to promote the standardized forms of characters for words which have other popular variants of writing (cf. Li Yuming 2015: 217-218), e.g.:

按捺—按纳 ànnà – to restrain (Ministry of Education... 2014: 4);

按语—案语 ànyǔ – a note; to comment (Ministry of Education... 2014: 4).

### 3.4. Corpora

A very important contribution to the study of lexicon is made by corpus linguistics. This area of study started with the beginnings of modern Chinese, i.e. since the 1920s, but the development of technology has certainly accelerated this branch of knowledge. Corpora are also one of the means of controlling the use of neologisms; they can be of great help in the choice of new words for dictionaries (cf. Mc Enery & Xiao 2016: 438-444).

As a result of corpus-based linguistics many frequency dictionaries are published, such as *A frequency dictionary of Mandarin Chinese: core vocabulary for learners* (Xiao et al. 2009; cf. Mc Enery & Xiao 2016: 439-441). Corpora were also used when the above-mentioned lists of commonly used characters (see 4.3) were created (Mc Enery & Xiao 2016: 439)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the most used corpora of Chinese are the following:

The UCLA Written Chinese Corpus (Tao & Xiao 2007; 2012) <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/corpus/UCLA/>

#### 4. Lexical change in *Putonghua* – how new words are incorporated

The vocabulary of Modern Chinese (*xiàndài Hànyǔ* 现代汉语) has been formed on the basis of the Mandarin (i.e. Northern) dialects, but it has also absorbed words from other sources, such as Old Chinese<sup>3</sup>, other dialects of Chinese, and foreign languages (cf. Chen 2004: 99-100).

As mentioned before (see 1), all the types of lexical change, as listed by Fromkin et al. (2004: 510-516), are present in *Putonghua*. There have been a few crucial moments in the development and fluctuation of Modern Standard Chinese, e.g. May Fourth Movement since 1919, the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the reforms and opening-up, and, at present, the rapid modernization. These historical events have left a trace also in the language.

##### 4.1. The addition of new words

Each new edition of *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* has new words (Deng 2017: 71). For example, the 7<sup>th</sup> edition had 477 newly incorporated words in comparison with the 6<sup>th</sup> edition. These were mostly notional words (*shící* 实词), among them mainly nouns and verbs, whereas function words (*xūcí* 虚词) were much less common (Deng 2017: 71-72).

The most recent changes are generally due to the “influence of social development on vocabulary development” (Ge 2018: 191). Thus, there have been many neologisms since the opening-up, the effect of a new economic situation, e.g. 特区 *tèqū*, ‘special zone’; 合资 *hézī*, ‘joint venture’ (Ge 2018: 190-191). During this period of reform, many words have entered the standard in Mainland China via Hong Kong and Taiwan (Tan 2000: 202). These territories are still a rich source of new vocabulary, including loanwords which will be discussed below (see 5.2). The examples of words which have been assimilated into *Putonghua* this way are: 公关 *gōngguān* (abbreviation of 公共关系 *gōng-gòng guānxi*) – ‘public relations’; 减肥 *jiǎnfēi* – ‘to reduce fat; to lose weight’ or 超市 *chāoshì* (abbreviation of 超级市场 *chāoji shìchǎng*) – ‘supermarket’ (Tan 2000: 218-219).

New phenomena in various fields, such as technology, politics, economy, social changes in general, need to be named (cf. Ge 2018: 191). Underneath several examples from the newest edition of *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* have been quoted, listed in Deng (2017: 72), and classified according to spheres of life:

- Politics: 红线 *hóngxiàn* – ‘red line’; 党群 *dǎngqún* – ‘the party and the masses’;

The Lancaster Corpus of Mandarin Chinese (Mc Enery & Xiao 2004) <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/corpus/LCMC/default.htm>

Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese (Chinese Knowledge and Information Processing 2013) <http://rocling.iis.sinica.edu.tw/CKIP/engversion/20corpus.htm>

Center for Chinese Linguistics Corpus of Chinese Texts at Peking University (Zhan et al. 2003) [http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl\\_corpus/](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_corpus/)

<sup>3</sup> Old Chinese, as understood by Ping Chen (2004: 1), denotes what is commonly called *Gǔdài Hànyǔ* 古代汉语, i.e. Archaic (or Old Chinese – *Shànggǔ Hànyǔ* 上古汉语) and Medieval Chinese (or Middle Chinese – *Zhōnggǔ Hànyǔ* 中古汉语), covering the period from 1700 B.C. to the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (cf. Chen 2004: 1-2).



- Economy: 保息 *bǎoxī* – ‘interest guarantee’;
- Society: 都市病 *dūshì bìng* – ‘lifestyle disease; diseases of affluence’; 接地气 *jiē dìqì* – ‘down to earth’;
- Internet: 网聊 *wǎngliáo* – ‘netchat’; 微信 *Wēixin* – ‘Weixin’ or ‘WeChat’; 拉黑 *lāhēi* – ‘to add sb. to one’s blacklist’.

## 4.2. Borrowings or loanwords

In the long history of China, contacts with other ethnic groups were a natural circumstance, and thus borrowings or loan words became part of the Chinese language.

Foreign loanwords constitute probably the most important category of new words in Modern Chinese (c.f. Chen 2004: 100-101). The past 150 years have witnessed an immense wave of new concepts which started to enter the Chinese language. The contact with foreign ideas and technology made it necessary to form new words. Many books were translated from Western languages (English, German, French), some directly, some *via* Japanese (Chen 2004: 101).

The Japanese started borrowing many concepts from the West during the Meiji period. Due to the large-scale contact between China and Japan, many borrowings from Japanese became a part of the Chinese lexicon. One of the types of loanwords were Japanese concepts written in *kanji*, as these were easily integrated into Chinese, e.g.:

- 卫生 *wèishēng* (jap. *eisei*) – ‘hygiene’ (Chen 2004: 102);
- 科学 *kēxué* (jap. *kagaku*) – ‘science’ (Chen 2004: 102).

Another kind of borrowings were “return loans” borrowed earlier into Japanese from Chinese, used then to express ideas translated from European languages into Chinese, e.g.:

- 机会 *jīhuì* (jap. *kikai*) – ‘opportunity’ (Chen 2004: 101).

Since 1910 there has also been a massive borrowing from European languages, mainly English (Chen 2004: 103). Currently, *Putonghua* borrows mainly either from dialects or from foreign languages (cf. Ge 2018: 192-193).

- Loanwords from European languages

Ping Chen (2004: 103-105) classifies loanwords from European languages into five categories:

- Loan translation

Calques or literal translations:

- 蜜月 *mìyuè* – ‘honeymoon’;
- 篮球 *lánqiú* – ‘basketball’.

- Semantic translation

A new word is created with the use of such morphemes that explain the features of the new concept:

- 汽车 *qìchē* (steam vehicle) – ‘car’;
- 邮票 *yóupiào* (post coupon) – ‘stamp’.



- Phonetic transcription

Words are borrowed directly from the source language, Chinese characters only represent sounds

坦克 *tǎnkè* – ‘tank’.

Among the phonetic borrowings, there is a large number of neologisms, which entered *Putonghua* via other dialects (T’sou 2015), e.g.:

咖啡 *kāfēi* ← Cantonese *gaa3fe1* ← English ‘coffee’;

(T) 恤 *T(tī)-xù* ← Cantonese *tilseot1* ← English ‘T-shirt’.

- Juxtaposition of semantic and phonetic transcription

A Chinese morpheme is added to the transliterated word:

芭蕾舞 *bālěi wǔ* – (-dance) – ‘ballet’;

啤酒 *píjiǔ* (-liquor) – ‘beer’.

- Combination of semantic and phonetic transcription

The combination of characters pictures both the sound and the meaning:

迷你 *mínǐ* (enchanted you) – ‘mini’;

雷达 *léidá* (thunder arrive) – ‘radar’.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan... 2016) 13 new loanwords from foreign languages were listed (Deng 2017: 72). Among them, there are words called 字母词 *zìmǔcí* – ‘words composed of letters’, e.g.: EV (Electric Vehicle) (电动汽车 *diàndòng qìchē*); HR (Human Resources) (人力资源 *rénlì zīyuan*). There are also phonetic loans, such as 比萨 *bǐsà* – ‘pizza’, and words describing English grammatical terms, e.g. 过去时 *guòqùshí* – ‘past tense’ 完成时 *wánchéngshí* – ‘perfect tense’.

### 4.3. Dialecticisms

Dialecticisms are not necessarily neologisms in the strict sense, but often words in use in other parts of China which enter the national standard (cf. Ge 2018: 197-198). In this respect, the influence of vocabulary from Hong Kong and Taiwan is also very strong (cf. 5.1 above; Tan 2000: 213-228). Due to economic reasons, especially strong is the impact of Hong Kong. But there are also words from the dialect of Beijing, Yue, Wu, Minnan, which have become a part of the standard (cf. Song & Piao 2003; Su 2001).

Chen (2004: 100) shows that many loanwords come from the Wu dialect, which shows the influence of prominent writers of Wu background on the evolution of Modern Written Chinese, e.g. the word for ‘rubbish’:

in Northern Mandarin – 脏土 *zāngtǔ* (lit. ‘dirty soil’);

in Wu – 垃圾 *lājī* (also pronounced *lèsè*) (Chen 2004: 100).

The Wu word has become widespread and has taken the place of 脏土 *zāngtǔ*, which could be misunderstood outside of the Mandarin Chinese area.

The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan... 2016) lists only two new dialectal words (Deng 2017: 72):

志工 *zhìgōng* – ‘volunteer worker’ (a word from the Jiangsu Province);

大约莫 *dàyuēmo* – ‘approximately’ (a word from Yulin in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region – the Yue dialect).

#### 4.4. The loss of words

In the process of language change, some words are bound to disappear from use. The standardization process in modern Chinese tends generally to eliminate words formerly used as phonetic transcriptions from foreign languages, and to replace them with those that sound more familiar, e.g. 德律风 *délǜfēng* (from English ‘telephone’) has been replaced by 电话 *diànhuà* (Ge 2018: 202).

Chen Zhan tai (2005: 291-292) provides some examples of the loss of words connected with the social structure and relationships between people. After the May Fourth Movement many forms of address, such as 先生 *xiānshēng* – ‘Mister’, 夫人 *fūrén* – ‘Madam’, 小姐 *xiǎojiě* – ‘Miss’, were in common use. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, the term 同志 *tóngzhì* – ‘comrade’ replaced most of these forms of address, causing their disappearance or neglect. What is interesting, after the opening-up, we could witness the return of 先生 *xiānshēng*, 小姐 *xiǎojiě* etc. (cf. Chen 2005: 291).

#### 4.5. Semantic change

Some noteworthy examples of semantic change in Modern Chinese can be given by the meanings of several forms of address, e.g.: the above-mentioned 同志 *tóngzhì* – ‘comrade’ and 师傅 *shīfu* – ‘master’. Liu and Chen (2015) describe in detail the shifts of meaning of these two words, which have in recent history intertwined. 同志 *tóngzhì*, meaning literally ‘people of same interest, of same ideas’ was popularized after the founding of the People’s Republic of China as a term denoting equality between the members of society. However, during the cultural revolution it had strong political connotations, and it was largely replaced by 师傅 *shīfu*, a term originally used by apprentices to address their masters. 师傅 *shīfu* began to denote any person, not necessarily craftsmen (cf. Liu & Chen 2015; Chen 2005: 291).

After the opening-up, both 同志 *tóngzhì* and 师傅 *shīfu* decreased in frequency. But in the meantime, 同志 *tóngzhì* started to be used by the homosexual community in Hong Kong in the sense of ‘gay and lesbian’, denoting the equality of rights for sexual minorities (Liu & Chen 2015: 76).

However, in Mainland China 同志 *tóngzhì* is currently used mostly in the sense of ‘comrade’, especially among party members, although it is not as common as it used to be before the Cultural Revolution. 师傅 *shīfu* is at present generally used to address workers, shop assistants, or strangers (cf. Liu & Chen 2015: 76-78).

## 5. Summary

*Putonghua* is based mainly on the Mandarin dialects of Chinese, and so is its vocabulary. However, this is not the only source of lexicon, as it is persistently absorbing words from other regions of China, and also from abroad. Generally, preference is given to the words prevalent in Northern Mandarin areas (Chen 2004: 105), but a part of vocabulary characteristic to the Beijing dialect has been rejected in the course of standardization.

The State Language Commission applies quite natural measures of codification. The mirror of language change are the normative dictionaries. Corpus linguistics should serve as a tool in establishing the norms according to the frequency of usage of new words (cf. Ge 2018: 213). The normative lists of characters play their role in the popularization of rules.

Standardization of vocabulary is a never-ending process, and it requires a lot of work from linguists and from the state organs. In the era of globalization and mass-communication this task seems even more challenging. That is maybe why observing the efforts is even more interesting.

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<sup>4</sup> 社区词语 *shequ ciyu* – 'community words' refers to words which originate in Chinese communities outside of mainland China, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and overseas Chinese communities.

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