Differences in the Roles of Parents' and Guardians' Language Use in Rural Left-behind Pupils: Evidence from Hukou County in China

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Abstract—**This paper investigates the language use and its influencing factors of 465 rural left-behind pupils in Hukou County, Jiangxi Province in China, and uses Logit model to make an empirical analysis and obtains the following conclusions: first, parents' language requirements and guardians' dialect inertia both have strong effects on children's language use, but the former is positive and the latter is negative, and the two roles are in conflict; second, female pupils are more inclined to use Mandarin; the higher the education level of parents, the more left-behind children use Mandarin; in families where parents use Mandarin, children are also clearly inclined to use it. The main research revelation is that parents who work outside the county should maintain as much communication as possible with their guardians and children in Mandarin and require guardians to conduct Mandarin education for children to facilitate the popularization of Mandarin.**

Keywords—left-behind children; language requirement; dialect inertia; language use

I. INTRODUCTION

At present, the phenomenon of left-behind children is prevalent in China's rural areas. Among the many problems of left-behind children, learning and using Mandarin deserves attention. This paper takes the pupils from Hukou county of Jiangxi province as a sample to analyze the factors affecting their language use in this paper. Pupils are selected as research subjects based on two main reasons: first, pupils enter the formal school learning stage and are in the initial stage of contact with Mandarin (Thomason et al., 1988; Thomason & Sarah, 2001). They are faced with a strong collision with dialect, and their language choices are in a turning point. Therefore, the importance of understanding their language choices and the reasons behind it is self-evident. Second, the language choice of left-behind children in China's rural is under the pressure of parents and guardians, and the selection process is complicated. For example, some pupils are used to using Mandarin in the dialect environment. The reason behind it is intriguing.

The language choice habits in elementary education may affect a person's lifelong language use. Hence, it is necessary to explore the origin of pupils' language use. This paper carries on field investigation on rural left-behind pupils and probes into the difference between the parents and guardians about this cause. More specifically: first, it is aimed to understand the rural pupils' language use and the factors affecting their Mandarin use; second, it is expected to provide theoretical reference for the popularization of Mandarin to promote the development of Mandarin education in this group.

II. SAMPLE SOURCES

In this paper, field interviews on the rural left-behind pupils' families under the jurisdiction of Hukou County were conducted by the interview team composed of 15 people, who have received higher education. Face-to-face exchanges with pupils' families were conducted by making full advantage of local social networks. The survey was divided into two phases. The first phase was from Jan.20 to Feb.19, 2018, that is, during the school winter vacation. During this period, the majority left-behind pupils' parents returned home for the lunar calendar New Year. The second period was from Jul.20 to Aug.19, 2018, was during the summer vacation.

In the first survey, 378 families were interviewed with 324 valid samples. In the second survey, only 6 people interviewed 177 families with 141 valid samples. The total number of valid samples in the two periods was 465, and the effective rate of data was 83.78 %. Among the tested families, the guardians were mainly grandfathers and grandmothers, which accounted for 91.83 % of the cases. Other guardians included grandpas, grandmas, uncles, aunts or others. During the winter vacation, the subjects interviewed were mainly guardians, parents, and children. During the summer vacation, the subjects interviewed were mainly guardians and left-behind children. The purpose of the interview was to understand the age, gender, and whether children use Mandarin or dialects in their lives.

This paper defines: first, speaking Mandarin refers to children's overall tendency to use words and sentences that conform to the pronunciation and grammar rules of Mandarin; speaking dialect is vice verse; second, the family is a unit with children left behind as the core, including

grandparents or other guardians, parents, etc. If the child has brothers and sisters who also stay at home, they are only considered as an object of investigation; third, families whose guardians work outside the county and do not speak Hukou dialect are not investigated; fourth, children whose parents work outside the county belong to the left-behind children.

III. VARIABLES AND DATA

A. Explained Variable

This paper only chooses "speaking dialect" and "speaking Mandarin" as the selection results of rural left-behind children and focuses on analyzing the language use in children's lives. The language use of children in specific situations such as school and media learning is not within the scope of this study. In the process of using dialect, a small amount of Mandarin is doped as a dialect choice; while in the process of using Mandarin, a small number of dialects are doped as Mandarin choices. Therefore, there is no case of "speaking both languages". And the language use (Use) is set as a 0-1 virtual variable, 1 for speaking Mandarin, and 0 for speaking dialect.

B. Explaining Variables

Main explaining variables are defined as language requirements (Requirement) and dialect inertia (Inertia). Requirement refers to the fact that the parents require

guardians to communicate with the child in Mandarin . If one party insists on using Mandarin and the other insists on using dialects, and they cannot hold each other, the choice of the guardians shall prevail. If the parent's consistent claims are to require the guardians to speak Mandarin with the child, assign 1, no requirements or ambiguous attitude, assign 0. Inertia refers to the degree to which guardians are accustomed to using dialect. Different guardians have different degree of language inertia. This variable is measured by the Likert five-point scale method.

C. Controlled Variables

This paper controls children's age (Age) and gender (Gender), and Gender is a 0-1 variable, girl, assignment 1; boy, assignment 0. Besides, the basic information variables are controlled, including the guardians' education level (Education_1) and parents' education level (Education_2), language use between parents (Use_2) and household annual per capita disposable income (PCDI). Among them, Use_2 is a 0-1 variable, when using Mandarin, assigns 1; Using dialect, assignment 0.

IV. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

This paper establishes a Logit model to analyze the influence of language attitude and language environment on using Mandarin of rural left-behind pupils, as shown in formula (1):

$$Logit(Use) = \alpha + \beta_1(1+\text{Re}\,quirement) + \beta_2 Inertia + \gamma Control \,\text{var}\,ables + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

In equation (1): α is a constant term, β_1 and β_2 represents the coefficient of explaining variable respectively, γ represents the coefficient of and controlled variables, ε is an error term. To solve the problem that the distribution value of the Requirement variable is right-biased, this paper uses the method of Rossi (2005) to add 1 to the variable and then take the logarithm. First, the correlation analysis of the

explaining variables was carried out. Except for the significant positive correlation between Inertia and Education_1, Requirement and Education_2 at a lower level, the other explaining variables are not significant, the correlation coefficients value are overall small, and the correlation are weak. This collectively shows that there are no multiple collinear problems among explaining variables. (See "Table. I")

TABLE I. LOGIT REGRESSION RESULTS

Variable type	Variable symbol	Coefficient	Standard error
Explaining variables	Requirement	0.345***	0.068
	Inertia	-0.593***	-0.072
Controlled variable	Age	0.161	0.117
	Gender	0.338*	0.009
	Education_1	0.187	0.144
	Education_2	0.615*	0.283
	Use_2	0.297**	0.075
	Income	-0.148	0.334
Likelihood ratio	LR	29.672***	

a. Note: **, ***, *** indicates significant statistics at 10 %, 5 %, and 1 % respectively.

A. Explaining Variables

Requirement has a significant positive effect on Use at the level of 0.01 with a coefficient of 0.345. This shows that parents' strong claim to the use of Mandarin by guardians

and children is an important factor influencing children's language use. Parents have a strong influence on children's language learning and use, whether they are passive (Arunachalam, 2016) or active (Atkinson, 1982) in the learning process. For example, if father or mother does not

use dialect, the child is required to master the Mandarin to facilitate the communication in the future; another example is that parents work in more decent units and do not want their children to use dialects so as not to be "indigenous". Guardians are often reluctant to use Mandarin in the process of raising children alone against the wishes of their parents.

Inertia has a significant negative on Use at the level of 0.01 with a coefficient of 0.593. This shows that the greater the inertia of the guardian's dialect, the less likely the child is to use Mandarin; the weaker the inertia, the more likely children are to use Mandarin. When the parents are not around the child, the guardians are formally equivalent to the parent's role. The guardian is the main input channel for children to learn and use the language. Its importance is self-evident.

B. Controlled Variables

Age is not significantly positive with Use, indicating that there are no major differences about language use in different grades. In fact, the use of dialects in their lives is more obvious. Girls are more likely to use Mandarin, which may be related to the importance of parents and guardians, and the ability of girls to learn a language (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).

Guardians' education level cannot obviously affect children's language use. First, guardians' education level is generally low. Second, the rural left-behind children basically use dialects. Even guardians with a high education level are less likely to communicate with their guardians in Mandarin. However, parents' education level has a significant effect on children's language use, indicating that the higher the parents' education level, the more likely children to use Mandarin. The reason is that the more educated parents pay more attention to plan for their children's future.

There is a significant positive correlation between parents' language use and children's language use at the level of 0.05, indicating that parents use Mandarin (usually the off-site marriage family) and children generally use Mandarin. This type of child can be integrated into family life. The negative impact of PCDI on the children's language use shows that the rural left-behind pupils have not significantly changed due to the difference in family economic level.

V. ROBUST TEST

Due to the short time interval between the two surveys, this paper uses different regression methods to replace lagging variables to carry on robustness analysis. That is, entering regression and stepwise regression analysis respectively. It is found that the regression results of the main explaining variables are not significantly different from those in "Table I", and the results of individual controlled variables vary slightly. The results of robustness analysis show that the empirical results of this paper have good stability.

VI. CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of this paper is that either parents' language requirements on rural left-behind children or guardians' dialect inertia has a strong influence on children's language use, but their roles are negative and conflicting.

Therefore, in order to improve the ability of rural left-behind children to use Mandarin, the awareness and requirements of parents in Mandarin are crucial. Especially after children use Mandarin, guardians and other adults tend to accommodate children in code conversion and choose to use Mandarin. This encourages children to form inertia in the use of Mandarin. Parents should maintain voice contact with their guardians and children as frequently as possible. In this way, the monitoring effect of the parents' Mandarin is better, and it can promote the absorption and use of Mandarin by children in a harmonious atmosphere of affection.

Parents' language attitude is to actively request and support children to learn and use Mandarin. But in fact, the proportion of migrant parents in rural areas in China holds this attitude is low, coupled with the guardians' dialect habits and living environment or other factors, so that the rural left-behind children's internal and external environment to learn and use Mandarin is not ideal. Therefore, in the process of national economic development and urban-rural integration, it is more important to strengthen the education of Mandarin for adults.

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