

Effects of Ways of Communication on the Preservation of Shanghai Dialect

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ABSTRACT

Shanghai dialect is being forgotten by the young generation of Shanghainese. The paper focuses on the preservation of Shanghai dialect, which is the basis of the Shanghai culture. It mainly discusses the aim of inheriting dialect and investigates the relationship between mass media and Shanghai dialect protection. Ways of communication generate negative impact on local culture in Shanghai due to the development of modern typing system and the vast growth of immigrant population. The factor that contributes to the protection of Shanghai dialect is social medium. In the future, medium should be employed to preserve Shanghai dialect by fully utilizing online platforms and minimizing the negative impact of mass communication.

Keywords: Shanghai dialect, mass media, immigrant population, culture preservation

1. INTRODUCTION

Dialect, as an imperative representative of historical memory and cultural sediment for the local people, is being erased day by day in Shanghai. As one of the most economically-developed cities in China, Shanghai is thriving in many aspects, not including the Shanghai language. There is a growing number of people who are born in Shanghai and live in this cities gradually but forget about the unique Shanghai dialect. In other cities of China, the local dialect can still be heard everywhere till today. Nevertheless, the situation is different in Shanghai. Shanghai dialect derives one of the four municipalities in the People's Republic of China.

Shanghai Chinese is generally understood as the modern dialect spoken in the urban districts that were recognized as the city center of Shanghai before the incorporation of various surrounding suburbs and towns into the municipality since the 1980s. Decades ago, Shanghai dialect was an essential tool to live in this city. No matter at home, in the school, at work or in the public, this dialect was frequently used. As time passes by, people from all walks of life default to start conversations in mandarin. This essay specifically focuses on the preservation of Shanghai dialect and investigates the reason behind the phenomenon that a great proportion of Shanghainese, especially the young generation, refuse to or incapable of speaking their dialect today. The preservation of Shanghai dialect is in urgent need and in the late future, Shanghainese might be forgotten by most of the Shanghainese. In several decades, there is a possibility that this dialect would be largely replaced by mandarin.

2. OVERVIEW OF SHANGHAI DIALECT

As the development of modern society, Shanghai, as the financial center of China, has attracted more and more migrant population. One of the most important reasons is that some Shanghainese, especially the youth, can no longer speak fluent Shanghai dialect. In the 20th century, Shanghai dialect is used in public places, school, and work. However, after the government established the language policy that people shall speak Mandarin in the public 15 years ago, Shanghai dialect has been fading in this city. At school, students are allowed to use Mandarin only. At home, they rarely communicate to parents with dialect. There is a great possibility that Shanghainese will not use dialect in the future.

According to a study which studies the relationship between the age (between 20-30) of Shanghainese and the ability to speak dialect, the results show that younger people tend to become more incapable of speaking Shanghai dialect. As for the migrant people, who move from other cities to Shanghai, hold little abilities to speak the dialect as well. Secondly, it can be known that most migrant population in Shanghai under 30, cannot speak Shanghai dialect fluently. In a word, Shanghai dialect, along with the Shanghai culture, is slowly disappearing. Indeed, a number of people believe that Shanghai dialect is the label of the "superiority", which is intentionally employed by the Shanghainese to despise and discriminate the immigrant population, claiming that Shanghainese has been transferring their anger to the later one, who has been taking over their homeland, taking advantage of their housing, medical and educational resources and minimizing their priority as Shanghainese identity. However, dialects have unique human values and should be protected. Although with economic and social progress

opening up, such an open system of language will definitely change, but it is necessary to do a good job of protecting dialects in light of the situation. The Shanghai dialect embodies the commercial characteristics of Shanghai. The active thinking of Shanghainese in an open society and free life as well as the whimsical dreams of Shanghai style have produced a large number of Shanghai style idioms in Shanghai dialect, which have great generalizing power for expressing life. The entire development process of Shanghai dialects fully conveys the splendor of Shanghai people's life creation, and also proves the important role of openness, innovation, and diversity in optimizing language. The spirit of Shanghai city is the spirit of Shanghai culture [1]. Therefore, Shanghai dialect is in an urgent need of preservation and inheritance.

3. CHANGES IN WAYS OF COMMUNICATIONS THAT LEAD TO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SHANGHAI DIALECT

3.1. Change of typing systems

Through the development of intelligent device, typing systems become more completed and convenient so that people nowadays prefer typing than making phone calls, which means they read literal texts or even use emoji instead of listening to the phone. Social apps appeared in China since 2010s, Weibo, Wechat, and QQ, along with the message function, have provided huge opportunities for people to communicate with each other. A poll by Gallup (an American analytics and advisory company based in Washington) also confirmed that text messaging outranks phone calls as the dominant form of communication among millennials, with 68 percent of 18 to 29-year-olds saying they texted "a lot" the previous day. Text messages enable users to get better answers in faster speed. Texts are instantaneous, while also offer time and ability to think over how to reply others, so that they are more comfortable and precise communication forms. In addition, phone calls require a kind of interruption to someone's day, while text messages can be opened and read during leisure time [2]. As a result, there are less verbal interactions and more literal browsing in daily life as the change of social media, which greatly decreases the opportunities for people to listen and practice speaking Shanghai dialect. Since Shanghai dialect cannot be represented as a thorough and complicated writing system, people are forced to communicate in mandarin. What is more, the process of typing in letters and using the Chinese phonetic alphabet strengthen people's skills in speaking mandarin instead of the local dialect. In this case, the younger generation of Shanghainese have limited chances to practice their dialect aside from home, which explains the reason why they are less capable of it.

3.2. Immigrant populations

Another factor dedicated to the lost of ability to speaking Shanghai dialect is the immigrant populations. More than 39% of Shanghai's residents are long-term migrants, a number that has tripled in ten years. Migrants are primarily from Anhui (29%), Jiangsu (16.8%), Henan (8.7%) and Sichuan (7.0%), while almost 80% are from rural areas. Interestingly, they have made up the largest percentage of the city's growth, as Shanghai's natural growth rate has been negative since 1993 because of low fertility rates [3]. Besides, the Shanghai Commission of Education established the "We all speak Mandarin" policy around 2005. Since then, students are not allowed or even get punished for saying their dialect in campus. This policy greatly alters the way of communication that Shanghai local youth employs during their childhood; as a result, lowers their ability to speak the dialect and causes the disappearance of it.

Due to the vast growth of immigrant population, Mandarin has gradually replaced the role of Shanghai dialect. Therefore, the way of communicating through mandarin blends into the individual's environment, and contributes to the change of language habit. Through the immigration process, mandarin, which is a system of symbolized language system, marginalizes the original Shanghai dialect, which is the representative verbal expression of Shanghai culture. This process dangers the preservation of Shanghai dialect as well as the culture, because characteristic words only exist in the dialect that tend to be forgotten.

4. WAYS OF COMMUNICATIONS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE PRESERVATION OF SHANGHAI DIALECT

As the development of scientific knowledge, ways of communications has become diverse as well. Unlike the past, citizens in the 2020 no longer merely rely on face-to-face communications or pristine chat rooms to communicate with others. New ways of communications can also serve as tools to spread Shanghai dialect and preserve Shanghai culture. Neotypes of internet platforms or unconventional medium contribute to the preservation of Shanghai culture and dialect under the improvement and guidance of human beings. These new ways of communication include traditional medium, social medium and artificial intelligence device.

4.1. Radio

The young generation of Shanghainese need a language environment to practice their language sense training. Radio is one of the traditional medium that enables them to pay attention to this dialect. Among all the shanghai radio channels, in Shanghai Radio Shanghai Drama and Arts Broadcasting, AM1197 and FM97.2, all the shows are

broadcasted with Shanghai dialect. People often listen to the car radio during commuting back and forth on road, and the radio is attractive and interesting to the audience, which builds a relaxing environment for people to learn things easily, including practicing the Shanghai dialect. These shows generally are made up of daily conversations, short stories and news. In addition, Shanghai Drama channel plays HU JU, a traditional Shanghai opera and HUA JI XI, a type of stand-up comedy. Both of these plays have been forgotten by the Shanghainese as time goes by, since the modern entertainment, such as reality show, has replaced the old way of amusement. Therefore, these radio channels not only assist the Shanghainese to improve listening skills in an entertaining way, but also preserve the traditional Shanghai opera culture, a part of historical remains of local spirit.

4.2. Television

Another long-existed medium, the television, can be utilized to preserve Shanghai dialect as well. As a matter of fact, a certain number of local TV channels or shows have the regulation of employing Shanghai dialect only. To be mentioned, these TV shows cover a wide range of spectrum, Xin Wen Fang [4], a news program; Shanghai Story, a documentary show which records a variety of lifestyles in Shanghai, Xin Lao Niang Jiu, a show that mediating family conflicts. These shows use Shanghai dialect with an intent to help those elderly, who have lived in Shanghai for their whole life and cannot understand mandarin well and fulfill their lives. Still, just like the radio, television can also preserve Shanghai dialect and inherit the culture in an entertaining way. Moreover, the visual effect has the function of helping people to understand Shanghai dialect better, because the sense ratio increases leading to a more immersive experience for the audience.

4.3. Social Media Apps

A number of modern medium have developed quickly at the present stage. Weibo, as a platform largely used by the young generation, serves the purpose of spreading Shanghai dialect as well. Several bloggers have opened up particular areas for people to communicate about Shanghai culture. For instance, "G Seng Dong", a famous blogger who owns about 1,230,000 fans, has been making videos of Shanghai culture and dialect for years. His channel keeps updating for about once a week, and each of his video is completely spoken in Shanghai dialect. The content can be talk shows, or funny scene plays sometimes, or Shanghai customs. Statistically, home page of "G Seng Dong" has the click view of more than 100,000 everyday on average, which indicates that he provides opportunities for more than 100,000, no matter Shanghainese or people from other cities to get to know about Shanghai culture. There are other similar bloggers, like "Xu Xiang" or "Hao

Jiao Hao Fa", and they all contribute to preserving Shanghai dialect. Aside from car radio, broadcast in public transportation system employs Shanghai dialect as well. Since 2014, underway stations and public bus have initiated Shanghai dialect station broadcast.

4.4. Artificial Intelligence

Furthermore, artificial intelligence has become popular these years. Cantonese, as a local dialect is one of the choices of Siri voice. If Shanghainese, another local dialect in China which contain its own written language as well, can be transcribed into the internet database and even employed as voice input, then the written language system of Shanghai dialect will be more popular, which could potentially protect the Shanghai dialect with firm written evidence.

5. DISCUSSION

The present Shanghai dialect preservation strategies raise people's awareness of the dialect crisis. However, not enough attention has been paid to the policy. Qi Shen [5] claims that the current Shanghai dialect protection has followed a bottom-up language planning in China. Yet, the language protection is an interactive and dynamic process which involves a large amount of effort and attention of people and administrators. The protection strategies could be adjusted according to LMT framework (figure 1) [6], a language protection model containing noting, evaluation, adjustment, implementation and feedback. The bottom-up planning requires language policy-makers to get involved in feedback and evaluation processes. Role of various stake-holders are important to the preservation aside from the participation of social medium bloggers or several radio and television directors only. On the base of statistics, the number of people who actually receive educational Shanghai dialect related knowledge is small, comparing to the whole Shanghainese group. In reality, the young generation are more willing to spend their time on more entertaining programs rather than listening to the Shanghai dialect shows during their leisure time. Most viewers, who enjoy these radio talks or TV shows are out of their original love and interest for Shanghai dialect. Still, according to "G Seng Dong", one of the weibo blogger, his action for protecting Shanghai culture cannot be understood by people. "A thankless task", as he wrote online, "Some people say that not all mandarin can be translated into Shanghai dialect, some say that Shanghai dialect cannot be written...This platform makes no profit. No investor values Shanghai culture, and it has received queries from many netizens... Shanghai dialect is struggling to death, frankly speaking. And I am pleased to be a part of the dying struggling".

The current dialect protection is oversimplified and marginalized. In the future, local administrators or Bureau of Culture should be aware of the pessimistic status quo of

Shanghai dialect. Kindergartens or primary schools should hold courses of Shanghai dialect learning and strengthen the education of local culture in the golden age of learning for the young generation. The government may reward and render financial support to the internet bloggers who spread Shanghai dialect. In summary, publicity and advertisement for the exposure of Shanghai dialect to more people may resolve the solution to towards a better future.

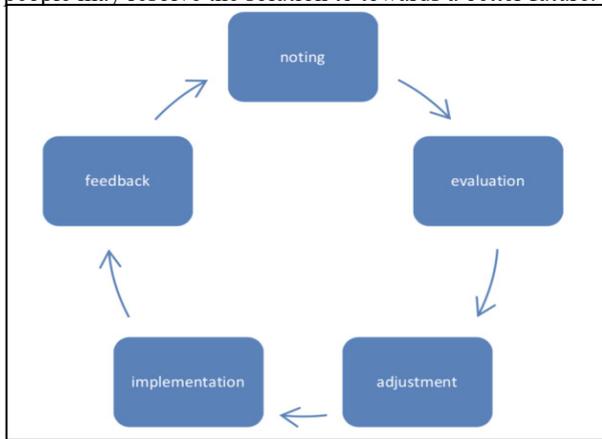


Figure 1 The LMT model

6. CONCLUSION

Contemporarily, more and more young people in Shanghai lose their capabilities to speak Shanghai dialect, because of the vast growth of immigrant population as well as the development of modern medium. Probably only few or none people will be able to communicate in Shanghaiese in the future. This dialect needs to be protected. The social medium can serve as the tool to develop make full use of its mobility and popularity to let people, no matter the local or the immigrant, know about this dialect and inherit Shanghai dialect and culture. Yet, this bottom-up language protection strategy is not enough for the disappearing Shanghai dialect. Government or local administrators should raise awareness for the Shanghai dialect protection. Academic paper or research about Shanghai dialect protection is limited, so that this paper may contain comparatively little professional theories or academic material basis. In the following stage, the author may contact those Shanghai dialect bloggers and participate in part of the protection programs. To spread Shanghai dialect and preserver the unique Shanghai culture, a club will be open in our school and serve for the purpose. The club will recruit students and teachers who are capable of speaking fluent Shanghaiese. The club will offer Shanghaiese courses which contain interesting cultural customs. A video channel will be established as well and videos will be uploaded. More ideas of how to preserve Shanghai dialect will be collected through the club and sent to official government online platform.

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