

A Case Study of Language Attitude: How Do Taiwanese Females View Mandarin-Speaking and Taiwanese-Speaking Males?

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INTRODUCTION

Motivation

According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992: 199), language attitude is the attitude which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each other's languages or to their own language. Furthermore, such attitudes may show what people feel about the speakers of that language. Attitudes are believed to be made up of underlying affective and cognitive components, highly influenced by the social structures within a society. As stated by Feifel (1994), "social forces will create different language attitudes towards language varieties which are spoken by those who are part of the power structure and those who are not" (p. 55). Thus, language attitudes are one way in which researchers attempt to understand ideologies toward language within a given society.

For centuries, Taiwan has been a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society where Mandarin is the official language. Although Mandarin is the official language, Taiwanese has served as the mother tongue of 73.3% of the population in Taiwan (Huang, 1993). To emphasize the importance of local languages, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Taiwan has implemented the Mother Tongue Policy in which local languages are taught in the primary school level since 2000. Within the last decade, mother-tongue language courses have been accepted and

initiated throughout primary schools in Taiwan, and many organizations have been developed for the protection and appreciation of these language varieties.

As many multilingual communities where code-switching is a common phenomenon. The same is true in the Taiwanese context. Code-switching can allow a speaker to declare solidarity, maintain neutrality when both codes are used to express identity (Wardhaugh, 1998). Consequently, the language we choose influences the way others perceive us. Following this view, it is not surprising that bilinguals or multilinguals perceive differently speakers of different languages or language varieties. It is thus the aim of this research to investigate how Taiwanese Mandarin-Taiwanese bilingual females perceive Taiwanese- and Mandarin-speaking males.

Research Questions

There are many studies focusing on language attitudes by using matched-guise test, such as English and French in Canada, and standard language and dialect in various communities. However, very few studies concerning language attitudes toward Mandarin and Taiwanese have been conducted. Thus, the study is to explore the six female participants' attitudes toward Mandarin-speaking and Taiwanese-speaking males. Accordingly, three research questions were proposed as follows:

1. How do Taiwanese females perceive Mandarin-speaking males?
2. How do Taiwanese females perceive Taiwanese-speaking males?
3. What are the differences?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on language attitudes has been prolific since the ground-breaking research of Lambert and his colleagues (e.g. Lambert, 1967). Lambert devised the matched-guise test in order to objectively evaluate the language attitude of French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians towards French and English. The matched-guise test is a sociolinguistic experiment technique employed by a method and its most related research in two or more guises, which has been lately known as matched-guise or matched-guise model (Davies & Elder, 2004). Lambert's work is original in the design of the experimental method or the indirect method. The matched-guise technique has been widely used in bicultural settings such as in Quebec, Canada, (Lambert, 1967) as well as in cross-cultural studies (Hoare, 2001) and multi-ethnic societies in order to elicit people's language attitudes. Specifically, this method makes use of tape recordings of speakers who each read the same text in two or more different guises. It has been employed not only as an instrument in comparing attitudes toward languages, but also toward dialects and accents. Furthermore, depending on particular listener, a speaker's accent, speech patterns, vocabulary, and intonation can all serve as markers for evaluating speaker's appearance, personality, social status, and character.

More specifically, this section briefly describes three studies important to the formation of the current research. Kalmar, Yong and Hong (1987) carried out a quantitative study examining people's attitudes toward standard language and dialect. Dede (1999) did a quantitative investigation of the language attitudes of Xining residents towards the Qinghai dialect in China. Furthermore, Ihemere (2006) explored the language attitudes and change in Nigeria by investigating the Ikwerre attitudes to their languages, i.e., Ikwerre and Nigerian Pidgin English.

Kalmar, Yong and Hong (1987)

Kalmar, Yong and Hong (1987) carried out a quantitative study in China on a Chinese-speaking community's attitudes toward the Standard Language (Mandarin), and by comparison, their local dialect (Cantonese). Based on the judgments of 24 students in Guangzhou in China by means of a matched-guise test, this study found a typical high/low distinction (Ferguson, 1959) in attitudes, which is common in diglossic communities. That is, Standard Chinese being the "high" language while Cantonese being the "low" language. Consistent to previous research on diglossic communities, the high variety is recognized as conferring social advantages, while the low variety retains the affection of its speakers (Kalmar et al., 1987). Similar to the study of Kalmar et al., Dede (1999) carried out a similar study investigating people's attitudes toward standard Mandarin and a local dialect.

Dede (1999)

Dede (1999) conducted a quantitative investigation of the language attitudes of *Xining* residents towards the *Qinghai* dialect in China. Dede used a questionnaire to collect data which required the residents to respond to the questionnaire designed to measure the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components of their attitude towards their local dialect, *Qinghai*, and Standard Chinese. According to Dede (1999), the results are mixed. The behavioral component suggests a negative attitude toward *Qinghai* dialect while the cognitive component suggests a positive attitude toward *Qinghai* dialect. Furthermore, the result from the affective component is mixed. This may suggest that the language attitudes of the residents are mixed in that although it is believed that the local dialect does not receive overt prestige, it is perceived by the residents positively in the cognitive component. There is a similarity between studies of Dede and Kalmar et al. research findings. Both of their findings indicated that dialect maintains a place close to people's hearts as a positive aspect of affective component.

Ihemere (2006)

Ihemere's (2006) study explored language attitudes and change in Nigeria by investigating the Ikwerre attitudes to their languages, Ikwerre and Nigerian Pidgin English. In this study, Ikwerre was a dialect in Nigeria while Nigerian Pidgin English was their standard language. The methods used in this study were the questionnaire/interview and the matched guise test technique which was developed by Lambert et al. (1960). The results showed that speakers who return higher scores for proficiency in Ikwerre would also select this language as their preferred choice for interactions with most interlocutors. Furthermore, the correlation test results indicated that age of male speakers correlates positively with language proficiency scores on the Ikwerre language scale and negatively with the scores for NPE. In other words, a person's language proficiency in Ikwerre would affect his/her language attitudes on the Ikwerre language.

METHODOLOGY

This study is an experimental research. Two research instruments were utilized in this study: questionnaire and interview. The following introduces first the design of the study, followed by participants, the guise and the procedure.

Research Design

This study was an experimental design, and the data were elicited in an experimental setting which involved the participants listening to two recordings to elicit language attitudes. Two research instruments were utilized in this study. They were questionnaire data and interview

data. A six-point Likert scale matched-guise questionnaire was adopted and revised based on Young's (2003) questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section contained nine items which included some background information and information about the participants' language preference and competence. The second section contained thirteen items in total, including two open-ended questions and eleven closed-ended questions. There were eleven adjectives regarding about the affective components of the guise.

Based on Lambert's (1960) matched-guise technique, the researcher replicated the experiment by recording male speakers reading a short passage in both Mandarin and Taiwanese. Then, six female participants were to reflect their feelings about the male speakers of Mandarin and Taiwanese by filling out a survey questionnaire in terms of psychological qualities and likability. In fact, the six participants were unaware that there was only one male speaker who spoke both Mandarin and Taiwanese. In order to have a more in-depth comprehension of the participants' attitudes, semi-structured interviews with the participants were conducted after they filled out the survey questionnaire.

Interview questions are as follows:

Q1: From the results of the survey questionnaire, it is found that your attitude towards Taiwanese-speaking males is higher than Mandarin-speaking males in average. Why do you think so?

Q2: From the results of the survey questionnaire, you indicate that Taiwanese-speaking males are more "educated" than Mandarin-speaking males. Why do you think so?

Q3: Do you think your language proficiency in Taiwanese has an impact on your attitudes toward Taiwanese-speaking males?

Q4: Do you think that your political preference has an impact on your attitudes toward Taiwanese-speaking or Mandarin-speaking males?

Finally, the interview transcripts were coded and categorized following Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) inductive analysis procedures for data analysis.

Participants

This study utilized stratified random sampling. Six female teachers from an elementary school in Taichung City were selected as participants. There were three age groups among the six participants. Participants 1 and 2 are between the age of 20 to 30 years old, and they are both single. Participants 3 and 4 are between the age of 31 to 40 years old, and they are both married.

Table 1. Description of the Participants

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>
Participant 1	26	F	Bachelor's Degree
Participant 2	30	F	Bachelor's Degree
Participant 3	37	F	Bachelor's Degree
Participant 4	36	F	Master's Degree
Participant 5	42	F	Master's Degree
Participant 6	50	F	Master's Degree

Participants 5 and 6 are between the age of 41 to 50 years old, and they are also both married. Furthermore, all of the six participants are all fluent bilinguals in Mandarin and Taiwanese. In terms of education level, participants 1 to 3 received a Bachelor degree while participants 4 to 6 received a MA degree. Table 1 includes the description of the participants.

The Guise

The selection of the guise is based on his proficiency in both Mandarin and Taiwanese. His proficiency level has to be native-like in both languages. One male from the researcher's neighborhood was requested to record his voice by giving a brief introduction first in Mandarin and then in Taiwanese as a candidate to be a guise. The initial recording indicated his proficiency level in both languages and then the guise was recruited. By using the same speaker for multiple recordings, the researcher was able to limit the variables such as pitch, voice quality and so on, achieving more conclusive results on attitudes towards languages per se. The male guise is in his late 30s and has a MA degree. He has also identified himself as fully proficient in both languages.

Procedure

Table 2 indicates the procedure of the experimental design.

Table 2. Procedure of the Experimental Design

<i>Week</i>	<i>Main Task</i>	<i>Progress of the Experiment</i>
1	Find Six Participants	Set up Three age groups
2	Design the Questionnaire	
3	Find a Male Guise	Record His Self-introduction
4	Six Participants Listen to the Recording and Fill Out the Questionnaire	Collect Questionnaire Data
5	Conduct Semi-structured Interviews	Collect Interview Data
6	Analyze the Data	

FINDINGS

Survey Questionnaire

According to the background information, the average age of the six participants was 37 years old. The participants were mainly from Central and Southern Taiwan of which three were from Central Taiwan, and the other three were from Southern Taiwan. In terms of education background, three of the participants hold a bachelor's degree and the other three hold a MA degree.

In terms of the responses towards the guise, items 10 to 21 contained eleven adjectives regarding the affective components of the guise. In average, the participants' attitudes toward Taiwanese-speaking males were higher than those toward Mandarin-speaking males. Furthermore, in average the participants rated Taiwanese-speaking males higher in seven dimensions. That is, the participants considered Taiwanese-speaking males more interesting, educated, friendly, outgoing, popular, happier, and of more attractive voice. The participants' rating on item 5, rich, was the same for both Taiwanese-speaking and Mandarin-speaking males. On the other hand, the participants rated Mandarin-speaking males more positively in three dimensions, including hardworking, polite, and physically attractive. That is, the

participants considered Mandarin-speaking males more physically attractive, polite and hardworking than Taiwanese-speaking males.

Based on the results of the frequency of language use, all the six participants spoke more Mandarin than Taiwanese in their daily life. In average, the frequency of using Mandarin was 83% while the frequency of using Taiwanese was 50%. However, the frequency of language they used to talk to their parents was reversed. In average, the frequency of using Taiwanese with their parents was 83%, and the frequency of using Mandarin with their parents was 22%. In other words, the participants all tended to use Taiwanese (their mother tongue) to converse with their parents. In addition, for the four participants who are married, they tended to use more Mandarin than Taiwanese to converse with their spouse. In average, the frequency of using Mandarin was 75% while the frequency of using Taiwanese was 33%. In terms of their language proficiency, two of them thought that their Mandarin oral proficiency was very well and four of them thought that they had native-like Mandarin oral proficiency. On the other hand, three of the participants thought that their Taiwanese oral proficiency was very well, and the other three think that they had native-like Taiwanese oral proficiency. In average, they perceived their Mandarin oral proficiency better than Taiwanese. Surprisingly, even though the participants perceived their Mandarin oral proficiency (89%) slightly better than their Taiwanese oral proficiency (83%), their overall attitudes toward Taiwanese-speaking males (70%) were higher than Mandarin-speaking males (61%). Furthermore, no differences were found in the different age groups in terms of their attitudes toward the two languages.

Interview

In order to further explore the participants' attitudes toward Mandarin-speaking males and Taiwanese-speaking males, semi-structured interviews were conducted after the matched-guise test and the questionnaire. There were four interview questions in total. For question one, two main themes came up from the interview data. The first one was fluency, and the other was familiarity.

Fluency

Four participants mentioned that they thought the Taiwanese-speaking male seemed to be more fluent and natural, with good intonations. Example (1) provides one such example.

Example (1): P1, 3, 4 & 5 said: "Taiwanese-speaking male is very fluent and natural in Taiwanese. Therefore, its fluency and intonation is better." (2011/5/23 interview)

Familiarity

Four participants also mentioned that they thought the Taiwanese-speaking male seemed to be using the language that is more common and ordinary to them. In other words, Taiwanese is the language which they are familiar with. Taiwanese is their mother tongue, and it maintains a place close to their hearts. This result is in line with Dede's and Kalmar's findings which indicated that dialect maintains a place close to people's hearts as a positive aspect of affective component.

For question two, three participants thought that Taiwanese-speaking males are more "educated" than Mandarin-speaking males. They felt that everyone seemed to be able to speak Mandarin in general. However, in order for someone to speak Taiwanese fluently and eloquently, he must be well-educated. In addition, these participants consider Taiwanese being more difficult in terms of speaking and reading than Mandarin. Examples (2) to (4) illustrate such views.

Example (2): P1 said: "Taiwanese is more difficult in speaking and reading than Mandarin. Thus, in order for someone to read or speak Taiwanese like that, he must be more educated." (2011/5/23 interview)

Example (3): P3 said: "I think that Taiwanese-speaking male seemed to be more highly educated, because the wordings and characters he used."

Example (4): P5 said: "I assumed that everyone can speak Mandarin in general. However, in order for someone to speak Taiwanese fluently and eloquently, he must be well educated."

For question three, five of the participants indicated that their Taiwanese proficiency did have an impact on their attitudes toward Taiwanese-speaking males. Only one participant did not think that her Taiwanese proficiency would have an impact on her attitude towards Taiwanese-speaking males. Examples (5) and (6) reveal such attitudes.

Example (5): P2, 3, 4, 5, & 6 said: "If your Taiwanese proficiency is low, then you won't be able to understand its deeper meaning or concept. Therefore, I think one's language proficiency in Taiwanese has an impact on his/her attitudes toward Taiwanese-speaking males."

Example (6): P1 said: "I don't think my Taiwanese proficiency would influence my perceptions of Taiwanese-speaking males."

For question four, the participants indicated that their attitudes toward Taiwanese-speaking or Mandarin-speaking males are not influenced by their political preference.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Based on the results of the questionnaire and the interviews, we can draw on two conclusions. First, the participants' attitudes toward Taiwanese-speaking males were higher than Mandarin-speaking males in average. This result was mostly influenced by their family background. That is, the language they used to converse with their parents, which was their mother tongue, did play a special role as an affective factor to them. Moreover, since three of the participants were born in the southern part of Taiwan and the other three participants were born in the central part of Taiwan, their families mostly would speak Taiwanese at home. In other words, Taiwanese seemed familiar and natural to them. That could also be the main reason for this finding. Second, the participants' different age groups didn't vary in terms of their attitudes toward the two languages. Therefore, age was not an issue. One's family background played an important role as to his/her attitudes toward a certain language (or languages).

Limitations and Suggestions

There are three limitations in this study. First, the number of participants is limited and so the sample size is too small to generalize the findings. This may account for the indifference of the factor, age. It is suggested that future studies consider a wider population in order to achieve generalizability. Second, only language attitudes of females were considered. Therefore, male perspectives and attitudes toward Taiwanese-speaking females and Mandarin-speaking females were not included in this study. In relation to this, this study has investigated only cross-gender interaction without considering same-gender interaction. To extend the research on how gender may affect language attitude, both cross-gender and same-gender can be included in future studies.

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