



INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS OF HUKOU DIALECT IDENTITY IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This paper conducts a tracking investigation the language attitude of the dialect speakers in Hukou County, China. Results reveal that: Both speakers' language identity differ in different dimensions. Language identity conforms to the irregular inverted U-shaped curve relationship of "rapid rise then gradual decrease". It's necessary to maintain the harmonious coexistence of dialects and Mandarin.

Key words:

language attitude; language identity;
Hukou dialect

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INTRODUCTION

With the development of China's economy and the popularization of Mandarin, the pace of shrinkage and decline of Chinese dialects has been greatly accelerated. Many local dialects are losing their natural features, getting closer to Mandarin, especially in the relatively backward central and western regions in China. A large number of people tend to work out of town, even settle all year round. Their language attitudes may undergone a change gradually. Part of speakers' views on their language may vary to the extreme opposites (Stefanie et al., 2014). Some may argue that their language should be passed onto their offspring to maintain their culture (e.g. King & Fogle, 2006). While others may consider their language "useless" due to its geographical or social restriction (Schüpbach, 2009). Thus, language attitude is mutable, understanding the development and evolution of language attitude means that individual language selection or language use can be observed more effectively.

When two or more languages come into contact with each other, the speaker is bound to face the problem of language selection. This is the process of language game and can be explained by the theory of language contact. The interaction and long-term effects of different languages may result in the borrowing of language components or language fusion. This may make the new, fused languages with traces of the original language, while the original language dies (Thomason & Terrence, 1988; Thomason, 2001). Mandarin is the official language of China, so the dialect speakers are mainly faced

with the selection between dialect and Mandarin, and the long-term contact between the two languages has produced the phenomenon of "dialect mingled by Mandarin" (Li, 2019a; 2019b). It is an inevitable outcome and reflects the traces of Mandarin left in dialect after language contact. This dynamic course makes many of the original elements in dialect disappear invisibly. It is just in this fusion that the Chinese dialects become inauthentic, endangered or even extinct. To protect dialects and preserve cultural diversity, the Chinese government has launched the "China Language Resources Protection Project" (Ministry of Education Department of Language and Text Information Management Division [2016]1), which has raised language protection to the national policy level.

Literature Review

Language attitude and language behavior

Language attitude involves individuals' stances on languages as well as the values attached to the languages (Dailey-O'Cain & Liebscher, 2011). As Gardner and Lambert (1972) proposed that language attitudes include the integrative and instrumental dimensions. The instrumental one focuses on the practical benefits of a language, particularly in terms of self-advancement, whereas the integrative view emphasizes the interpersonal and affective feelings towards the community speaking the language (Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004). For example, Kalmar et al. (1987) investigated Guangzhou students' attitudes towards Mandarin and Cantonese and found

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that Mandarin had received the most positive evaluation in terms of social progress, but from the perspective of personal empathy, Cantonese was more positively evaluated. This implies that language attitude is a psychological construct, rooted in the individual's mind. It can be expressed through language behaviour or action.

In this paper, language behavior mainly refers to the speaker's language selection or use of dialect or Mandarin. Language behaviour could be positive or negative, favourable or unfavourable. Positive language behavior is manifested by that a language is regarded as a preference for language use, and the proficiency of this language is getting better and better, while the negative language behavior is the opposite. Le Page et al. (1985) proposed the theory of acts of identity based on study of Creole language, it is suggested that there are four conditions for speakers with identity behavior: firstly, different groups can be identified; secondly, there are opportunities and capacities to observe and analyse the behavioral systems of these groups; thirdly, there is a strong motivation to join the group, and the feedback received from that group makes this motivation either enhanced or diminished; fourthly, the speaker has the ability to change his behaviour. Hence, language behavior is the direct manifestation of language identity.

The relationship between them

There is an essential connection between language attitude and language use (Patrick, 2017). A positive attitude towards a language may result in a positive behaviour towards the language, and similarly, a negative attitude may lead to a negative one (Nwagbo & Osita, 2015). Pennington and Balla (1998) examined the language attitude and language use of bilingual Chinese in Hong Kong and revealed that they directed literacy more towards their L2 (English), and that their L1 (Cantonese) was more used in colloquialism, while Mandarin played a relatively small role in students' daily communication. Similar studies, Nwagbo and Osita (2015) surveyed the language attitudes of 3 ethnic groups (Krahn, Bassa, Kpelle), a total of 120 Liberian refugees in Oru camp with respect to their indigenous languages and the language of the host community, Yoruba. He argued that teenage group (13-19 years) highly praised Yoruba, and correspondingly had proficiency in it. While the young adults (20-39 years) and the full adults (40-60 years) viewed Yoruba negatively and were accordingly very unskilled to it. Just as Patrick (2017), he confirmed that the younger generation of Singaporeans had a negative attitude towards their ethnic mother tongue, Chinese, and preferred to view English as a language preference. Hence, it has been numerically shown that language attitude closely linked to language behavior.

Dewaele (2015) compared 1454 adult multilinguals' language preferences for inner speech and emotional inner speech in their different languages. His quantitative analysis demonstrated that multilinguals using L1 most frequently and Lxs (languages learnt later in life) were used gradually less frequently. Increased use of the Lxs was linked to self-perceived proficiency, general use and socialization. Moreover, the effects of education level, age and gender were more limited and scattered. This research involves the influencing factors of language selection or use and reveals that languages that have been acquired earlier in life are used more frequently (Dewaele, 2010; Ewert, 2010; Pavlenko,

2005; 2012). In this regard, it applies equally for the language selection of dialect and Mandarin. For the residents in Chinese dialect areas, the preferred language is often dialect. However, with the popularization of Mandarin, there may be some changes in the language behavior, and the use of Mandarin has been strengthened.

A concept similar to language attitude is "language identity". Jenkins (2007) believed that language identity is a complex phenomenon and can not be separated from language attitude, language awareness and linguistic power, especially in post-modern society. The relationship between them has become more complicated. Language use is a carrier of identity (Yuk-Yue, et al., 1999), an act of identity, a means by which a group of people indicate to others who they are (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). This study does not subdivide these two concepts in meaning, they are considered equivalent since they have a common manifestation, that is, language behavior. There's a continuum between language behavior and society. Language embodies a social relationship, but also reflects a social structure, and language identity is undoubtedly a symbol of social and cultural identity.

Aims and value

Most of the current studies on language attitude or identity remain at the qualitative level, mostly in the form of investigation. In this way, this paper attempts to make further findings in the following two aspects: first, classify the respondents according to their personal characteristics, and understand the differences of language identity of different dimensions of speakers. Secondly, based on the theory of language contact, this paper divides the process of Hukou dialect and Mandarin contact into three stages, and analyzes the differences of language identity in the three stages.

Research Design

Source of data

Interviews were conducted from July 10, 2019 to August 13, 2019. Interviewees were the residents in Hukou County. Hukou County is located at the intersection of the famous Yangtze River and Poyang Lake in central China, with a registered population of 297308 (by the end of 2018). There are slight differences within the Hukou dialect, which can be divided into three major areas: Liusi, Wenqiao, and Liufang dialect area. This paper does not compare the specific differences among them.

Our investigation team consisted of 12 locals, all of them were college or graduate students. The survey tracked previous respondents only by telephone and WeChat because the previous study had accumulated much information in 2016. A total of 814 sets of valid data were obtained finally, and all questions were answered.

We only conducted voice surveys and collected four aspects of data: (1) Basic information, including the respondents' gender, age, occupation and education level; (2) Language attitude, namely, respondents' comprehensive evaluation or identity of Hukou dialect.

Measurement of language identity

Language attitude (identity) is selected as explanatory variable. Respondents' overall evaluation of Hukou dialect can basically reflect their language attitudes. The language attitude was assigned by the Likert scale method, and 1-5 points were

scored according to the degree of identity. This paper only analyzes the identity of dialect but not Mandarin, the language attitude is called “language identity” in the following paper.

Four basic information variables such as gender, age, occupation and education level were classified to calculate the degree of respondents’ language identity in each dimension. The results are shown in Table 1.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Language identity

Table 1. Multidimensional distribution of language identity

Variable	Dimension	Number	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)	D (%)	E (%)
Gender	Female	436	5.51	13.30	13.76	26.15	41.28
	Male	378	9.52	14.29	19.05	34.39	22.75
Age	30 years and below	248	16.12	25.00	28.23	25.00	5.65
	30-50 years	302	4.64	11.92	15.23	35.10	33.11
	50 years and above	264	2.27	5.30	6.06	28.79	57.58
Occupation	Student	84	26.19	30.95	19.05	11.90	11.91
	Wage-earner	374	7.49	11.76	14.44	22.99	43.32
	Other	356	2.81	11.80	17.42	41.57	26.40
Education	Primary and below	518	5.79	14.29	12.74	31.27	35.91
	Secondary / technical school	238	6.72	9.24	22.69	29.42	31.93
	College and above	58	24.14	27.59	20.69	20.68	6.90
Total	/	814	7.37	13.76	16.21	29.98	32.68

Note: A, B, C, D, and E respectively indicates that the degree of language identity: extremely not, relatively not, moderately, relatively, extremely.

As Table 1 shows, the respondents with the least language identity accounts for 7.37%, while the most language identity accounts for 32.68%. It reveals the differences in the distribution of Hukou dialect among speakers of different dimensions.

1. Gender. The rate of E in the dimension of female, climbing up to 41.28 %, is nearly twice than that in the dimension of male. It indicates that females are more dependent on the dialect.
2. Age. With regard to the E option, it presents that with the increase of age, the rate of the choice increases step by step, especially among the respondents aged 50 and above, the rate is up to 57.58%, which is more than 10 times than that of those aged 30 and below. Additionally, the rate of the respondents aged 50 and above who chose each degree of language identity increases step by step. Conversely, the rates of both A and B decline with the descending trend of age, and the rates of those aged 30 years and below is much more than that of those aged 50 and above. This illustrates that the older the respondents, the stronger the language identity. The older are more attached to their dialect than the younger.
3. Occupation. The rates of A and B in the dimension of student are significantly more than that of wage earner and other occupations. Correspondingly, the rates of D and E by students are significantly less than other occupations. It means that students have a relatively weak emotion for dialects.
4. Education level. The rates of D and E show a step decline with the improvement of education level. Instead, as to the rates of A and B, college and above are significantly more than that of other education levels. This proves that education (including Mandarin learning) has weakened the respondents’ language identity to some extent.

Stage of language identity

This paper divides the process of using Mandarin into three stages: early (S1), middle (S2) and late (S3) stages, and each stage is assumed to be a time unit. The following questions are set to understand respondents’ language identity:

- S0: Before you came into contact with Mandarin, you had identified with your dialect. Do you agree with this?
- S1: In the early stage of using Mandarin, the identity with your dialect became stronger. Do you agree with this?
- S2: After a period of using Mandarin, the identity with your dialect had been weakened. Do you agree with this?
- S3: After a longer period of using Mandarin, the identity with your dialect had been more weakened. Do you agree with this?

According to statistics, the respondents’ choices of language identity in the three stages are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Distribution of language identity at different stages

Stage	A (%)	B (%)	C (%)	D (%)	E (%)	Mean value
S0	2.70	3.93	53.32	19.16	20.89	3.5160
S1	4.42	9.58	12.29	28.75	44.96	4.0025
S2	6.14	14.01	25.06	27.52	27.27	3.5577
S3	10.81	17.69	43.98	19.90	7.62	2.9582

Note: The letters and their corresponding meanings are as shown in Table 1.

The sum rate of the D and E in Table 2 is selected to judge the variation characteristics of respondents’ language identity. It reveals that before using Mandarin, the rate of language identity is 40.05%. At the early stage, the rate of language identity suddenly rises to 73.71%, and over time it drops to 54.79% at the middle stage, and then decreases to 27.52% at the later stage. The variation characteristic of mean value is similar to that of rate of language identity. The distribution of

the rate and mean value of language identity are shown in Fig. 1.

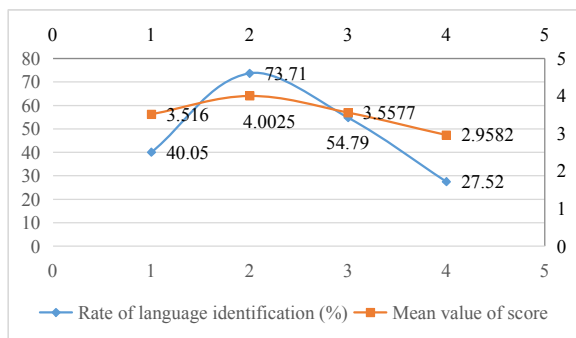


Fig 1 Distribution of the rate and mean value of language identity

Fig. 1 demonstrates that language identity has the development trend of first rising and then falling with the increase of the unit stage time of the using Mandarin.

CONCLUSION AND REVELATIONS

Conclusions

This paper investigates the phenomenon of “dialect mingled by Mandarin”, dialect speakers’ language identity and its effect on language degeneration, as well as the substitution effect of language attitude and language environment on influencing language degeneration. Main conclusions are as follows:

(1) Females and older people have stronger language identity; Students, those with higher education levels have weaker language identity. (2) In the process of contacting and using Mandarin, the dialect speakers’ language identity follows the inverted U-type law that increases rapidly first and then decreases.

Revelations

These results imply that: (1) There are differences in dialect speakers’ language identity. As to the dialect protection and inheritance, students, those with higher education levels and better family economic conditions deserve attention, especially the student group. Thus, classrooms below secondary school should be moderately invested in dialect activities, such as dialect courses. (2) Using the law of diminishing marginal utility, in the protection of dialects, the principle of “initial guidance and later education” should be adopted. That is, at the beginning of using Mandarin, it’s wise to guide speakers to accept Mandarin peacefully; In the later period, the focus is on propaganda, strengthening dialect speakers’ language identity and enhancing their love for the dialect.

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