

# Re: Fun with the Origin of Chinese spoken languages

**Source:** <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2004-10/2773.html>

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**From:** SJ (*donot\_at\_send.spam.net*)

**Date:** 10/27/04

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PaPaPeng <papapeng@yahoo.com> wrote in  
news:2h1rn09o63q71b51cboebgnr2c5obkb1su@4ax.com:

>On Mon, 25 Oct 2004 17:39:32 -0700, Jacques Guy

><jguy@alphalink.com.au> wrote:

>

>>He's just learnt the meaning of wang2ba dan4. "Terrapin" is  
>>a North American species of turtles (wang2ba)--the word is  
>>believed to have been borrowed from Algonquian (a native  
>>language spoken in Virginia and thereabouts).

>

>

>Reminds me of The ECONOMIST article on the early efforts that led to  
>the adoption of the Beijing dialect as the common national language of  
>China. I have that article filed somewhere.

>

>This was just after the 1949 Revolution and there was a national  
>congress on a national language. The Shanghai clique of course wanted  
>their dialect as the national language. Somewhere during the  
>conference break the senior Shanghai delegate used the word "wang  
>something" in reference to a rickshaw he wanted to hire. However, to  
>the Peking delegate who overheard him, it sounded like Turtle, a word  
>that has the power of calling one a whore. The Peking delegate was  
>enraged and chased the Shanghai guy out of the hall. The Shanghai guy  
>never returned to the conference and the Beijing dialect won by  
>default.

>

>Thus when you ( SJ mainly) non Chinese guys talk with such authority  
>about Chinese as it was spoken more than 2000 years ago you have  
>totally no credibility. Even modern Chinese of different dialects can  
>badly misunderstand one another.

Outsiders sometimes can understand better than insiders.

SJ.