

How does younger generation view their languages? – A case study in Guangdong and Hunan

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Chinese dialects have different developments and status in Mainland China. *Putonghua*, as the standard language, is largely promoted by the government. According to Li (2014), the *Putonghua* promotion is overall successful in dialect regions except Guangdong, and it is mainly because there is a regional lingua franca, the standard Cantonese. On the contrary, Xiang dialect, spoken in the nearby Hunan Province, is receiving substantial influence from *Putonghua*. Although there is no standard Xiang dialect, *Putonghua* with a strong Hunan accent is becoming outstanding nowadays. The younger generation in the capital city of Hunan and surrounding cities can switch between standard and accented *Putonghua* according to whom they talk to.

Many previous language attitude studies are conducted in terms of integrative and instrumental orientation (Lai, 2005). Integrative orientation focuses on the perspective as a member of the community, and instrumental orientation emphasizes on using the language as a tool. This study uses these two orientations, and focuses on language attitudes of younger generation towards standard *Putonghua*, accented *Putonghua*, and dialects in Guangdong and Hunan.

To minimize the influence of variations within Cantonese and Xiang dialect, only participants who grew up in Guangfu-pian (广府片) in Guangdong and Changyi-pian(长益片) in Hunan were recruited. Data includes 7 participants from Guangdong and 8 from Hunan under the age of 30. The gender distributions are balanced in both groups. All the participants were asked to rate statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The table below shows the average rating for each category:

Perspective	Towards	Guangdong	Hunan
Integrative Orientation	Local Dialects	4.47	4.25
	Standard <i>Putonghua</i>	3.14	3.50
	Accented <i>Putonghua</i>	2.73	3.52
Instrumental Orientation	Local Dialects	4.29	4.19
	Standard <i>Putonghua</i>	3.68	3.82
	Accented <i>Putonghua</i>	2.50	3.82

The results showed that participants from Guangdong have a slightly stronger preference for their dialect while participants from Hunan are more open to standard *Putonghua*, because they have more needs for standard *Putonghua* in everyday life. Accented *Putonghua* in Hunan is not merely *Putonghua* with accent caused by low proficiency in *Putonghua*; however, it still lacks legitimacy considering the relevantly lower scoring than dialect and standard *Putonghua*.

This study directly presents how younger generation in Guangdong and Hunan view the languages they are speaking and/or hearing every day after years of *Putonghua* promotion. It is helpful in exploring solutions to balance *Putonghua* promotion and preservation of dialects. Results also point out the specialty of accented *Putonghua* in Hunan, and call for further studies on this special category of *Putonghua*.

References:

- Lai, M. L. (2005). Language attitudes of the first postcolonial generation in Hong Kong secondary schools. *Language in Society*, 34(03), 363-388.
- Li, D. (2014). Lingua Francas in Greater China. In C. Sun & W. S. Wang (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Linguistics* (pp.590-600). Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press.