

Dialect Attitude, Dialect Environment and Dialect Degradation: Evidence from Hukou Dialect in China

Jinfeng Li

School of Liberal Arts
Zhaoqing University
Zhaoqing, China 526061

Abstract—This paper investigates dialect attitude and “dialect mingled by Mandarin” phenomenon of 782 family residents in Hukou County, Jiangxi Province, China. OLS model was established to analyze the relationship between dialect attitude and dialect degradation. Results showed that: first, the distribution of value attitude is similar to that of the word frequency ratio of “dialect mingled by Mandarin”; second, the more people identify with their dialect, the weaker the degree of dialect degradation is; third, the younger students are and the higher education level and better economic conditions people are in, the deeper the degree of dialect degradation will be.

Keywords—*dialect attitude; emotional attitude; value attitude; dialect mingled by Mandarin; dialect degradation; dialect environment*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, people have begun to show concern for the phenomenon of language change. Studies made by Krauss (1992) and Crystal (2000) have aroused widespread concern worldwide. With the acceleration of China’s social reform and opening-up and modernization, the original relatively closed areas are rapidly moving towards openness, the shrinking and declining pace of dialect in the dialect layer is greatly accelerated, and it gradually gives way to Mandarin. All local dialects are losing their natural features, getting closer to common language (Mandarin), and developing into “dialect mingled by Mandarin”. It is irresistible that weak dialects deteriorate gradually, and become endangered, even die out.

Dialect degradation may be caused by external forces, such as economic and policy factors. Economic factors lead to population movement, which leads directly to extensive contact and collision of dialects and Mandarin. This is the most important factor for dialect degradation and endangerment. Dialect degradation may also be caused by internal factors, such as language attitude. Language attitude is the value judgment of people’s treatment of a certain language or dialect, and the resulting linguistic tendency and speech act. Lambert (1960)’s Matched-guise Technique opened the study of language attitude.

There is an essential connection between language attitude and language use, and positive language attitude is one of the necessary conditions for the growth of language

use (Grin, 2003). The attitude of language groups has significant influence on the death and revival of language (Julia, 2013). It is the key factor to measure the maintenance or loss of language. Early research on attitudes towards endangered languages focus on the attitudes of the remaining speakers and relative vitality of languages: the number of people, their age profiles, whether the language is being passed on to children, etc. As Joshua Fishman (1991) considered that the most important reference point in “saving language” was family, and intergenerational communication was the “gold standard” for language maintenance. Language maintenance was impossible without the transmission of intergenerational mother tongue, because speakers control whether to continue delivering their language to their children.

In summary, the academic community has extensively explored the dialect degradation and endangerment from internal and external factors. However, little research has been conducted to show the factors affecting language attitudes. Moreover, previous researches emphasize on description. Hence, this paper aims to investigate urban and rural dialect speakers’ emotional attitude (subjective identity) and value attitude (objective identity) in Hukou dialect region from two perspectives: internal language attitude and external language environment. Different dimensions, such as gender, age, occupation, education level, per capital disposable income, language fusion, etc. are involved to analysis the impact of dialect attitude and dialect environment on dialect degradation. In order to gain insights into the dialect degradation, we centered on their language attitudes to dialect. We integrate Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) concepts of language attitudes. Dialect attitude is divided into emotional attitude and value attitude, and “language identity” is used to roughly reflect it.

II. DATA AND VARIABLES

A. Data Sources

In this paper, field investigation and questionnaire are used to penetrate Hukou dialect area to obtain primary data. The first survey was conducted in 2018, from January 7th to February 12th, with an initial sample of 432, but 407 valid samples were collected for this collation. The second survey was carried out from July 1st to August 26th, a total of 302

residents were interviewed, with a valid sample of 275. In total, 682 valid samples were obtained with an effective rate of 92.92%.

B. Variables Selection

First, explanatory variable: dialect degradation (Degradation) is measured by the word frequency ratio of “dialect mingled by Mandarin”. Second, explained variables: the main explained variables are dialect attitude (Attitude), which is divided into two emotional attitude (Emotion) and value attitude (Value). Emotional attitude reflects dialect speakers’ identity in the emotion and use habits, and value

attitude reflects the practicability of dialect. Both variables are assigned in the Likert five-point scale, according to the extent to which the respondents rated the degree of dialect identity. Third, moderator variable: use dialect environment (Environment) as Moderator variable, including per capital disposable income (AIncome), language fusion (OTime) and friends and family speech (CMandarin) three sub-variables. (4) Control variables (C). This paper controls four kinds of basic information such as gender (Gender), age (Age), occupation (Occupation) and educational attainment (Education), as shown in "Table I".

TABLE I. VARIABLE MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

Variables	Name	Indicator	Symbol	Variable interpretation	Measure method
Explanatory variables	Dialect degradation		Degradation	word frequency ratio of “dialect mingled by Mandarin”	Word frequency
		Emotional attitude	Emotion	Emotional identity	Likert five-point scale
Explained variable	Dialect attitude	Value attitude	Value	Value identity	Likert five-point scale
		Per capital disposable income	AIncome	The sum of annual household income/total number of households	Last year
		Language fusion	OTime	Total time to go outside the county to work, travel, visit family, travel, etc. (0.5 months as a unit of measure)	Recent three years
Moderator variable	Dialect environment	Friends and family speech	CMandarin	Proportion of close friends in the social network circle who use Mandarin	
		Gender	Gender	Female, assigned 1; male, assigned 0	0-1 assignment
		Age	Age		
		Occupation	Occupation	Virtual variable: student, assigned 1; others, assigned 0	0-1 assignment
Control variables	C		Education	According to the actual time of receiving education, assignment: illiteracy or semi-illiteracy =0; Primary school = 6; Junior high school = 9; High school/senior/technical secondary school =12; Subject = 15; Undergraduate = 16; Master’s degree =19; PhD =23.	

III. STRUCTURAL EQUATION ANALYSIS

A. Dialect Attitude

The following are classified according to the respondents’ gender, age, occupation, education level and

per capital disposable income. Multidimensional distributions of dialect attitude are shown in "Table II".

TABLE II. MULTIDIMENSIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF DIALECT ATTITUDES

Variables	Dimension	Number	Attitude	A	B	C	D	E	Mean value
Gender	Female	437	E	6.41	12.13	14.65	27.00	39.82	3.82
			V	8.47	18.76	20.14	25.40	27.23	3.44
	Male	245	E	11.02	21.63	22.45	23.27	21.63	3.23
			V	15.10	14.29	16.33	22.86	31.43	3.41
Age	≦ 30	198	E	11.11	33.33	25.25	16.67	13.64	2.88
			V	22.73	25.76	24.75	14.65	12.12	2.68
	30-50	233	E	6.87	11.59	14.59	26.61	40.34	3.82
			V	7.73	13.73	17.17	27.04	34.33	3.67
	≧ 50	251	E	2.79	5.18	13.94	35.86	42.23	4.10
			V	4.38	13.55	15.54	29.88	36.65	3.81
Occupation	student	141	E	17.02	31.91	20.57	12.77	17.73	2.82
			V	24.82	37.59	20.57	9.93	7.09	2.37
	wage earners	317	E	6.94	11.36	16.09	22.71	42.90	3.83
			V	9.15	11.04	16.72	18.93	44.16	3.78
	others	224	E	4.02	11.16	17.41	37.95	29.46	3.78
			V	4.46	12.95	20.54	41.52	20.54	3.61
Education	Primary and below	325	E	6.15	11.08	14.46	30.46	37.85	3.83
			V	10.15	20.92	24.31	27.69	16.92	3.20
	Secondary/technical schools	201	E	6.97	15.92	16.42	25.37	35.32	3.66
			V	10.45	13.43	9.95	20.90	45.27	3.77
	College degree or above	156	E	13.46	24.36	25.00	16.03	21.15	3.07
			V	12.82	14.10	18.59	22.44	32.05	3.47
Income	≦ 20,000	416	E	6.97	10.10	14.90	31.97	36.06	3.80
			V	9.86	14.42	18.03	33.17	24.52	3.48
	>20,000	266	E	9.77	24.06	21.43	15.79	28.95	3.30
			V	12.41	21.43	19.92	10.90	35.34	3.35
Total sample	/	682	E	8.06	15.54	17.45	25.66	33.28	3.61
			V	10.85	17.16	18.77	24.49	28.74	3.43

^a Note: The unit of number of is people, and the other units are %. A, B, C, D, E respectively presents the degree of dialect identity: very disagree, relatively disagree, agree, relatively agree, very agree. The corresponding data is the choice of the number of people in each topic as a proportion of the number of people in the dimension. The following table is the same.

As can be seen from "Table II", in the whole sample: horizontally, whether it is emotional identity or value identity, the proportion of choosing D and E is significantly higher than A and B, indicating that respondents as a whole identify with the dialect; vertically, the proportion of emotional identity is higher than value identity when choosing D and E, but lower than value identity when choosing A and B. Moreover, the emotional identity is more

than value identity. Overall, it shows that respondents' emotional identity to dialect is stronger than value identity.

B. Word Frequency

According to statistics, 491 people appeared the phenomenon of "Dialect mingled by Mandarin", accounting for 71.99%. The total word frequency of "Dialect mingled by Mandarin" is 3,424, as shown in "Table III".

TABLE III. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL RESULTS OF WORD FREQUENCY OF "DIALECT MINGLED BY MANDARIN"

Indicator	Maximum number	Minimum number	Mean number	Proportional Maximum Value (%)	Proportional Minimum Value (%)	Average ratio (%)
Numeric value	27	1	6.97	11.62	0.95	4.49

IV. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

A. Model and Output Results

According to the variable symbols listed in "Table I", the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression model is constructed to verify the relationship between dialect attitude and dialect degradation, as shown in Formula (1):

$$Degradation = \alpha + \beta_1 Emotion_i + \beta_2 Value_i + \sum \gamma_n C + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

i is the number of samples, α is constant item, β_1, β_2 and γ_n respectively present emotional attitude, value attitude, coefficient of control variables. n, C is respectively represents the number and symbol of control variables. ε is error item.

TABLE IV. EFFECT OF DIALECT ATTITUDE ON DIALECT DEGRADATION (GROUPED BY THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE OF SURVEY)

Variables and parameters	whole sample		1st phase		2nd phase	
	coefficient	Standard error	coefficient	Standard error	coefficient	Standard error
Intercept	0.314***	0.512	0.369***	0.459	0.322***	0.601
Emotion	-0.375**	-0.439	-0.363**	-0.365	-0.404**	-0.598
Value	-0.308**	-0.362	-0.298*	-0.316	-0.229*	-0.559
Gender	0.086	0.001	0.127	0.002	0.081	0.004
Age	-0.273***	-0.856	-0.205***	-0.909	-0.297**	-0.811
Occupation	0.101***	1.185	0.193***	1.242	0.077***	0.970
Education	0.209*	0.513	0.146*	0.557	0.178	0.783
Observation value	682		407		275	
Adj. R ²	0.212		0.189		0.207	
F value	12.623***		10.398***		11.986***	

Note: *, ** and *** respectively represent model regression results are statistically significant at the levels of P<0.05, P<0.01, and P<0.001.

B. Result Analysis

First, emotional attitude and value attitude have significant negative effects on dialect degradation, which indicates the more identity with dialect emotionally or in value, and slower the dialect degradation. Second, dialect degradation is related to the age, occupation and educational level. There is a non-significant positive correlation between gender and dialect degradation. There is a significant negative correlation between age and dialect degradation. Namely, the older the age, the slower the dialect degradation; conversely, the younger the age is, the faster the dialect degradation will be. The degree of students' dialect degradation is the deepest. It shows that dialect users with higher educational level have a deeper degree of dialect degradation. Third, dialect environment also has an important effect on dialect degradation. The dialect users with better family economic conditions have a deep degree of degeneration of dialects, and those who have more out time and use more Mandarin with their families or friends, dialect degradation is much faster.

V. CONCLUSION

First, the popularization of Mandarin makes the characteristics of dialects gradually being consumed. The phenomenon of "dialect mingled by Mandarin" is more and more, and the degree of dialect degradation is becoming faster. Therefore, the protection of dialects is very urgent and necessary, and its rescue research is more forward-looking and long-term. Second, people differ in dialect attitude; in

the work of dialect protection and inheritance, students of higher education and better economic conditions of the family deserve more attention, especially the student group. Third, dialect degradation is an inevitable phenomenon of language contact. However, in the process of promoting Mandarin, it is necessary to maintain the harmonious coexistence between dialects and Mandarin.

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