

Chinese in Contact with Tibetan: the Case of Wutun Language

Erika Sandman

University of Helsinki

Language contact between Chinese and non-Chinese languages is usually assumed to be unidirectional (Chinese → non-Chinese). However, in the case of Wutun language the reverse is true. Wutun is a distinct local form of Northwest Mandarin that has undergone heavy interference from Amdo Tibetan. Wutun is spoken by ca. 4000 people in Qinghai province of Western China, a region which forms a contact zone between Chinese and Tibetan cultural and linguistic spheres. Wutun represents a rare case of Sinitic language nestling in the middle of Tibetan-speaking area and it has almost completely adapted its linguistic environment. The Sinitic status of Wutun is evident from its basic vocabulary and grammatical morphemes, which are mainly of a Chinese origin, but Tibetan influence manifests itself in the all levels of its linguistic structure: phonology, morphosyntax and lexicon.