



A Survey on Language Attitudes of Mianzhu Locals toward Mianzhu Dialect and Mandarin

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Abstract

This study investigates language attitudes of Mianzhu locals towards Mianzhu dialect and Mandarin on the status and solidarity dimensions. 220 Mianzhu locals were invited to participate in current study and filled in a questionnaire. Results suggest that locals value Mandarin more on status dimension and treasure Mianzhu dialect more on the solidarity dimension. Locals are inclined to learn Mandarin to raise their social status and to encourage their posterity to learn and use Mandarin in the pursuit of better lives. However, they are more comfortable to use Mianzhu dialect if occasions and audiences permitted since it sparks the sense of belonging, intimacy, and a unique social identity among them. Special attention has been paid to noticeable differences across age and it is found that younger generations prefer to speak Mianzhu dialect because their unique identity can be expressed by it. The authors tentatively predict that with such language attitudes, this dialect would not go extinct but would undergo changes in morphological, semantic and phonological ways as a result of language contact.

Keywords

Language attitude, Mianzhu dialect, Mandarin, Status value, Solidarity

1. Introduction

Mianzhu is a county-level city of Sichuan province in southwest China. Linguistically speaking, despite there are Hakka and Old Xiang dialect, most locals speak the Mianzhu dialect which is a subdialect of Sichuan dialect, which in turn is a branch of Southwestern Mandarin (Li, 2009). It is this widely spoken Mianzhu dialect that this paper aims to explore.

Great efforts have been taken by the local government to popularize the Mandarin, especially among elementary and secondary schools where a variety of relevant activities have been held. Meanwhile, in order to protect dialects like Mianzhu dialect, a project for establishing language resources database has been launched in Sichuan province since 2016, in which Mianzhu dialect has been listed. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to locals' attitudes toward it. A study of the language attitude can reveal the reasons for the emergence, existence and changes of many linguistic phenomena, which are of great significance for language planning and language policy-making (Liu, 1993). Therefore, a survey into the language attitudes of Mianzhu locals' towards Mianzhu dialect is of immediate significance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Language attitude is one of the important issues for sociolinguistics. It refers to "any affective, cognitive or behavioural (i.e., conative) index of evaluative reactions towards different varieties and their speakers" or, more in-

clusively, their users (Ryan & Giles, 1982, p.7). Affective index is about feelings towards certain language variety and their speakers. Cognitive index concerns the beliefs, mainly rational judgments on the value and status of certain variety. Behavioral index is about behavioral tendency toward certain variety, for example, whether speakers are willing to use certain variety in a particular situation. Language attitudes can reveal the reasons for the emergence, existence and changes of many linguistic phenomena which are of great significance for language planning and language policy-making (Liu, 1993).

Language attitude is usually evaluated via two dimensions, namely, status and solidarity since they could efficiently explain different attitudes speakers hold toward different language varieties (Ryan & Giles, 1982). According to Ryan (1979), solidarity referred to harmonious relationships among individuals while status was related to whether the language was standardized and to the social economical status of the speakers. Since they were proposed, numerous studies have been conducted based on them. For instance, Long (1999) took them as the theoretical basis and analyzed Hongkong people's attitudes toward Cantonese and Mandarin. A matched-guise test, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were employed. That study focused on the relationship between attitude and profession and found a close relationship between the two. While Long (1999) centered on different varieties, El-Dash and Busnardo (2001) investigated the attitudes toward two languages, namely, attitudes towards Portuguese and English in Brazil. A subjective questionnaire and a matched-guise test were again utilized as the research instrument to collect data. Some even focused on different accents (Stewart, Ryan, & Giles, 1985; Dragojevic, Giles, Beck, & Tatum, 2017; Carrie & McKenzie, 2018) and dialects (Zhou, 2009; Yang, 2001; Alahmadi, 2016). In this study, authors also took these two dimensions as the theoretical framework to analyze the language attitude.

2.2 Studies on Mianzhu Dialect

Modern Sichuanese, which evolved due to the immigration during the Ming Dynasty, is a branch of Southwestern Mandarin spoken mainly in Sichuan and Chongqing. It is the lingua franca in Sichuan, Chongqing and part of Tibet. Sichuanese is more similar to Standard Mandarin Chinese (Mandarin for short hereafter) than southeastern Chinese varieties but is still quite divergent in phonology, vocabulary, and even grammar (Cui, 1996). The study of Sichuanese dates back to the book *Fang Yan* written by Yang Xiong in the Western Han Dynasty and the book *Shuowen-Jiezi* written by Xu Shen in the Eastern Han Dynasty, both of which took down some dialect vocabularies. After that, numerous studies have been carried out to explore the vocabularies in Sichuan dialects. Dictionaries (Wang, Zhang, & Zhou, 1987; Luo & Leng, 1987; Li, Liang & Huang, 1998; Wei, 1998) were compiled. Treatises and research papers were composed as well to compare it with Mandarin in terms of both vocabulary and grammar (Liang, 1982; Lu, 2007; Chen, 2018) and with other dialects (Shen, 1996; Shen, 2011), to analyse the word formation of vocabularies (Deng & Zhang, 2010; Chen, 2023) and their changes diachronically (Deng & Zhang, 2011; Cao, 2021), and to compile dictionaries for subdialects of Sichuan dialect (Yang, 2013; Wang, 2018; Zhu, 2021).

When it comes to Mianzhu dialect, only three articles were found and all centered on vocabularies. Liao (2006) was the first academic paper that investigated Mianzhu dialect as a dialect spoken in the administrative area of Deyang. It focused on pronouns, interrogative pronouns, tense auxiliaries, demonstrative pronoun, modal particles, conjunctions, prepositions and some special adverbs in dialects spoken in that area and compared them with Mandarin. As the first study that exclusively focused on Mianzhu dialect. He (2011) examined a particular change of vocabulary “di4zhen3” (earthquake) in terms of its morphology. In Standard Mandarin, this is a compound word and therefore cannot be separated. However, in Mianzhu dialect, this vocabulary has been changed into “di4-lao2-zhen3-lao2” (to have gone through an earthquake) after 5.12 Earthquake in 2008. He tried to analyze this variation from the perspectives of pragmatics, semantics and psychology. Unlike the former two studies, Rao (2015, 2017) paid special attention to phonological features of Deyang dialect, which is a subdialect of Sichuan dialect. In both studies, Mianzhu dialect was mentioned as one part of Deyang dialect. Rao (2015) explored its phonological features, compared it with Chengdu dialect, and pointed out that the degree of language contact resulted in the differences. Rao (2017) instead investigated a tone sandhi prevalent in Deyang dialect, which according to the researcher's observation is more common in Mianzhu dialect than other dialects within the administrative region of Deyang. Rao (2017) reported that this phenomenon was constrained by phonological, contextual and semantic conditions. It can be seen from the above review that research on Mianzhu dialect to date is still confined to the analysis of its grammatical, morphological and phonological features. Based on authors review, none has in particular turned the attention to people who use it and their attitudes toward this dialect. This research aims to provide some insights in this respect.

Studies on language attitudes towards certain Chinese dialect are enormous. Most of them focused on the language attitudes of the speakers of one particular dialect toward the dialect and Mandarin. It was the same for Sichuan dialect, although the amount of relevant studies decreased. Most studies (Yang, 2001; Xiao, 2003; Xin, 2008; Ren, Chen, & Xie, 2010; Zhou, 2013) resorted to a questionnaire, analyzed the language attitudes on the status dimension and the solidarity dimension, and reported similar results, that is, most studies showed a higher score for Mandarin on the status dimension and a higher score for Sichuan dialect on the solidarity dimension. However, the research on Mianzhu dialect from the perspective of language attitudes is still lacking. Therefore, by comparing Mianzhu locals attitudes toward Mianzhu dialect and toward Mandarin and evaluating them via the aforementioned two dimensions, this study can fill the research gap, enrich the studies of the language attitudes of Sichuanese and hopefully provide some inspirations for the protection of Mianzhu dialect.

To be more specific, two research questions are to be addressed:

- 1) What are the language attitudes of Mianzhu locals towards Mianzhu dialect?
- 2) What are the language attitudes of Mianzhu locals towards Mandarin?

3. Research Methods

3.1 Participants

220 Mianzhu locals were recruited. Information on age and gender was presented in Table 1 below. They were all native born and lived in Mianzhu. Although some of them had gone to other places for higher education, or worked or traveled for a while in their life, they settled down in Mianzhu. Participants were not restricted to any age group, gender, education background or occupation so as to get a more comprehensive view of locals' language attitudes. For the education background, 17.4% received primary schooling or none at all; 18.2% attended middle schools; 20.7% attended high schools; 11.6% received vocational education, 23.1% received undergraduate education; and 9.1% received graduate education and above. As for the occupation, there were 11 civil servants, 13 self-employed entrepreneurs, 25 enterprise staff, 21 workers from the tertiary industry, 48 agricultural laborers, 22 technical personnel, six medical staffs, 13 teachers, 42 students and 19 unemployed individuals.

Table 1. Gender and Age Distribution

		Age						Total
		≤18	19~30	31~40	41~50	51~60	>60	
Gender	Male	20	18	19	17	17	16	107
	Female	18	22	17	22	18	16	113
Total		38	40	36	39	35	32	220

3.2 Instruments

A questionnaire titled A survey of Language Attitudes of Mianzhu locals was designed and handed out through Internet with the authors' presence to collect data about locals' attitudes towards Mianzhu dialect and Mandarin. This questionnaire was adapted from Romaine's questionnaire on language attitudes (1995, p. 303) and trials were conducted for adjustments. The questionnaire contained two parts: basic information and language attitudes.

The basic information part included six questions. The first question was aimed at filtering out some invalid questionnaires, namely, those that were filled in by participants who reported themselves as not locals of Mianzhu but completed the questionnaire by mistake. Questions two to five were aimed at collecting basic information of the participants (gender, age, education background, and occupation). In the language attitude part, the first six questions were about language attitudes toward Mianzhu dialect while the following nine questions, toward Mandarin.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

In March, 2023, the above mentioned questionnaire was distributed through the website *www.sojump.com* so as to facilitate data collection. Questionnaires were filled in with the presence of the authors so as to give further explanations if confusions arose. In the description part at the beginning of the questionnaire, the authors stressed the importance of the participants' identities and their objective reports and that they were expected to provide their

answers accordingly. All participants filled in the questionnaires voluntarily through the Internet with the authors' presence. Altogether 220 questionnaires were returned and were all valid.

Data collected was analyzed via SPSS 22. In the beginning, the data was put into SPSS 22 for a descriptive analysis of the distribution of age, gender, education background and occupation background of participants. Next, the data of language attitudes of Mianzhu locals was analyzed. The frequency and percentage of the options of each question were computed to explore the language attitudes of locals.

4. Findings and Discussion

In this section, language attitudes of Mianzhu locals toward Mianzhu dialect and Mandarin were analyzed from the status dimension and the solidarity dimension by discussing the results of each question in the questionnaire.

4.1 Language Attitudes toward Mianzhu Dialect

The first question is about reasons for speaking Mianzhu dialect. Results are presented in Figure 1. Among 220 participants, 64.5% report that they speak Mianzhu dialect because they are born to and 50.4% think that when they speak Mianzhu dialect, they feel the sense of belonging. Surprisingly, only 14.9% participants have a deep feeling toward Mianzhu dialect while 9.9% think this dialect is quite convenient. Only seven participants think Mianzhu dialect sounds nice.

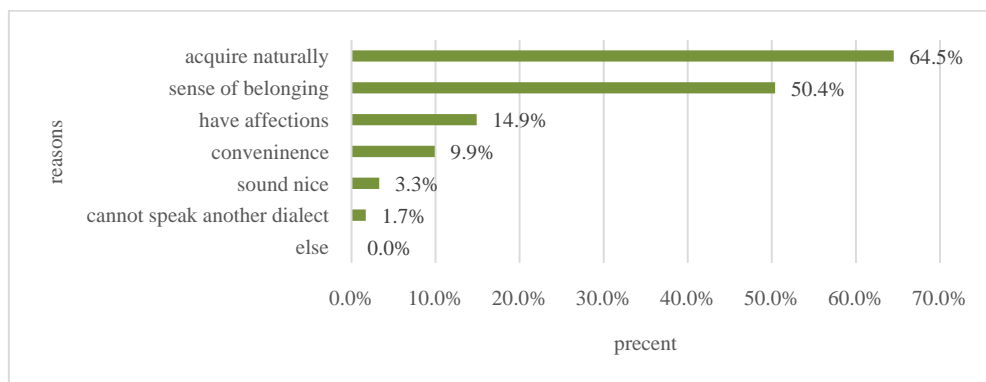


Figure 1. Reasons for Speaking Mianzhu Dialect.



Figure 2. Feelings about Whether Their Children or Parents Can Speak Mianzhu Dialect or not across Ages.

The second question is how locals feel if their children or parents cannot speak Mianzhu dialect. From Figure 2, it is obvious that more than half of locals (64.1%) think it does not matter if their family members cannot speak Mianzhu dialect. 35.9% locals regard it as a shame while no one feels proud about it. This suggests that for Mianzhu locals, the ability to speak Mianzhu dialect seems to be a way to show their identity. If their family members

speak no Mianzhu dialect, they deem it as an identity loss so that no one feels proud about it and even regard it as a shame. This implies that this dialect still displays a high solidarity for Mianzhu locals. Meanwhile, more people adopt a somewhat laissez faire attitude. It should also be noted that 100% young people under 19 and 70% young people between 19 and 30 take this attitude. Meanwhile, for people above 50, the percentage declines to less than 50%. This suggests that younger generations adopt a more tolerant attitude toward the choice of language variety of their children and parents. This may be because for most people, so long as they can communicate with each other, they care less about what dialect others use. It is also possible that with a more rapid migration, it is highly likely that they may get married with non-Mianzhu locals and this happens more toward younger generations to elder ones. As a result, the variety used within a family is no long Mianzhu dialect so that they care less about whether their parents or children speak Mianzhu dialect or not. These said, it is worthy of further investigations.

The third question is aimed at finding out perceptions on their own features, namely, things that can best show their identity as Mianzhu locals. According to Figure 3, most of them (67.4%) think the most typical feature of Mianzhu locals is the language while 20.8% think they are the same as people in other regions. The results show that for the majority of people in Mianzhu, there remain differences between Mianzhu dialect and other language varieties spoken within China and the ability to speak Mianzhu dialect is the most apparent feature of being a Mianzhu local. It suggests that for Mianzhu locals, Mianzhu dialect is a way to express their social identity, making them feel intimate with each other who speak this dialect. This implies that for them, this dialect presents a high solidarity.

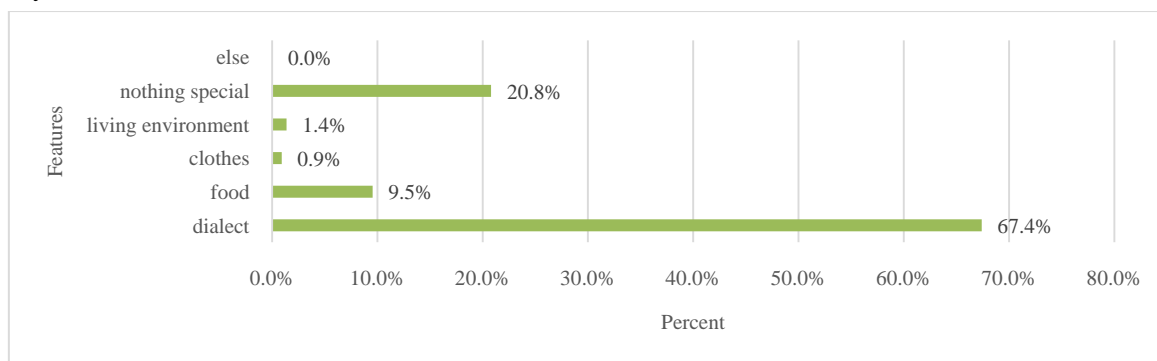


Figure 3. The Most Prominent Feature of Mianzhu Locals.

Table 2. Views on People from Other Regions Learning Mianzhu Dialect

Age	Frequency						Percent
	≤18	19~30	31~40	41~50	51~60	>60	
Yes	8	6	0	8	7	11	18.2%
Doesn't matter	0	7	18	13	11	7	25.5%
Unnecessary	0	6	0	6	7	7	11.8%
It depends	30	21	18	12	10	7	44.5%

As for how locals think about whether people from other regions should learn Mianzhu dialect or not, according to Table 2, more (44.5%) believe it depends and 25.5% participants think it does not matter. Surprisingly, 18.2% of the participants think they should. Compared with the former results, it shows that locals present a more tolerant attitude towards their family members than towards strangers from other places. It may be because for these locals, they are proud of their ability to speak Mianzhu dialect and of their identity shown by it. They think people from other regions should also learn to speak this dialect to be accepted to this social group. More investigations are required in this respect. But in general, they are tolerant toward people from other regions.

Question five is about whether they are supportive of media programs in Mianzhu dialect. According to Figure 4, on the whole, views of locals are divergent on this issue but still more locals (39.5%) are supportive of it. It is also worth noting that during face-to-face communications with some of the participants, they showed a huge interest in this type of program and queried about the access. Moreover, it can be seen from the Column Chart 4.5 that people

of younger ages are more approving to these programs. Therefore, it is advisable to strengthen the publicity of it so as to better protect Mianzhu dialect. The reason might be for locals, especially for younger locals, they have become more and more aware of Mianzhu dialect's unique feature after they have contacted other language varieties in their life experiences. As a result, this dialect gives them a sense of belonging and enables them to demonstrate their unique identity. Once they see Mianzhu dialect used in media programs, their sense of pride and belonging may be aroused so that they are interested in and supportive of them. This also is a symbol of a high value on the solidarity dimension for Mianzhu dialect.

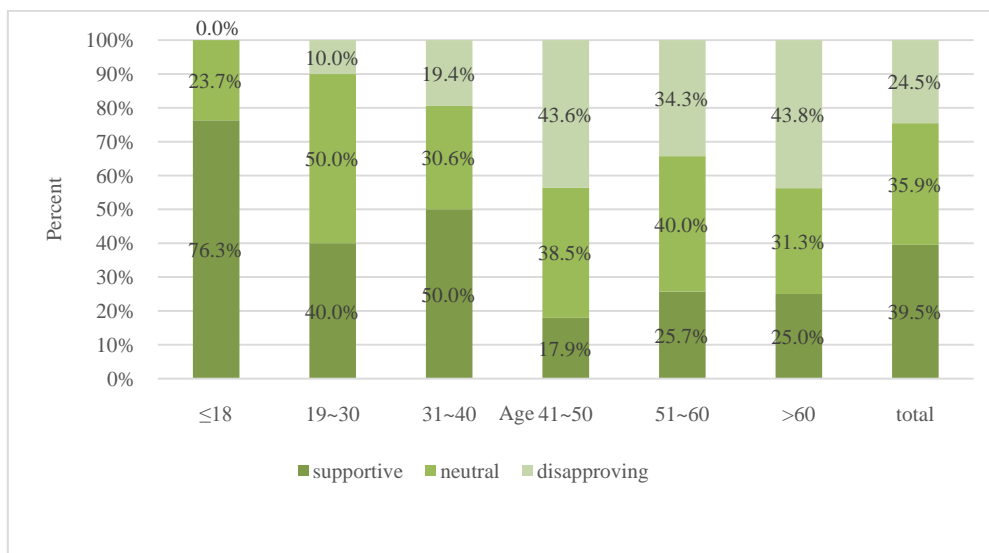


Figure 4. Attitudes toward Media Programs in Mianzhu dialect.

Table 3. Confidence in the Future of Mianzhu Dialect

Age	Frequency						Percent
	≤18	19~30	31~40	41~50	51~60	>60	
Definitive not	38	12	9	16	16	13	47.3%
Maybe not	0	10	9	13	19	13	29.1%
Do not know	0	5	7	2	0	0	6.4%
Maybe will	0	13	11	8	0	0	14.5%
Definitely will	0	0	0	0	0	6	2.7%

The last question is about the confidence in the future of Mianzhu dialect. In the face of this question, 47.3% participants think that Mianzhu dialect will never die out while another 29.1% think it may not. It suggests that generally, most locals are confident in the future of Mianzhu dialect. 6.4% are not sure about it while 14.5% think there is a probability that Mianzhu dialect will die out. Six participants are quite sure that it will go extinct and they are all above 60. Among participants who are fully confident in the future of Mianzhu dialect, some give further explanations, saying that it will not die out but certain changes are inevitable due to migration of population and the promotion of Mandarin across the country. This reminds the authors' of the possibility that different people might have different definitions for Mianzhu dialect. Taking this into consideration, it is possible that participants who believe that this dialect might die out might contend if changes take place, Mianzhu dialect is no longer authentic and with more and more changes taking place, it will eventually die out. Meanwhile, for those who give an affirmative answer, it may be because they are more tolerant toward changes and therefore believe so long as it is the dialect spoken by people living in this place, it should be Mianzhu dialect. This again demonstrates a close relationship between language and social identity and thus is a symbol of a higher value on the solidarity dimension. However, more explorations are needed in this respect.

4.2 Language Attitudes toward Mandarin

Questions seven and eight are about the ability to comprehend and speak Mandarin. Table 4 is about the comprehensibility of Mandarin for Mianzhu locals. Among 220 participants, 90.0% report that they can understand completely, 7.3% can comprehend most of speech in Mandarin. Only six participants report that they can understand just a little bit and all of them are of the age above 60. None of them reports they cannot understand it at all. Younger generations, as expected, show a better result in this respect than elder generations.

Table 4. The Ability to Understand Mandarin

Age	≤18	19~30	31~40	41~50	51~60	>60	Percent
yes	100.0%	95.0%	100.0%	94.9%	85.7%	59.4%	90.0%
basically yes	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%	5.1%	14.3%	21.9%	7.3%
a little bit	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	18.8%	2.7%
Not at all	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 5. The Ability to Speak Mandarin

Age	≤18	19~30	31~40	41~50	51~60	>60	Percent
yes	100.0%	75.0%	44.4%	33.3%	14.3%	0.0%	46.4%
basically yes	0.0%	25.0%	30.6%	61.5%	40.0%	0.0%	26.8%
a little bit	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	5.1%	45.7%	40.6%	18.2%
Not at all	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	59.4%	8.6%

As for whether they can speak Mandarin or not, according to the Table 5, it is obvious that as age grows up, the percentage of participants with the ability to speak Mandarin fluently decreases. Only 13 participants with the age above 60 can speak a little bit Mandarin, and participants who report they cannot speak Mandarin all fall into the eldest group. This leads to a stark contrast with the number of people under the age of 30. This is the result of the promotion of Mandarin in compulsory education across the country. With such a promotion, younger generations who have received formal education naturally are more capable of comprehending and speaking Mandarin than elder generations. Meanwhile, although some elder people cannot speak Mandarin, they can understand it because most media programs they watch are in Mandarin so that Mandarin gradually becomes comprehensible to them. Moreover, the promotion of Mandarin makes it the standardized language spoken in China, thus enjoying a high value on the status dimension.

The ninth question queries about reasons for speaking Mandarin. The results are presented in Figure 5. Overwhelmingly, a large portion of participants (76.9%) choose to speak Mandarin because of specific conversation occasions. When further inquired, they contend that the more formal the occasion is, the more likely they prefer to use Mandarin. 44.6% locals switch to Mandarin due to the individual they address to, for example, when their audiences cannot understand Mianzhu dialect. Another influential factor is the national policy. 28.9% participants think that they speak Mandarin because it is the lingua franca in China and it is officially approved. These findings suggest that Mandarin is more likely to be related to higher social status. It is more often used in a more formal occasion and people value it because of the national policy. It implies that Mandarin for Mianzhu locals presents a higher value on the status dimension. Meanwhile, only 6 out of 220 report that they are born to speak Mandarin, two prefer to speak Mandarin because it sounds nice and no one has affections toward Mandarin. Compared with above findings, Mandarin ranks lower than Mianzhu dialect in terms of solidarity since the latter gives locals a sense of belonging and some locals have affections toward it and some think the latter sounds nice.

As for whether Mianzhu locals are supportive of their parents and children speaking Mandarin at home, the results are presented in Figure 6. 45.0% of participants take a relatively tolerant attitude toward it. Compared with the results of the second question, it can be seen that more locals hope that their family members can speak Mandarin instead of Mianzhu dialect, even if they are at home. This is more evidenced by the result that 48.2% of participants support it and only 6.8% of them oppose it. The reason might be the higher status of Mandarin. A language variety with a higher value on the status dimension is deemed to symbolize more power and more opportunities to move

upward in terms of the social status. For locals therefore, the ability to speak Mandarin ensures more chances for locals to pursue a better life. This suggests that Mandarin values high on the status dimension compared with Mianzhu dialect. It should be noted that compared with elder generations above 30, although younger generations below the age of 30 are, according to the eighth question, the most competent speakers of all, are less supportive of speaking Mandarin at home and among the 19-30 age group, participants who oppose it take up to 22.5%, ranking the first among all age groups. The reason might be although Mandarin is regarded as a way to obtain a better social status, Mianzhu dialect remains as a way to express their unique social identity, which younger generations do not want to lose. While for older generations, they deem Mandarin as an important step toward a better life so that they tend to encourage their children or even grand children to speak Mandarin even at home. Still, more investigations are needed in this respect.

The eleventh question investigates local attitudes toward whether all Mianzhu locals should learn to speak Mandarin. Figure 7 displays the details. On the whole, more locals (48.6%) think it depends on one's own conditions and desires while 35.5% of them give a definite yes. Only 15.9% locals contend it is unnecessary. These findings illustrate that more people to some extent believe that it is better to learn Mandarin than not. It might be explained by reasons discussed above, showing again the high value of Mandarin on the solidarity dimension. In other words, it is more likely that locals learn Mandarin for its utilitarian value, which is closed related to the status dimension (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

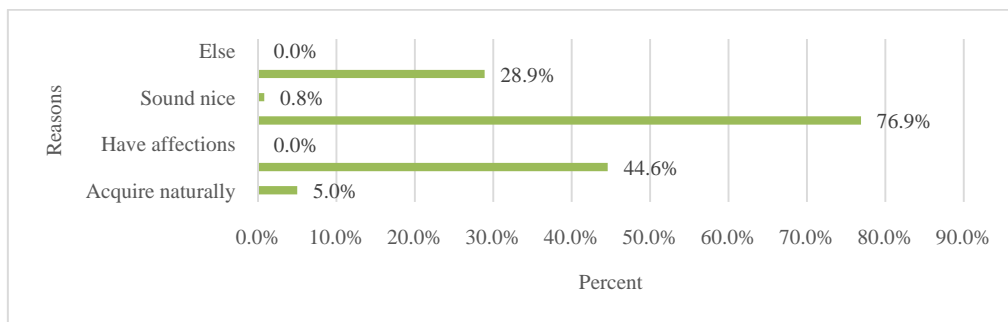


Figure 5. Reasons for Speaking Mandarin.

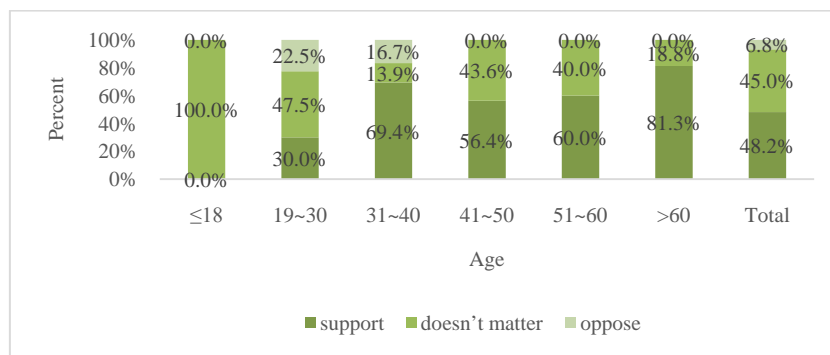


Figure 6. Attitudes towards Parents/Children Speaking Mandarin at Home across Age.

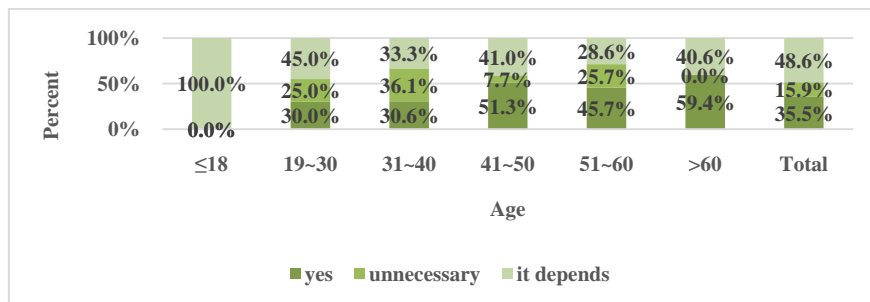


Figure 7. Attitudes toward Locals Learning Mandarin.

The twelfth question concerns attitudes toward a Mianzhu native speaking Mandarin only and never speaking Mianzhu dialect. The results are displayed in Table 6. Although there are 39.5% participants think it does not matter to them that much whether a Mianzhu local speaks Mandarin only, more (55.0%) show somewhat negative feelings toward Mandarin and merely 5.5% participants express a positive feeling (well-educated). Among those who display negative feelings, 32.7% of them believe he or she is just putting on air, perhaps trying to show a higher social status according to some participants. This suggests that unconsciously, Mianzhu locals attach high value to Mandarin on the status dimension. It should be noted that all 38 youngest participants believe they are just putting on air. This requires further investigations. 22.3% participants believe if someone does not speak Mianzhu dialect, he or she cannot be deemed as a native of Mianzhu any more. This corresponds with the results of the former question in which most locals in Mianzhu consider the language as the most typical feature of them, suggesting that Mianzhu dialect displays a higher value on the solidarity dimension than the Mandarin.

Table 6. The Attitude toward a Local Speaking Mandarin Only

Age	≤18	19~30	31~40	41~50	51~60	>60	Percent
Well-educated	0.0%	0.0%	13.9%	5.1%	14.3%	0.0%	5.5%
Putting on airs	100.0%	25.0%	19.4%	10.3%	0.0%	40.6%	32.7%
Not a Mianzhu local any more	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	20.5%	45.7%	18.8%	22.3%
Does not matter	0.0%	50.0%	41.7%	64.1%	40.0%	40.6%	39.5%
Else	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

The thirteenth question is about locals' attitudes towards the Mandarin-only policy in schools or governmental institutions. As can be seen in Figure 8, the overall result is quite diversified with just 1.4% more participants support this policy than those who oppose it and 5% more than those who take a neutral stance. However, when taking the age factor into consideration, it can be seen that younger generations are more likely to give a negative reply in this respect while elder generations are more supportive. All 38 participants in the youngest group oppose this policy while 93.8% of the participants in the oldest group approve it. This suggests that although younger generations have a better grasp of Mandarin, they choose not to use it even in some formal situations. Perhaps for them, they use Mandarin only when they are required to. It is possible that they are afraid that if they speak Mandarin, others may think, according to the result of the former question, they are putting on airs. Consequently, it might be harder for them to fit in. As a result, they try to avoid speaking Mandarin even if they are on some formal occasions. But for the elder generation, perhaps in their mind people working in those places automatically have higher social status so that they are supposed to speak the Mandarin, which has a high value on the status dimension to match their status and demonstrate their professionalism. All these imply that Mandarin scores higher on the status dimension than Mianzhu dialect.

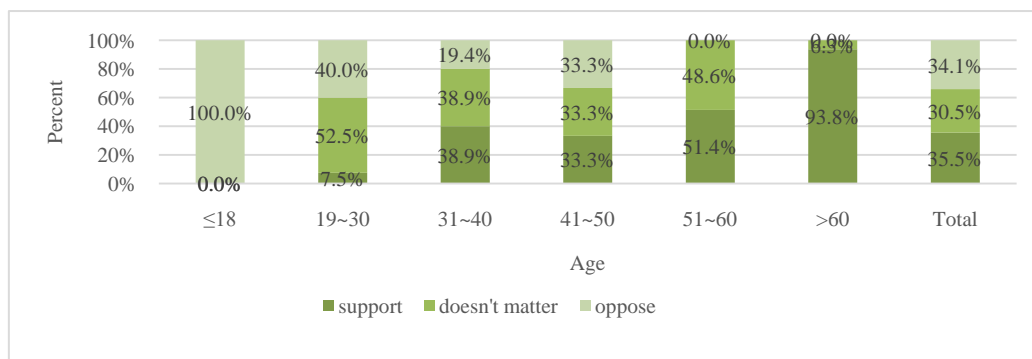


Figure 8. Attitudes toward the Mandarin-only Policy in Schools and Governmental Institutions across Age.

The last question concerns their views on the relative importance of Mianzhu dialect and Mandarin to themselves. It can be seen from Figure 9 below that locals predominately (76.8%) attach importance to both. 21.4% participants value Mandarin more and only 1.8% participants value Mianzhu dialect more. This may be due to different interpretations of the word “importance”. Based on previous discussions, when it comes to the utilitarian value, locals think Mandarin is more important. When it comes to the intimacy, the sense of belonging or social identity,

Mianzhu dialect is attached to more importance. Most locals value both because they perceive the importance in both perspectives. For them, Mandarin allows them to attain a higher status both socially and economically while Mianzhu dialect allows them to keep their unique social identity and feel they are part of certain social group. These results again show that on the solidarity dimension, Mianzhu dialect scores higher while on the status dimension, Mandarin does. It should be pointed out that younger generations are more likely to attach importance to both of them. The reason may lie in the fact that the younger generations have more chances to learn Mandarin and can learn it with more ease. Compared with older generations, they have more acute language awareness so that they are more aware of the language changes. Meanwhile, the spreading of Mandarin, together with the high probability in the convergence between Mianzhu dialect and Mandarin or other subdialects of Sichuan dialect, results in a linguistic identity crisis. In the face of such a crisis, speakers of one particular speech community will make some adjustments. It is clear that language attitudes that younger generations take in this study are ways to enhance their sense of linguistic identity.

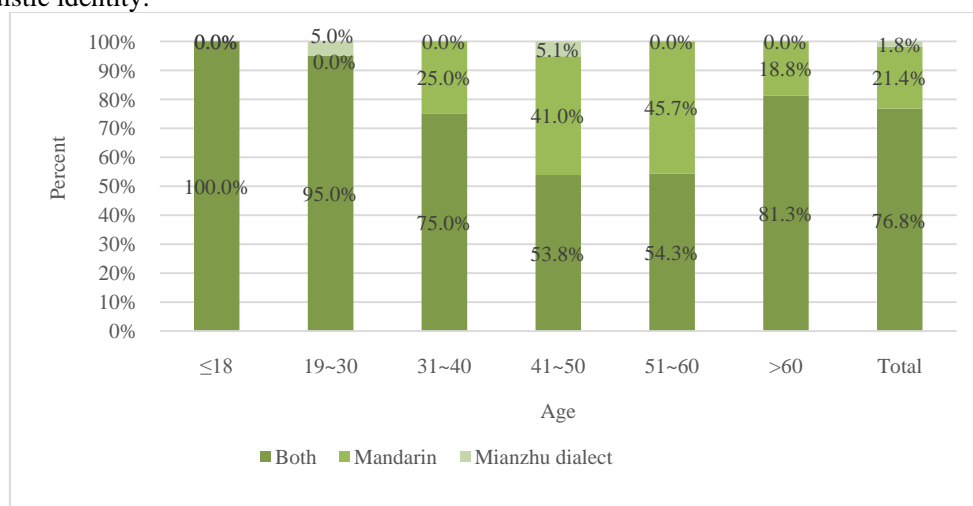


Figure 9. Views on the Relative Importance of Mianzhu Dialect and Mandarin.

From the discussions from above, the authors conclude that on the status dimension, Mandarin has the upper hand. Historically speaking, Mianzhu has always been an economically prosperous and culturally important city, but when compared with other metropolises, it still falls far behind. For people who desire better lives in a larger city, Mandarin is an important linguistic step toward their dreams. Meanwhile, Mandarin promotion policy also plays a role. Mandarin is a lingua franca in China and is promoted by the central government. As a result, it has more overt prestige and can perform more social functions than Mianzhu dialect. Most locals attach importance to Mandarin for its status. They have to learn Mandarin to obtain better education, to get employed and to communicate with people from other parts of China for commercial purposes, etc.

On the solidarity dimension, Mianzhu dialect has the upper hand. Locals do not like Mandarin more. Actually, none of the locals has affections toward Mandarin. The primary reason speaking Mandarin is “occasion”. It is also out of respect to their audiences or be supportive of national policies that they speak Mandarin. Younger generations seem to be more reluctant to speak Mandarin when they do not have to. More locals speak Mianzhu dialect not only because they are born to, but also because they feel the sense of belonging and intimacy when speaking Mianzhu dialect. They think Mianzhu dialect is a key symbol of their unique social identity. For most locals, it has more covert prestige. In fact, most locals still communicate in Mianzhu dialect most of the time in their daily lives. The results are in line with studies that compared locals’ attitudes toward Mandarin and another dialect spoken in Sichuan, which also presented a higher value for Mandarin on the status dimension and a higher value for the dialect under investigation on the solidarity dimension (Yang, 2001; Xiao, 2003; Xin, 2008; Ren, Chen, & Xie, 2010; Zhou, 2013).

It is also worth noticing that the promotion of Mandarin in Mianzhu has proved effective. 97.3% locals can basically or totally comprehend Mandarin and 73.2% can basically or fluently speak Mandarin. All people under the age of 30 can basically or totally understand and speak Mandarin. But the authors believe this is unlikely to put Mianzhu dialect under threat due because of the attitudes taken by Mianzhu locals and younger generations in par-

ticular.

5. Conclusion

This study explores language attitudes of Mianzhu locals towards Mianzhu dialect and Mandarin respectively from the solidarity dimension and the status dimension. The authors conclude that on the status dimension, Mianzhu locals value Mandarin more and from the perspective of solidarity, Mianzhu locals value Mianzhu dialect more. Most locals have recognized the importance of both of them. Such language attitudes may urge the locals to learn Mandarin and to encourage their posterity to learn and use Mandarin in the pursuit of better lives. However, they are more inclined and more comfortable to use Mianzhu dialect if occasions and audiences permitted since it sparks the sense of belonging, intimacy, and a unique social identity among them. Younger generations also demonstrate similar attitudes and they even prefer the dialect for it allows them to maintain their unique identity although they are fully competent in speaking Mandarin. With such language attitudes, Mianzhu dialect is unlikely to go extinct but still more efforts should be taken from the government to preserve some of its unique features. This is because Mianzhu dialect is, same as other dialects in China, likely to undergo changes due to language contact.

The present study has two major limitations. First, the number of participants in the questionnaire is relatively small. The present study only involves 220 individuals. While the distribution of the age and gender is nearly balanced, it is not for the education background and occupation. A more balanced sample with a larger size may yield more convincing results. Second, it should be noted that the findings in the study are mainly based on the data gathered through questionnaire. Therefore, the results concerning the real picture of language attitudes of Mianzhu locals would be more convincing and comprehensive if combined with other research methods such as interviews.

As for future research directions, first, this study mainly focuses on the language attitude itself. Future research can be conducted on more detailed reasons for such attitudes. This might require more qualitative methods such as interviews. Second, this study mainly compares noticeable differences across age groups. Whether the difference is significant or not and whether there is a difference across educational background, professions and between genders still remains to be explored. Thirdly, more research is also needed to explore unique linguistic features of Mianzhu dialect so as to provide a more comprehensive picture of it.

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