

A Study on the Differences of Intergenerational Language Attitude of Lichuan Dialect in China

LI Lan

School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, China

Research on the changes of Lichuan dialect mostly focuses on microlinguistics such as specific vocabulary, syntactic or semantic research, less on the language use and language attitude in sociolinguistics. Therefore, This study mainly discusses the differences of intergenerational language attitude of Lichuan dialect and the reasons so as to protect traditional dialects in China. 11 participants were interviewed. The results reveals the reasons: (1) internal reasons of personal dialect attitudes including cultural confidence, social identity, dialect inheritance; (2) language attitudelanguage contact such as educational background, rural-urban migration, study and work with people from different cities and media development.

Keywords: language attitude, intergenerational differences, dialect

Language attitude refers to personal evaluation and behaviour tendency of languages or dialects (You & Zou, 2003). From the perspective of languages' evaluation, Dai (2004) defines language attitude as people's views on the use value of language, including the status, function, and prospects of language. From the aspect behaviour tendency, Gui and Ning (1997) define language attitude as the way people treat language. They pointed out that society is composed of individuals. Studies of language attitude have focused on identity (Molina-Plaza, Nwagbo, Gerald, 2015), language education, language communication and language policy; there are also studies that explore related concepts, theories and research methods of language attitudes (Giles & Marlow, 2011). Research on the changes of Lichuan dialect mostly focus on specific vocabulary, syntactic or semantic research, less on language attitude. Lichuan is located in the southwest of Enshi Tujia Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hubei, China. With the history changes, most of the Tujia and Miao people in Enshi Prefecture have lost their native language, using Han language in daily communication. Different generations hold various views on Lichuan dialect changes. Therefore, This study mainly discusses how dialect changes differ in the three generations, what language attitudes they hold, and the reasons behind these attitudes so as to protect traditional dialects.

I. Methods

In the study, 11 Lichuan dialect speakers were interviewed. They belong to three generations who have different education background. All of them have migrant experiences. The time of each semi-structural

interview is over 30m. All of the interviews are tape-recorded by recording pen and are transcribed later for further analysis. Participants were asked the following 4 questions: (1) Examples of phonological varieties in different generations' dialects. (2) What do you think is the reason for their differences in dialects? (3) Has your dialect changed in different time, space or to different listeners? What is the reason for the changes? (4) Young people are less aware of the some Lichuan dialect' s pronunciation, and instead use the "new" dialect that sounds similar to Mandarin to communicate. What do you think of this phenomenon?

II. Results and Discussions

Different generations represented by people in 60-70 years, 40-50 years, 20-30 years and 5-15 years hold various views on dialect changes in Lichuan. Based on those different attitudes, many social factors can be reflected. This paper analyzes changes from: (1) Internal reasons of personal dialect attitudes including cultural confidence, social identity, dialect inheritance; (2) Language contact such as educational background, rural-urban migration, study and work with people from different cities and media development.

Internal Reasons of Personal Dialect Attitudes

(1) Dialect and cultural self-confidence. People' s dialect attitudes reflect their cultural confidence. One the one hand, People with negative attitudes may not be confident enough in their own dialects. Two elder generations have stronger awareness that old dialects with a lot of Un patois sound rude. Participants of two elder generations both mentioned "we should keep up with the times". They changed greeting ways when communicating with "intellectuals" from "你切搞墨子" to "你好, 你去做什么". On the other hand, the young generation shows cultural self-confidence by sharing rarely-used characters in daily-used dialect sounds with friends. Participants in 40s and 50s said the Mandarin-like dialect is acceptable. For example, Long Yanhua thinks the "new" dialect sounds more fashionable and sometimes they will imitate the pronunciation. (2) Dialect and identity. People in the same cultural background, Lichuan, recognize the dialect as identification. Using dialects can not only convey semantic and pragmatic meanings, but also represent phatic function of language. As a result, when communicating with family, fellow villagers, and friends, dialect can establish a closer relationship. According to the research, the elder people are, the more identification they have. For example, when they meet people speaking similar dialects in other cities. One participant in 40s said, "When I meet people who speak similar dialects, such as people in Sichuan, Chongqing, Guizhou, I choose to speak in dialect to get closer relationship. After returning to my hometown, I feel awkward to speak in Mandarin." The youngest generation use the dialect when communicating with their families. However, children spend most of their time in other cities can understand a little about dialects, so lower identification they have. (3) Inheritance of dialects. Most of the three generations agree that dialects should be inherited. The older generations believe that languages also need to "return to their roots." No matter how many languages are learned, the characteristics of dialects should not be forgotten and should be inherited. The younger generation in 20s believes that dialects may be used in low frequency, but it belongs to traditional cultural inheritance. They consider it is both progress and cultural extinction. It is helpful for Mandarin popularization and communication. But some traditional native culture may disappear. People born after 2000, living in other places for a long time, have no strong awareness of learning dialects.

Language Contact

(1) Educational background. Different generations' educational background is one of the most important reasons. The oldest generation received a little formal education. There was no regulation of their language usage. Participants over 60 who experienced great changes in China think the "new" dialect is a symbol of "new things". Large amount of Un patois which sounds rude were used in daily communication. In 1986, China started universal compulsory education. People in 40s get the chance of study. Lower frequency of Un patois made the dialect changing. In 1990s, Since the 1990s, Mandarin promotion started from all levels. From the school perspective, teachers were required speak in Mandarin as much as possible. So Lichuan dialect was changing influenced by Mandarin. (2) Rural-urban migration. Lichuan is located in the northwest of Enshi Tujia Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hubei Province. Before 2000, several mountains almost "cut" communication with other places owing to underdeveloped transportation. People in 60s spend most of time living in Lichuan, contacting with local people. Because of the unbalanced economic development, people in 40s swarmed into the developed city to make a living. They have to communicate in Mandarin. Participants in their 40s or 50s said, "we learned Mandarin because of rural-urban migration." As a result, their dialects are affected by Mandarin even other dialects. That's why they said "The pronunciation of the dialect does not change much, but now sometimes I speak in Mandarin unconsciously." (3) Study and work with people from different cities. People in 20s get more chance of contacting with others speaking in different dialects, especially when entering universities. There is no better choice than Mandarin maintaining their social relationship. The more contact, the less old dialect they learn. (4) Media development. Economy and technology promote media development. Before 2000, face-to-face communication is the main character. With the popularization of television, especially its programs and news reports, people learn more "standard" language which influences their dialect. Nowadays, internet makes the flourishing of communication channels. Young people, the main users, are likely to add new elements into their dialect.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, Language is a social phenomenon, and its varieties are related to various social factors. Different generations hold views with Similarities and differences. Their attitudes are significant factors to preference and dialect changes, the internal reasons behind which are cultural self-confidence, dialect's identity and inheritance of dialects. Moreover, dialect changes are inseparable with language contact. So external reason cannot be neglected, such as educational background, rural-urban migration, study and work with people from different cities, media development. So it's important to recognize those factors so as to protect traditional dialects to achieve true integration with Mandarin.

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