

The Influencing Factors of Language Attitudes on Code-switching in National Languages and Dialects

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Abstract: The relationship between national languages and dialects is one of the three main linguistic relationships. Under the policy of popularizing and promoting Mandarin, the preservation and transmission of dialects is also a necessary step in preserving cultural diversity, and the study of the code-switching between the two has received increasing attention. This paper uses the theoretical perspective of French sociologist Bourdieu to analyse the factors influencing code-switching between national languages and dialects, using the characteristics of “disposition” in language attitudes, i.e. inculcation, structure, stability, production and extension, to reveal the interrelationship between the two. It is important to establish a win-win relationship between the promotion of national languages and the preservation of dialects.

Keywords: Language attitudes; National languages (Mandarin); Dialects; Code-switching; Factors

Language attitudes are valued responses to the emotions, perceptions and behaviours of different languages and language speakers¹ There is a growing consensus that language attitudes protect linguistic diversity, and that in today’s globalised world, it is important to consider the diversity of languages and scripts as a valuable national resource. According to linguist Bao Houxing, “the promotion of national languages and local languages may seem contradictory, but in fact they go hand in hand; Mandarin should be learnt well, and the home language can be preserved”. The harmonious coexistence of national languages and dialects has become a common phenomenon in human society. From the perspective of linguistic attitudes, mutual respect, tolerance and understanding between different languages and cultures is an important prerequisite and guarantee for building a harmonious society. Multilingual coexistence requires language speakers to code-switch when faced with different language barriers in different linguistic environments in order to communicate effectively. Code-switching is an important cross-cultural communication skill and a complex process that is influenced by many factors, including social status, cultural background, and the individual’s purpose and intentions.

Language attitudes play a crucial role in influencing language change. The evaluation of language is based on a judgement of its social and cultural foundations, while its application goes beyond language itself and has a wide range of social and cultural implications. Differences in language speakers, including individual factors such as age, gender, cultural background and social factors such as social development and inter-group links interact to create differences between speakers of different languages or even between speakers of the same language. Social integration in the context of globalisation and urbanisation is changing people’s attitudes to language. Shifts in language attitudes are an important aspect that affects changes in language development, with positive language attitudes contributing to language maintenance, while negative language attitudes may affect the maintenance and transmission of that language.

Drawing on the theoretical perspective of the sociologist Bourdieu, linguistic attitudes can be seen as a set of ‘habitus’, i.e. a certain stable ‘disposition’, “ These dispositions are acquired in practice and continue to play various practical roles; they are constantly shaped by structures and are constantly in the process of their production” (Bourdieu, 1998: 165). Habitus is “inculcating, structural, stable, generative and malleable” (Bourdieu, 1991: 12).

1. Indoctrination in language attitudes affects code-switching

Bourdieu sees the inculcation in language attitudes in the sense that relationships are gradually developed during formative

experiences, with the role of childhood experiences being particularly important. We know that the critical period for language acquisition is from 0-6 years of age (preschool) and that the best period for written language development is from 7-18 years of age (basic education level), so that this competition between national languages and dialects is prevalent in the preschool and basic education levels. We know that parental mastery of a language will be acquired first in the early stages of language acquisition by language users. From Liu Zhigang's investigation into the acquisition of the Tianzhu Tu language and the correlation between parental language use when he was a child, it is clear that both parents have a decisive role in the child's language acquisition, and that the home language environment is an intra-familial communicative setting, an environment in which language users feel relaxed and at ease, and in which The home language environment has been described as the last bastion for the preservation of national linguistic heritage and diversity¹. Language speakers naturally speak in the dialect in their home environment or with their fellow countrymen, even if at one moment they were expressing their views in the national language, but when the subject of the conversation changes to their fellow countrymen, the code naturally switches to the dialect.

2. Structural influences on code-switching in language attitudes

Structural means that habitus inevitably reflects the social conditions of the environment in which it is adopted, such as the social class situation, which in China is mainly adopted from the Marxist theory of social class division. It is mainly divided into the working class, peasant class, intellectuals, urban petty bourgeoisie, entrepreneurial class and so on. The economic attributes of language users determine their social integration and participation in society. The peasant class, because of their restricted scope of life, have fewer opportunities to use the national language and therefore have less need for code-switching ability and are therefore more conservative in their use of dialects. They switch to a familiar dialect. For migrant workers in the cities, the popularity of the common language affects the distance between them and the city. 90% of migrant workers in the cities say that their employers require them to speak Mandarin, and this group of people are often young and strong and have a strong ability to learn and adapt. With the change of working environment and after hard self-learning, more than 90% of migrant workers have the ability to communicate in the national common language, while about 50% of migrant workers in the city explicitly state that they want their children to maintain their dialect. 2At the same time, the model converts that each level of proficiency in the national language increases the likelihood of starting a business by 3.7%. 3Compared to the peasant class, the other classes have a high demand for code-switching between the national language and the dialect because of their high mobility and wide range of interpersonal interactions, and are therefore more flexible in code-switching.

3. Stability in language attitudes affects code-switching

Stability means that habituation is deeply imprinted in people and is not easily changed; it works quietly to manipulate and is not easily perceived. When conducting an empirical survey on the use of the national language, it was found that a large number of language speakers, especially older men, identify more emotionally with the dialect, and that even public officials, who otherwise have a good level of use of the national language, will prefer to talk in the dialect during interviews. Stability in language attitudes is thus influenced by language loyalty and age and gender. Sixty-four per cent of the elderly consider themselves to have a good level of Mandarin, while reasons for their lack of Mandarin proficiency include the influence of language loyalty and a lack of linguistic identification with Mandarin.

4. Generativity and extension in language attitudes influence code-switching

Generativity and malleability refer to the ability of habitus to form many similar perceptions and practices that extend beyond the field in which they are formed to other fields. According to Bourdieu's theory, generativity refers to the local linguistic and cultural characteristics of a social group that are shared and stabilised by its members over time. It is an inherent characteristic of a language and culture that is influenced by social, cultural and historical factors, and which extends to the way members use language and think. Language attitudes are also contagious, and the contagiousness of language attitudes is also shown in the way people engage in the process of converting national languages and dialects. Through linguistic communication, we are not only perceiving and understanding each other's language, we are also unconsciously influenced by each other's speech codes. This process involves adjusting our own language attitudes to the other person's changing language attitudes in order to achieve better communication and understanding with them. During the interview process, we found that when three or more people are conversing together and one person does not speak the dialect, then the other two people will naturally switch to Mandarin when talking to this person, and when two dialect speakers are talking, they will also choose their own language code according to the content of the conversation. The code-switching is natural and coordinated.

At the same time, Bourdieu argues that the extension of language attitudes refers to the transformation and selection of different

codes in a given context. A person's social context, class, level of education, etc., all influence the generation and extension of their linguistic attitudes.

These attitudes reflect the values, beliefs and ways of thinking of a social group and are related to the individual's position in the group and his or her life experiences.

In summary, language attitudes have a profound impact on the code-switching of national languages and dialects. Bourdieu's theory of language attitudes is of great importance in the development of policies to promote the spread and common use of national languages. State policy on code-switching requires respect for and protection of non-standard languages such as dialects, while at the same time promoting and popularising national languages and facilitating the interchange of dialects and national languages. From the point of view of language attitudes, this is a very positive and inclusive attitude, an attitude that is an inevitable product of the diversity and complexity of society.

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