



A Study on the Usage and Language Attitudes of the National Common Language of the Yi Ethnic Group in Xichang

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Abstract. With the development of society and the changes of the times, the promotion of the national language has been increasingly valued by ethnic language researchers and various social groups. A thorough understanding of the use and attitudes of the Chinese national language among the Yi people in Xichang is an important foundation for understanding the use and attitudes of the Yi language. This survey mainly used a combination of questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews to investigate five aspects of the language abilities, language use, language attitudes, language learning, and language environment of the Yi people in Xichang. The survey found that Xichang is a typical "bilingual area", where language functions are intermixed and code-switching is common. The Yi people have a strong sense of attachment to their mother tongue but also highly identify with the national language. The local community has formed a harmonious language environment where the national language and local dialects and Yi language have hierarchical structure and complementary functions. Based on these characteristics, the article discusses issues and realities related to the coordinated development of the national language and the Yi language, the strengthening of school functions, the continuity of the Yi language, and the construction of a suitable learning environment for the Yi language in society.

Keywords: Xichang Yi ethnic group, national language, language usage, language attitude

1 Introduction

Scholars have long been interested in the use and attitudes of the national language in ethnic minority areas. Dai Qingxia (1993) defined language attitudes as "people's views on the value of language use, including their views on the status, functions and future development of language. Language attitudes are a component of cultural attitudes and a specific expression of cultural attitudes in language" ^[1]. As the capital city of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Xichang is a core area for investigating the language use and attitudes of Yi people, and has gained attention from the linguistic community and society as a whole. Munireha (2009) believed that "in mixed or bilingual areas, the

language is the main language while the other is used as a supplement" [2]. Therefore, based on various practical factors, a survey was conducted on the language use and attitudes of Yi people in Xichang using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. A total of 106 electronic questionnaires were distributed and received, and 8 Yi people from different fields were interviewed for a total of approximately 800 minutes, with a collected language corpus of 132,771 words (transcribed from audio recordings into text). Interviewees included teachers, lawyers, and administrative personnel. After strict data cleaning, the data was deemed to be scientific and feasible. This article takes the use and attitudes of the Chinese national language among the Yi people in Xichang as the focus of investigation, and summarizes and discusses the main data concerning the language abilities, language use, language attitudes, language learning, and language environment of Yi people in Xichang.

2 Preliminary findings of the investigation

The promotion and popularization of the national language should go hand in hand with the protection and inheritance of minority languages^[1]. It is necessary to investigate the use and attitudes of the national language among the Yi people in Xichang. In recent years, scholars have conducted surveys in Yi ethnic settlements in Liangshan Prefecture, but they mostly chose areas with good ecological environment, such as Ganluo, Puge, and Xide. The research shows that Chinese is still the most important communication tool for people. However, people will choose appropriate communication languages based on different communication objects and occasions, and language switching may occur during conversations. Yi people have a strong sense of attachment to their mother tongue, while also showing clear recognition and identification with the national language. This survey mainly focused on the more developed and open Yi ethnic settlements in Xichang, exploring the language use and attitudes of Yi people. The survey included basic information of respondents and interviewees, language abilities, language learning, language attitudes, language use, and language environment. As Table 1.

Table 1. Basic information of semi-structured interviewees

Interview number	Interviewee	Education	gender	mother tongue	occupation
20220801	X1	Undergraduate degree	Woman	Yi language	English teacher
20220802	X2	Undergraduate degree	Woman	Yi language	lawyer
20220803	X3	Undergraduate degree	Woman	Yi language	Mathematics teacher
20220804	X4	Master's degree	Man	Yi language	lawyer
20220805	X5	Secondary school education	Man	Yi language	Yi language teacher

Number of people who choose to be satisfied or very satisfied (person)	83	83	62	57	92	86	89	85
Proportion (%)	78%	78%	58%	54%	87%	81%	84%	80%

Source: Obtained through organizing survey questionnaires

Based on Table 2, the vast majority of participants expressed satisfaction with their ability to listen to and speak the Yi language, which accounted for 78% of the total survey respondents. However, their ability to read and write in Yi was not as proficient, with only 58% of participants able to read Yi writing fluently, and 54% of participants proficient in writing Yi characters. Nevertheless^[5], over 75% of people were able to understand and use Yi fluently in communication with their own ethnic group. This suggests that most people can comprehend and apply the Yi language in communication with their own people, but are relatively unfamiliar and less skilled in Yi writing. Furthermore, over 80% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their ability to listen, speak, read and write in the national language of China, including both the national language as well as standard Chinese characters.

Based on interviews with eight individuals, interviewee X1 stated that they were naturally exposed to the Yi language in their family and acquired it through oral communication. However, when they started attending elementary school, the teachers used Chinese for instruction, and they gradually used Chinese more frequently due to work demands. They now primarily communicate in Mandarin Chinese, and are only able to understand a few characters in Yi writing. Interviewee X2's family primarily used Yi for communication, but adapted to using Mandarin or Sichuan dialect during times when their father was away for work. Despite their mother's limited perspective, they are still proficient in speaking and understanding the Yi language. As they grew older and moved away for education and work, they also used Chinese or Sichuan dialect more frequently than Yi.

In conclusion, the participants' proficiency in the national language of China was generally high^[7], enabling them to use it fluently in communication, reading and writing. This is closely related to the country's comprehensive promotion of the national language, as stated in various legal provisions and policies. In addition, the living environment of Xichang, with its diverse ethnic groups, made it possible for Mandarin and Sichuan dialects to become dominant languages, given their practicality. Lastly, there are two types of education models in Xichang, with one emphasizing Yi language instruction in all subjects except Chinese, and the other following a typical educational model using Chinese. The latter model does not prioritize Yi language instruction, and only provides it as an optional interest-based course without significant academic value.

2.2 Language usage

In everyday life, language is the most direct and primary means of communication^[10], conveying both information and emotions. As such, it plays a crucial role in people's daily lives. "Language use varies greatly from region to ethnicity, social class, education level, gender, occupation, and age"^[6]. This article takes three aspects - the language usage by the Yi people in Xichang, the local language usage, and the promotion of the national language - to conduct a survey using four questions: "What is your usage of Chinese language?" "What is your usage of Yi language?" "What is the promotion of the national language in Xichang?" and "What is your perception of the language usage in Xichang?" Self-reported language usage reflects personal daily language habits, while local language usage reveals the language habits of the majority population as well as their future language preferences. The promotion of the national language in Xichang reflects the actual implementation and effectiveness of its dissemination.

2.2.1 Most people actively use Chinese for communication.

In the survey on the usage of Chinese language, over 47% of participants reported actively using Mandarin Chinese in daily communication, with 39% using it either actively or passively. According to interviewee X3, they adjust their language based on the person they're speaking to, using Mandarin or Yi language as appropriate. For example, they would switch to Yi language if the other person uses it. Similarly, X3's mother would greet strangers in Sichuan dialect with some Yi accent, which is also effective in communication. This demonstrates that people are consciously selecting appropriate languages to communicate with others based on various factors such as the audience and the context of the interaction^[11].

2.2.2 Most people actively use Yi language for communication

According to the survey results, 55% of people reported actively using the Yi language in communication with others, mainly in family settings and Yi ethnicity villages. Both active and passive use of the Yi language accounted for 40% of the total respondents. As interviewee X4 stated, "In our home, I speak the Yi language, not Mandarin Chinese". This suggests that people in Xichang still consciously choose to use the Yi language in daily communication, indicating that the Yi language is still widely used and has a strong vitality in the local area.

2.2.3 People generally use the national common language and Sichuan dialect alternately for communication, with a large proportion of the national common language.

According to survey data, 40% of people believe that the national common language is the most widely used in the Xichang area, while 32% believe that dialects are the most widely used, and 28% believe that Yi language is the most widely used. In Xichang, people use the national common language, Sichuan dialect, and Yi language widely. Most people are bilingual or multilingual, which demonstrates that these languages have developed harmoniously. The people can promote and popularize the

national common language while also learning about other ethnic languages, writing systems, and customs, which is in line with the characteristics of ethnic settlements.

People also believe that the national common language has a significant presence in daily life and that they use appropriate language expression mechanisms based on the language of the person they are speaking with. Many people also indicate that age is a factor in language usage, with younger people using the national common language more frequently due to their exposure to new things through their studies or work. However, people still use their local dialect or Yi language in specific situations.

Overall, the language use in Xichang is closely related to the local language policy and development. The promotion of the national common language in Xichang is relatively successful, and it has been widely used in people's daily lives. However, people still use their native language in certain situations, which has created a situation where multiple languages are mixed or used simultaneously. This situation is influenced by people's identity, ethnic consciousness, language and writing planning, and other practical factors. Therefore, the development of local languages in Xichang is harmonious, and multiple languages are being used and preserved by its people.

In conclusion, based on Verschueren's (1999) linguistic accommodation theory, language use is a dynamic process in which language users make choices based on internal and external reasons, at different levels of consciousness. Xichang's language development situation shows that local language policy and development, along with practical factors, have a significant impact on daily language use.

2.3 Language attitude.

Wang Yuanxin (1999) believes that in bilingual and multilingual societies, people's attitudes towards a particular language or writing system are shaped by factors such as social or ethnic identity, emotions, goals and motives, and behavioral tendencies, and this is typically referred to as language attitude^[8]. In our survey questionnaire on language attitudes among Yi people in Xichang (N=106), two interrelated questions dealt with attitudes towards the use of Chinese. One question aimed to reveal the future development of language from a realistic perspective, by asking the respondents about their views on their children's language acquisition. The other question aimed to reveal the emotional factors that influence Yi people's use of the national common language, by asking whether they believed it was meaningful to speak fluent Chinese^[9].

Table 3. Overview of Language Attitudes of Yi Ethnic Groups in Xichang

variable	Question	option	Number of people	Proportion (%)
emotion cognition	Do you think speaking a fluent national language is meaningful?	Very meaningful	57	54%
		Meaningful	41	39%
		commonly	7	6%
		Meaningless	1	1%
Willingness tendency	What language are you willing	Teach Yi language	17	16%

	to teach your children?	Teaching the National Language	11	10%
		Teach both	47	45%
		No children at present	31	29%

According to Table 3, 98 people believed that it is meaningful or very meaningful to speak fluent Chinese, accounting for 93% of the total respondents. The vast majority of people believe that speaking fluent national common language is necessary and recognize the significant importance of its development and use in the local community. Regarding their children's language acquisition, most people choose to teach both Chinese and Yi language due to practical and emotional factors, except for those without children. It shows that people are increasingly recognizing the importance of a universal language while also passing down their mother tongue. Not only do they want to be bilingual themselves, but they are also happy for their children to become bilingual and become "bilingual people."

The survey results of Yi people's attitudes towards the national common language and their children's language acquisition show that people generally recognize the status and function of the national common language and have a strong emotional attachment to their mother tongue. X3 said: "I personally think that in the future, I will definitely give my child a Yi name, such as a four-character name. Because I think this is a symbol of identity. When others see the name, they'll know that I am a Yi person." Through semi-structured interviews, we found that minority languages and Yi names are symbols of their identity. Due to their identity recognition, deep love for their mother tongue, and evaluation and recognition of the practical and functional aspects of the national common language, mastering bilingualism has become an increasingly popular choice among Yi people.

2.4 Language learning.

The ultimate goal of language learning is to be able to communicate smoothly and effectively using the knowledge acquired. Only by constantly improving one's language learning abilities can one enhance their language skills in daily life, and express their thoughts and emotions accurately and appropriately with clear and organized language, while continuously improving their ability to communicate with others. A thorough investigation and understanding of the language learning of the Yi people in Xichang is not only to understand the purposes of people's language learning, but also to understand the main ways and means by which they learn the national language and characters in the overall environment, as well as the difficulties they face in language learning. In order to fully understand the language learning situation of Yi people, the related questions in the questionnaire are designed in a multiple-choice format to achieve a multifaceted understanding of the language learning situation of Yi people.

2.4.1 Learning the national language is utilitarian

According to survey results, people generally believe that the reason for learning the national language is because they "like the national language", reaching as high as 88

individuals; many people also choose to learn it "for future employment", with 66 individuals. The next reason for learning the national language is to "improve academic performance", with 61 individuals; followed by the convenience of communication with others and other considerations, with 50 individuals. People's learning of the national language is driven by both special emotions towards the language and the need for practical communication or job requirements. "Because our family requires us to inherit Yi culture and language, but after entering school, the government requires that we speak Mandarin in the Yi area. I feel quite inferior because I don't speak Mandarin. Teachers in school require us to speak Mandarin, so I force myself to learn it. Later, I found myself speaking Mandarin better and not knowing much Yi language anymore" (X6).

2.4.2 There are various ways to access the national common language.

Currently, more than 90% of people believe that the main way to be exposed to the national language is through school education. This also indicates that schools are the main battlefield for promoting and popularizing the national language and the most important place for studying and using it. With the arrival of the information age and the rapid development of technology^[12], the internet has also become a way for people to be exposed to the national language. More than 70% of people believe that they mainly learn the national language through the internet. For more than 40% of people, their work colleagues are also one of the ways they come into contact with the national language due to work reasons. As described by X2, "My niece and nephew's family didn't teach them much Mandarin at home, they just watched TV. After watching TV for half a year^[13], my niece started speaking entirely in Mandarin. She was taught Yi language before, but now when you communicate with her, she speaks Mandarin." This indicates that internet media is also a way for people to be exposed to the national language, and the ways in which people come into contact with it are diverse and closely related to their daily lives.

2.4.3 Classroom teaching mainly focuses on Mandarin.

According to Article 12 of the "Education Law of the People's Republic of China" (revised in 2015), schools and other educational institutions should use the national language and characters for education and teaching. 91 people responded that teachers mostly use the national language during teaching in school; 38 people indicated that teachers use Sichuanese dialect during teaching; only a few people said that teachers use Yi language during teaching. Therefore, most teachers use the national language for teaching, which is also the best period and main place for students to learn and use the national language. During the interview process, we also conducted in-depth interviews with teachers, who all stated that schools require teachers to use the national language for education and teaching during class. According to Article 12 of the "Education Law of the People's Republic of China" (revised in 2015), schools and other educational institutions should use the national language and characters for education and teaching. 91 people responded that teachers mostly use the national language during teaching in school^[14]; 38 people indicated that teachers use Sichuanese dialect

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2.4.4 Learning the national common language is greatly influenced by local dialects.

Yi people encounter various difficulties when learning the national language. Most people believe that the main difficulty lies in the influence of the local dialect spoken by people around them, making it difficult to change accents, and difficulty discerning pronunciation or reading accurately during the process of learning the national language. It can be seen that the main difficulty in learning the national language is the environmental influence from the local dialect spoken in the area, and the heavy Sichuanese accent, which are the main factors affecting the learning of the national language. One of the difficulties in language learning is the lack of comprehensive promotion of the national language for daily communication in schools. X8 said: "It's not a problem if you only speak Chinese, but in comparison, it's a little difficult to speak the national language because of the lack of a language environment. After returning, everyone still speaks Sichuanese or Yi language, which has some influence."

In conclusion, the survey results show that people generally recognize the practical role of the national language in daily life. Most people learn the national language due to practical needs such as work, education, and social interaction. The main ways and methods for people to be exposed to and learn the national language are through school education and internet/media. It can be seen that schools and internet media are the main channels for people to learn and use the national language. However, the national language has not been fully popularized locally, and a good learning atmosphere and conditions for the national language have not been fully created, which makes learning the national language difficult and influenced by the local dialect^[15].

2.5 Language environment

The term "language environment" refers to the natural language environment and classroom language environment, including communication situations, social and cultural backgrounds, and era context. The current language environment survey mainly focuses on the classroom language environment to explore whether there is any teaching content related to our national language and culture in daily learning. In the classroom language environment, students learn under the guidance of teachers and receive language input in a fixed pattern. The goal is to understand whether people have a good language learning environment and atmosphere in learning their native language.

2.5.1 The teaching content of the school involves the teaching of Yi culture.

According to the statistical results of the survey questionnaire, 71% of respondents believe that school teaching content may or may not involve the teaching of Yi culture, while 20% of people believe that school teaching content will not touch upon Yi culture education. Additionally, 9% of people indicate that school teaching content is fully related to teaching Yi culture. "Now our school also has Yi language classes, which are just for hobbies and interests and may not account for much, especially when it comes to high school enrollment, where they might not focus on it as much" (X1). Whether school teaching content involves Yi culture is mainly related to the local education policy and the specific educational plan of the school.

2.5.2 The school's teaching content involves teaching the Yi language.

Regarding whether school teaching content involves Yi language teaching, 63% of respondents answered that school education teaching content will involve Yi language teaching; 25% of people still believe that school teaching content will not touch upon Yi language teaching, and 12% of people indicated that school teaching content is entirely related to teaching Yi language. X7 stated: "I went to a Yi language school and learned Yi language there. However, I still want to go out and explore, travel from my village to the county town. Therefore, now I mainly speak the national language, but I cannot ignore the fact that Yi language, as my mother tongue, plays an essential role. Whenever I return to my village and speak Yi language with my relatives, I feel a strong sense of intimacy."

From the above statistical results, it can be discovered that despite school teaching content involving Yi language, Yi written language, and culture, there is no well-developed education model or system used for teaching our national language and culture. This is mainly related to the unique education model and language planning in the local area. Under the broader language background of promoting and popularizing the national language, local education still involves the teaching of our national language and culture, which possesses significant practical value.

3 Summary and Suggestions

The preliminary description of the survey data can reflect a series of characteristics of the language usage and language attitudes of ethnic minorities represented by the Yi compatriots in Xichang:

3.1 Recognize the national common language and encourage the coordinated development of Yi language and the national common language

The Yi ethnic group in Xichang has proficiency in the national language and can communicate with others whenever necessary. The national language is still an essential communication tool in the local area, and the recognition of the national language among the Yi people is relatively high. They use the national language frequently in their daily lives and communication. At the same time, they also have innate and

profound emotions towards their own culture and language. They hope that Yi written language can be recognized as a symbol of their identity and have specific means to learn and master their own language.

In terms of language use, whether it is the national language or other languages, it is based on the needs of language expression. The use of the national language, dialects, and Yi language simultaneously or alternatively can reflect the irreplaceable role that both the national language and Yi language play in the daily lives of the Yi people. To ensure the continued use and development of both languages, it is necessary to constantly improve language policies and adjust language and written language planning. Both the promotion of national language and the protection of Yi language and culture should be taken into consideration. In addition, the role of the Yi people as the main body should be emphasized and encouraged to learn and use their own language and written language.

3.2 Adhere to the school as the main battlefield for language learning, and leverage the effectiveness of modern multimedia media

With the constant development of information technology and the improvement of economic development levels, local language habits and customs are gradually transitioning towards popularization and losing their unique ethnic attributes. As a result, the protective shell of ethnic language and culture will gradually erode. Various social and cultural factors will influence the continuation and development of Yi language and traditional culture, which requires self-regulation and adaptation.

At the same time, the analysis of the survey results shows that schools are not only the most important places for promoting and popularizing the national language but also the most important platform for learning Yi language and culture. Using modern technology to spread Yi ethnic customs and language, recording language and written language through multimedia and other modern means, creating dialect programs to promote local cultural characteristics and providing convenience for other ethnic groups to learn Yi language are essential. Also, the primary function of schools should be reinforced to promote and popularize national language education while giving due attention to the education of Yi language and culture.

3.3 Strengthen the inheritance and protection of Yi language and writing, and enhance the continuity of Yi language transmission from generation to generation

The use of Yi language and culture is mainly demonstrated in traditional Yi villages by the elderly or teachers who specialize in teaching Yi language. In mixed areas, particularly in developed towns and cities, people tend to use more practical national language. The frequency of Yi language and culture is decreasing in some areas with severe "Sinicization", only appearing in traditional activities such as marriage, funeral and sacrifice. The frequency of using Yi language in daily life is continuously decreasing, which poses a significant risk to the disappearance of Yi language and culture if effective measures are not taken to protect it.

To protect and inherit Yi language, it is necessary to advocate for more practical laws and regulations regarding language protection and for government departments to enhance the protection and inheritance of Yi language. Encouraging Yi people to attach greater importance to their own language and culture and to use oral transmission in family education to pass on Yi language to future generations is also critical.

3.4 Expand the field of language communication space and construct an environment suitable for language learning

Efforts have been made locally to protect native languages, and some remarkable achievements have been made. Yi language still exhibits strong vitality, and traditional culture is being inherited. Due to the loss of communication partners and language environment, Yi language cannot be adequately used. For a particular ethnicity, its language is an indispensable carrier of its culture and customs. To implement the national strategy for the common development of multi-ethnic cultures and maintain the diversity of Chinese national culture, policy support and material protection must be provided for the inheritance of minority languages.

Language is not only a concentrated expression of the vitality of a nation but also has an inseparable connection with its culture. The local government is recommended to protect and construct an environment for Yi language learning and use through measures such as establishing Yi language schools and cultivating specialized talent in Yi language while promoting the national language as a common language for all ethnic groups. It is essential to create balanced bilingual environments for Yi descendants, enabling them to become successors who can speak the national language and integrate into modern society, as well as inherit and promote their own culture through Yi language.

4 Conclusion

This study aims to describe and summarize the relevant situation and characteristics of the use of common language, written language, and language attitudes among Yi compatriots in Xichang, as well as the current development status of their own ethnic languages. In terms of the survey results:

Firstly, school education plays a leading role in promoting and popularizing the national common language. In the future, the promotion and popularization of the national common language should continue to focus on schools, while paying attention to the new opportunities brought by the development of modern technology, and utilizing online media to promote and popularize the national common language.

Secondly, the development trend of the national language is good in the local area. With policy guidance at the national level and local government promotion, the use of the national language has become deeply rooted in people's hearts. The national language has gradually become the main communication language in the local area, becoming the only dominant language. People have a high understanding and evaluation of the function and status of the national language.

Finally, the socio-economic development of the Yi region has not only disrupted the environment of the Yi ethnic mother tongue and weakened the use of the Yi language, but also provided new opportunities for the inheritance and development of Yi culture. The local people still retain their own ethnic language and script, and they also learn and use their own culture and language in their daily learning. Most people express that they will still allow their descendants to learn Yi language and acquire it as their first language, with strong vitality in their mother tongue. Through visits, it was found that although the local language environment has been somewhat damaged, effective measures have been taken to protect it. Bilingual store names and billboards are used, as well as shops selling Yi clothing with local characteristics and exhibition halls with ethnic customs.

The Yi language plays a crucial role in the development process of the Yi ethnic group. It is not only a long-standing historical and cultural heritage of the Yi ethnic group, but also a valuable spiritual asset of the country. In short, the ethnic group mainly composed of the Han ethnic group, with Mandarin as the common language of the country, and the widespread application of the national common language and script have had a significant impact on the development and inheritance of the Yi language [11]. These are all facts that cannot be ignored, and with the deepening of mutual communication and exchange between the Yi and other ethnic groups, the common language between ethnic minorities will receive more and more attention. The promotion and popularization of the national common language will inevitably further eliminate language barriers between different ethnic groups and enhance national cohesion.

Therefore, it is necessary to further promote the harmonious development of the national common language and the Yi language in areas with mixed ethnic groups such as Xichang. The promotion and popularization of the national common language has achieved remarkable results in the language and writing work of our country under the awareness of standardizing the whole society's characters. At the same time, it has eliminated the language barriers in various regions, and strengthened the cohesion and centripetal force between various ethnic groups. However, the promotion of national language is not at the cost of eliminating minority languages. We should respect and protect minority languages while promoting national language as a universal language in society. As an important part of the splendid culture of the Chinese nation, it should be inherited and promoted.

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Author Introduction

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