

An Empirical Study of Heritage Language Users—Taking the Performance of Three Generation of Xi'an Hui People as An Example

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to investigate and study the inheritance and development of the inherited language of the Hui people, taking the phenomenon of the use of the inherited language among three generations of the Hui people in Xi'an as an example. The results of the survey showed that the Xi'an Hui inherited language speakers' dialects were at an intermediate level or above, their listening and speaking skills were better than their reading and writing skills, their dialects were used very frequently, and their learning attitudes and motivation were at an upper intermediate level. At the same time, the different backgrounds of the inherited speakers, such as gender, place of residence and partner's ethnicity, have an impact on their motivation and attitude towards the inherited dialect.*

Keywords: Xi'an Hui Minority Group, Heritage Language (HL), Learning Motivation, Learning Attitude.

1. INTRODUCTION

The majority of ethnic minorities in Shaanxi Province is Hui. Hui is a very special ethnic group, made up of several ethnic groups from within and outside the region, with diverse characteristics. Therefore, the languages used by the Hui have been diverse throughout their history. With the development of the great ethnic integration and urban modernization, Chinese has gradually become the common language of the Hui people, but the use of Arabic and Persian still exists among the older groups, and some middle-aged people among the Hui do occasionally use the above-mentioned multiple languages, but not very frequently. The younger generation of Hui people, although they hardly use languages other than Chinese, are able to understand Arabic and Persian, a phenomenon which is widespread among the Hui, but which has not been much studied by academics in terms of the phenomenon of the use of heritage languages by generations of Hui for a long time [1]. The research introduces the "heritage language theory" that has emerged overseas, and re-conceptualises the specificity and importance of the Hui heritage language. Through questionnaires and interviews collect information on the reality of the development of the Hui heritage language, reflect on the development of the Hui heritage language, and provide a reference for the protection of the Hui heritage language.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Questions

The theoretical basis of this study is the narrow theory of heritage language represented by Valdés [2], which defines the three generations of Xi'an Hui inherited speakers in terms of the "family use" of the language. In the investigation of language motivation and language attitudes, Dörnyei's three-level theory of motivation is used as the main theoretical basis, complemented by Gardner [3]'s classical theory of motivation for second language learning. The specific research questions are as follows:

- (1) How often are dialects, as well as Mandarin, used in everyday communication among Hui people in Xi'an?
- (2) How do the attitudes and motivations of Xi'an Hui people's heritage language use affect language use?

2.2 Research Subject

This paper investigates the factors influencing the acquisition of the heritage language among 261 residents of Xi'an Muslim Square using a questionnaire. Before designing the questionnaire, the author commissioned the local

residents to do a simple pre-survey on the selected sample, which mainly included information such as gender, age and area of residence.

To ensure the typicality and homogeneity of the research population and to make the findings more objective, the 261 inherited speakers were selected from three generations: the first generation - those born in Xi'an Muslim Square to parents who have lived in Xi'an since their birth in the 1940s-1960s. The second generation - those born to parents in Xi'an Muslim Square and who have lived in Xi'an since their birth in the 1960s-1980s and have received some level of cultural education in China; the third generation - those born to parents in the third generation - those who were born in Xi'an Muslim Square and have lived in Xi'an since their birth in the 1980s-2000s and have completed their education in China from kindergarten to high school or have a university degree or higher.

2.3 Research Process

This study will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative study used a questionnaire to collect data, with a target number of 300 questionnaires and a target number of 261 valid questionnaires to investigate the language use status of Xi'an Hui people's heritage language speakers and their attitude, motivation and proficiency in the use of the heritage language. The qualitative study was conducted using interviews with three interviewees, selected by snowball sampling to investigate the reasons for the formation of the language environment at home and the sources of motivation for learning.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to statistics, there are 261 respondents to the survey, girls held a relative advantage, with 140 (53.64% of the total sample), while boys accounted for 121 (46.46% of the total sample). The majority of the respondents lived in Hui Min Street, with 203 people, accounting for 77.78% of the total sample. The number of Hui who had lived there for more than ten years was 236, accounting for 90.42% of the total sample.

3.1 Situation of Heritage Language Usage

Table 1: Heritage Language Usage Table

		Hui dialect	Mandarin	Dialects mixed with Mandarin	Others
Family Environment	Communication with parents	84.09%	3.79%	12.12%	0%
	Communication with grandparents	87.5%	3.03%	8.33%	1.14%
	Communication with siblings	77.27%	6.44%	16.29%	0%
	Communication with children	51.89%	18.56%	25.38%	4.17%
	Communication with spouse	71.97%	12.12%	14.77%	1.14%
	Communication with grandchildren	41.67%	28.41%	23.11%	6.82%
	Say it when eating with the whole family	75.38%	7.2%	17.42%	0%
Social Environment	Saying when buying something in a shop	22.73%	40.53%	36.74%	0%
	Say when ordering food at a restaurant	29.55%	35.98%	33.33%	1.14%
	Communication with neighbors	60.23%	18.18%	21.21%	0.38%
	Communication with friends	43.56%	17.42%	38.64%	0.38%
	Communication with colleagues/classmates	30.3%	35.98%	32.58%	1.14%
Personal Environment	Use when writing	14.02%	69.32%	16.29%	0.38%
	When thinking about a problem in my head	49.24%	31.82%	18.94%	0%
	When you are in a hurry	63.64%	19.32%	17.05%	0%
	For Internet access	13.26%	62.12%	21.97%	2.65%

Table 1 shows that the language use of the Xi'an Hui group is selective and targeted, i.e. they use different

languages in different contexts and for different speakers. The use of the Hui dialect is higher in the family and personal environment than in the social environment.

In the family environment, the use of the Hui dialect is the highest, with grandparents speaking exclusively in Hui dialect or a mix of dialect and Mandarin, and parents using 87.5% of the time. 18.56% of parents speak standard Mandarin and have a good level of Mandarin, which provides the prerequisite for students to communicate with their parents in Mandarin. When communicating with siblings of the same generation, 77.27% choose the dialect, 6.44% use Italian Mandarin and 16.29% use a mixture of both dialects. Students who are educated in Mandarin as the language of instruction in mainstream schools return to their families and Hui communities to communicate with their own people in their dialects, and their bilingualism and bilinguism is developed by their peers who are in the same situation as they are.

In the social environment, 40.53% and 35.98% of students would choose to use Mandarin when going out to shops and ordering food in restaurants, while only 22.73% would use the Hui dialect in shops and 36.74% would use mixed dialects. When ordering food 29.55% of people use their dialect and 33.33% use a mixture of both dialects. This phenomenon may be attributed to the difference in living environment, as most of the study participants live in Muslim neighborhoods, and most of their neighbors are Muslims. From the high use of Hui dialects in this social environment, it can be inferred that Hui groups usually move around in the Hui streets, so they can communicate with each other in their own dialects.

In the personal environment, the tendency to mix multiple languages is most evident, with language use becoming bilingual when people are alone. Only 14.02% of the students chose to write in Hui dialect, while 69.32% chose Mandarin, and the rest used a mixture of Italian and Chinese. This is also the reason why 18.94% of the students chose to use a mixture of dialects when thinking. The language used by individuals when they are in a hurry is subconscious, and the difference between the probability of using the Hui dialect and Mandarin alone when they are in a hurry is large, demonstrating a certain bias in the use of language by the Hui group. When accessing modern resources such as the Internet and television programmes, people also tend to use both dialects, i.e. watching television and communicating online in Mandarin as well as in their dialect, ensuring that they have an understanding of the society and the world represented behind both dialects.

Whether at home, in society, or in a personal context, the Hui community predominantly uses dialects, but there is a non-monolingual use of the language.

3.2 Motivation for Learning Heritage Language among the Hui Community

Table 2: Distribution of Heritage Language Learning Motivation among Hui

Type of motivation	Intrinsic interest motivation	Motivation by external demands	Motivation for social responsibility	Motivation for personal development
N	261	261	261	261
Mean	4.17	4.13	3.81	3.52
Std. Deviation	1.03510	.73670	.74732	1.0372

As can be seen from Table 2, intrinsic interest motivation was the strongest for inherited speakers, with a mean value of 4.17, and external requirement motivation was comparable to intrinsic interest motivation, with a mean value of 4.13. Respondents showed strong agreement with these two motivations, which can be said to be their main motivation for learning Hui heritage languages. This is followed by social responsibility motivation and personal development motivation, with mean values of 3.981 and 3.52 respectively. In general, these two motivations do not play a major role and can be considered as general motivations.

Table 3: Distribution of Heritage Language Learning Motivation among Hui

Type of motivation	Intrinsic interest motivation	Motivation by external demands	Motivation for social responsibility	Motivation for personal development
Male	121	121	121	121
Mean	4.45	4.06	3.16	3.61
Std. Deviation	0.82	1.07	1.11	0.74

Female	140	140	140	140
Mean	4.10	4.33	3.92	3.32
Std. Deviation	0.84	0.97	0.96	1.08

The difference in the influence of gender on language is a fact that has been well understood by both linguistic and psychological communities. In Table 2 can clearly see that in the Hui group, the female group scored somewhat higher than the male group in both external demand motivation and social responsibility motivation, with a mean of 4.33 for female and 4.06 for male, with female scoring 0.27 higher than male. for intrinsic interest motivation and personal development motivation, the male group scored higher, with the gap essentially being closer to 0.3 or so. In line with the findings of numerous previous studies, female motivation and male motivation can vary depending on the type of motivation.

Table 4: Distribution of Learning Motivation of Different Three Generations of Hui Inherited Speakers

Type of motivation	Intrinsic interest motivation	Motivation by external demands	Motivation for social responsibility	Motivation for personal development
1941-1960	41	41	41	41
Mean	4.12	4.36	4.16	3.75
Std. Deviation	0.85	0.97	1.03	1.14
1961-1980	116	116	116	116
Mean	4.54	4.13	3.89	3.32
Std. Deviation	0.94	0.91	0.87	1.15
1981-2000	104	104	104	104
Mean	3.85	3.73	3.39	3.24
Std. Deviation	0.74	0.87	0.96	0.67

HL maintenance depends on different types of motivations and external factors that affect the life of an individual and the different practical reasons that drive the usage of such language. In addition to the practical reasons is the need as dictated by the value one attributes to the HL as a language but also as the benefits it brings to the individual as its user [4].

In terms of the value attributed to the HL, there seems to be agreement by and large across all generations for a predominance of motivations. Though the first generation also attributes a high external demand, social responsibility and intrinsic value to their HL, they find great practical, ideological, general and personal development motivation in knowing, using and maintaining Hui dialect. In this way, the first generation reports a more wholesome and organic livelihood in their HL. The third generation, attributes the least primarily motivation to the HL and finds practical benefits such as traveling, music, and meeting people. It is the second generation that attributes intrinsic interest motivation to the HL and finds little and balanced benefits of practicality.

3.3 Attitude for Learning the Heritage Language among the Hui Community

The means of all items on the four indicators of respondents' learning attitudes (awareness component, affective component, behavioral analysis and overcoming difficulties) were greater than 3.5, indicating that the Xi'an Hui group has a relatively high attitude towards learning the heritage language in general. The means of the six items in the table range from 3.52 - 4.09, which shows that the learning attitudes of Xi'an Hui speakers are moderately high in terms of structural characteristics. The mean values of these items show an almost stable trend in the hierarchy. In terms of the standard deviation of the individual items, the strongest discrete trend is for the overcoming difficulties (s. d.=1.04), followed by the cognitive component (s. d.=0.92), the affective component is closer to the behavioral analysis (s. d.=0.74, 0.79), and the weakest discrete trend is for the affective component (s. d.=0.74).

Table 5: Distribution of heritage language Learning Attitude among Hui

Type of Attitude	Cognitive component	Emotional component	Behavioral analysis	Overcoming difficulties
Male	121	121	121	121
Mean	4.04	3.69	4.16	3.50
Std. Deviation	0.49	0.64	0.78	0.75

Female	140	140	140	140
Mean	3.78	3.71	3.92	3.53
Std. Deviation	0.75	0.67	0.88	0.97

With the exception of the cognitive component and behavioral analysis, females had higher mean scores than males on the other two attitudes to learning. But the most significant difference was for the cognitive component, where males scored higher and the gap was larger, indicating that males identify more significantly with the Hui dialect; for the two learning attitudes, the affective component and overcoming difficulties, the difference was not significant, indicating that in this respect, males and females have the same attitude towards learning the Hui heritage language.

Table 6: Distribution of Learning Motivation of Different Three Generations of Hui Inherited Speakers

Type of Attitude	Cognitive component	Emotional component	Behavioral analysis	Overcoming difficulties
1941-1960	41	41	41	41
Mean	3.81	3.73	3.94	3.54
Std. Deviation	0.79	0.77	0.98	0.67
1961-1980	116	116	116	116
Mean	3.85	3.70	4.12	3.57
Std. Deviation	0.99	0.73	0.88	0.69
1981-2000	104	104	104	104
Mean	3.69	3.67	3.88	3.52
Std. Deviation	1.14	0.98	1.24	0.99

Maintaining HL stresses the advantages of multilingualism in terms of mental flexibility, metalinguistic capability, social and emotional development, a stronger sense of identity and greater sensitivity towards other cultures [5]. Even among those who have only receptive and limited proficiency in the HL, there are people who do not shy away from taking on identities traditionally associated with their HL, shuttling in and out of languages to take on new identities [6].

Attitudes to learning do not differ significantly across the three generations of Hui compared to motivation, but overall, the first- and second-generation groups have higher mean scores on attitudes to learning than the third generation, especially in terms of cognitive components and behavioral analysis.

4. CONCLUSION

The main findings of this study are as follows. First, the self-assessment of Hui dialect proficiency shows that the Hui dialect heritage language levels of the Xi'an Hui group are all above the intermediate level, but the development of speech skills in the dialect is uneven, with listening skills better than reading and writing skills. Besides, the language use of the Xi'an Hui group is selective and targeted, i.e. they use different languages in different contexts and for different speakers. Hui dialect is mostly used within the primary nuclear family, while Mandarin is more prominent with members of different social circles. The mixed use of Hui dialect and Mandarin is greatest with secondary family members and is quite frequent with members of the social groups. more and more of the first and second generation groups communicate with their grandchildren in Mandarin rather than the Hui dialect, and even the third generation groups use other languages for their children's language.

Second, the overall motivation of Xi'an Hui inherited speakers was healthy and good, and was at a medium to high level. When comparing the motivation of the two genders, female motivation and male motivation can vary depending on the type of motivation. As for the different generations, the first generation reports a more wholesome and organic livelihood in their HL. The third generation attributes the least primarily motivation to the HL and finds practical benefits such as traveling, music, and meeting people. It is the second generation that attributes intrinsic interest motivation to the HL and finds little and balanced benefits of practicality.

Family language policy is a centripetal force to enhance HL. The language policy of a family, grounded in ideology, maintenance and practice [7], can ensure the sustainability of the HL in immigrants who migrate to countries where that language not only is a minority language but also is affected by external forces such as a community, an institution (like school or youth movement), a nation-state on all its enforcements and affordances for maintaining

the HL [4]. In summary, minority languages are an important intangible cultural heritage in China and have significant research value. Linguistics provides us with a new perspective on the preservation and development of minority languages. According to the linguistic perspective, we need to enhance the awareness of minority people to preserve and develop their own languages, create an environment for the use of minority languages, make full use of the technology and tools of the information age to preserve and protect minority languages, and strengthen the research on minority languages.

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